Doctor of Ministry Major Applied Project   Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-1-1990

Small Groups: Growing in the Lutheran Church

Alan Bachert
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ahbach5@aol.com

Small Groups:
Growing in the Lutheran Church

Alan H. Bachert

May, 1990

Concordia Seminary
Saint Louis, Missouri

_____   June 1, 1990
Advisor, Arthur D. Bacon   Date

_____   June 1, 1990
Director, Doctor of Ministry Program   Date
Arthur D. Bacon

SMALL GROUPS:
GROWING IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

A MAJOR APPLIED PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
CONCORDIA SEMINARY
ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

In partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by Alan H. Bachert
May 1990

SMALL GROUPS:

GROWING IN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH

Alan Harold Bachert

Doctor of Ministry

1990

Concordia Seminary

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this major applied project is three-
fold. First, through a study of the Scriptures, the history
and use of small groups will be traced, and the text will
demonstrate that it is God's will that His Church grow and
be brought into a relationship with Himself. Secondly, the
necessity and strategy for persons to be brought into a re-
lationship with one another as they grow in discipleship
will be emphasized and discussed in a chapter which reviews
not only biblical data, but also provides a search of re-
lated literature from the fields of both theology and social
psychology. Finally, specific concerns and tasks are sug-
gested which must be identified as congregations intention-
ally pursue the task of disciplemaking.

A Lutheran bias is reflected in the project with spe-
cific attention being drawn to the means of grace (Word and
Sacrament) as the effective course for both church growth
and growth in discipleship while also emphasizing the work
of the social sciences in addressing the needs of people.

Some of the present work in the area of small group ministry in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod is identified. A leadership manual is proposed in the final chapter for use in the training of leaders in a small group ministry within the Lutheran Church, a manual which is being used by the author.

Project Mentor: Elmer W. Matthias, D.Min.

Abstract: 220 words

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Church Growth Movement has spawned a renewed interest in relational activities with Christian churches. The small group continues to be at the heart and center of the significant opportunities which the Church can offer to follow our Lord's Great Commission and, at the very same time, build us, His body--the Church.

The care, support, commitment and Bible study opportunities that present themselves within the small group rival those of the early church. We consider the biblical imperative that the Church grow as a body of people responsibly related to Jesus through faith and to each other as members of the Church, which is His body. After considering key sociological factors, the discussion of a pro-active strategy will be featured as the task of disciplemaking is addressed. The development of a network of relationships as these relate to membership in the church will be included. The use of small groups especially within the Lutheran Church will be noted and a manual for training the small group leaders within a Lutheran congregation will be presented.

This study intentionally reflects a Lutheran bias, particularly that of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. However, much of the content is applicable beyond the confines of Confessional Lutheranism.

Biblical quotations within the paper are taken from the New International Version of the Scriptures (NIV).

CHAPTER I

The Church, concerned with disciplemaking through the small group, has recognized the need to help people feel a sense of belonging to the local congregation. The Church has repeatedly identified that it is God's will that the lost be found and be brought into a responsible relationship with Jesus and with the Church. This, indeed, is the Great Commission stated in various ways in the New Testament. Matthew states it: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:16-19). The task of the Church is set forth in this passage. The main verb is "disciplize"--to make disciples. The participles (in the Greek) tell how: by going, baptizing, and teaching--going outside of what might be their normal course to where the unchurched or non-believer might reside. This is accomplished by baptizing in the name of the Triune God. Baptism brings them into a new relationship with God. This is accomplished by teaching them the benefits of this new relationship: the joys, privileges and responsibilities which are theirs. Teaching is both pre-baptismal and post-baptismal. Disciplemaking is the mission of the Church.

The Great Commission

Numerous passages in Holy Scripture speak of the Great Commission (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:8). The focus in this paper is on Matthew 28:16-20. Dr. Yong J. Son quotes from the unpublished writings of his mentor at the Potchefstroom University (Dr. J.C. Coetzee) as he presents "the basic narrative structural pattern of Matthew 28:16-20."[1] (The translation is my own.)

The Basic Narrative Structural Pattern

(i) The Situation: "So the eleven disciples went to Galilee"

v. 16 Οἱ δὲ ἕνδεκα μαθηταὶ ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατα αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς,

(ii) The Action of the Disciples: "And seeing Him they worshipped (Him)"

v. 17 Καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν.

(iii) The Action of Jesus: "And approaching them, Jesus talked with them saying"

v. 18 ὁ Ἰησοῦς Καὶ προσελθὼν ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων

---

1 Young J. Son, The Missiological Significance of Matthew 28:16-20, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, (thesis), 1983, p.35.

(iv) The Contents of the Message of Jesus: "All authority in Heaven and on earth was given to me"

Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς.

v. 19 "While you are going, disciple all the nations"

πορευθέντες οὖν
μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη,

"Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"

βαπτίζοντες αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ
καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ ἁγίου πνεύματος,

v. 20 "Teaching them to observe all the things I gave command to you"

διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα
ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν·

"And I am with you all days until the completion of the age."

καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς
ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος.

Drs. Son and Coetzee recognize that "the contents of the message of Jesus" are in the nineteenth and twentieth verses. Based on the power and authority (v. 18) given to Him, Jesus empowers His people to take what they have learned and share it with others (v. 20). He reminds them that He (His power) remains with them as they carry out this Commission.

The disciples are to multiply. They are to "make disciples." The Word here indicates that the disciples were to go out into the world and win others who would be what they themselves were--disciples of the Christ. This mission is clearly indicated when the Greek text is studied. The words "go," "baptize" and "teach" are all participles which derive their force from the one controlling verb "make disciples." The participle "go," however, does stand in a coordinate relationship with the verb which allows it also to be translated as an imperative. "Go make disciples" becomes the command "and do it by preaching the Gospel, baptizing and teaching" "and my power is with you."

As Dr. Robert E. Coleman has written in The Master Plan of Evangelism:

> This means that the great commission is not merely to go to the ends of the earth preaching the Gospel (Mark 16:15), nor to baptize a lot of converts into the Name of the Triune God, nor to teach them the precepts of Christ, but to "make disciples"--to build men like themselves who were so constrained by the Commission of Christ that they not only followed, but led others to follow His way. Only as disciples were made could the other activities of the Commission fulfill their purpose.[2]

It is time that we, as members of the Church, look at our lives and our ministries from this perspective. As Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, says in his classic little booklet, Born to Reproduce, "Where are our

---

2 Robert E. Coleman, The Master Plan of Evangelism, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963), p.108-109.

men?"[3] What are disciples doing today? He goes on to say
"Consider what it would mean to the future of the Church if
we had only one true disciple now to show for our labors."[4]
Disciples should multiply over and over again. They have
and do multiply and the small group process aids the growth.
Disciples are "growing" and "going" in Word and Sacrament as
small groups are growing in the Church in fulfillment of the
Great Commission. An emphasis upon these groups needs to be
made in the plateaued and declining Lutheran Church-Missouri
Synod.

The critical commentaries, i.e., those on the Greek
text, present a reassuring consensus on these basic facts of
exegesis. Not that everyone of them consulted presents all
of these view points, but they do supplement one another.
This brief survey included many of the best recognized ex-
egetical authorities.[5]

The doctrine of Christian discipleship is focal in our
Commission and in the New Testament. It must become focal
in the Church of Jesus Christ. The importance of disciple-
ship as found in Scripture is noted by Peters when he
states: "There are 270 references to it in the gospels, and

---

3 Dawson Trotman, Born to Reproduce (Lincoln, NE: Back
to the Bible Publishers, 1959), p.42.

4 Ibid.

5 Robert D. Culver, "What is the Churches'
Commission?", Bibliotheca Sacra (July 1968), p. 244, as
quoted by George Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions,
(Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), p.187.

the Book of Acts."[6] Discipleship is a vital expression of the Christian life--to teach it is imperative; to neglect it is tragic.

Luke, in his version of the Great Commission, describes the content of the message to be taught when he writes: "This is what is written...repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). The preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins suggests the use of both Law and Gospel in making disciples, since it is only by the Law that sins are recognized and confessed and it is the Gospel alone that works conversion.

In summary, the main message of this Great Commission is to make disciples, as expressed by *matheteusate*, an imperative form. The participles, which are adjectival, indicate the means by which this is to be accomplished, namely, as believers go, disciples are made by baptizing and by teaching. As Christians proclaim the Gospel for the purpose of making disciples, God uses that Gospel to bring people to faith, and having come to faith, they continue to teach them. The two main doctrines of the Church are set forth here: justification and sanctification.

In commenting upon this activity, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod published a study document which notes: "...the Church's responsibility does not end when disciples

_____

6 Peters, A Biblical Theology of Missions, p.184.

have been gathered into the Church. The Church has the commission also to 'teach all things which Christ has commanded...'"[7] The present participle *didaskontes* in Matthew 28:20, implies that "Christian instruction is to be a continuous process with a view to enabling disciples to walk worthy of their vocation."[8] The report of the Commission further notes,

> A disciple is described in the Scriptures as one who is committed to the Saviour, is willing to take up the cross and follow Him (Luke 14:26,27), continues in Christ's Word (John 8:31-32), bears much fruit (John 15:8), loves fellow human beings, and thus gives evidence of discipleship (John 13:35)."[9]

Exegetically the Matthew 28:16-20 passage leads to an appreciation for the absoluteness, the comprehensiveness, the universality and the infiniteness of Christ's Lordship as well as the witness of the Church. As Son has also noted, the Great Indicative (v. 18d), the Great Imperative (v. 19) and the Great Promise (v. 20c,d) make a clear cut three-fold pattern.[10]

In his book entitled, The Great Commission for Today, Dr. David Howard notes that "Jesus tied the Great Commission

---

7 The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Evangelism and Church Growth, St. Louis, 1982, p.9.

8 W. Robertson Nicoli, ed., The Expositor's Greek Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:340.

9 CTCR, Evangelism and Church Growth, p.9.

10 Young J. Son, The Missiological Significance of Matthew 28:16-20, p.50.

to the entire history of salvation from the Old Testament onward."[11]   He suggests that the missionary mandate of the Church is actually a pyramid built right side up with its base running from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22. He pleads for a broad application of the Great Commission.

Throughout the Word we learn it is God's undivided purpose to bring lost, sinful mankind back into fellowship with Himself. From the time of the Fall of Adam, God has been seeking the lost--"the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9). This was not a question of information on God's part as much as an invitation for the hidden Adam to return to God. In an immediate act of grace and mercy, God offered a redemptive plan in capsule form, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heal" (Genesis 3:15). Already God had the victory of the cross and resurrection in mind as the means to bring about reconciliation for the world. He certainly could have destroyed Adam and Eve at that point and started over. Instead, the Lord God made clothes out of the skins of animals for Adam and his wife (Genesis 3:21). He immediately began to care for their waywardness. The Scripture reminds us that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11). He wants all to be saved--to be brought into a relationship

---

11 John Howard, The Great Commission for Today (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), p.53.

with Him by faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. He wants the lost to be found.

The universal scope of God's plan is found in Genesis 12 where the covenant is made with Abraham. God states it simply,

> "And I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:2-3).

The universality of the salvation which God had prepared is found in the fact that all nations would receive blessing from the seed of Abraham. This is supported by Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

In the Book of Ezekiel, the God of Israel continues to seek the lost. He compares Himself to a shepherd who searches for lost sheep:

> For thus says the Lord God: Behold I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over, I will feed them in justice (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

The Lord has a sincere, heartfelt desire for the return of the lost, whether they are unchurched or inactive.

Likewise, Jesus' foremost concern is the salvation of the lost. "The son of man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). Elsewhere He says that the disciples were to begin their ministry by joining Him in going "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6). Jesus' concern for the lost is further illustrated in His confrontation with the Pharisees who were angered with Him because He associated with sinners. He told the Pharisees a three-pronged parable (Luke 15) about finding the lost and bringing them back into a fellowship. First, Jesus relates how the shepherd with 100 sheep leaves 99 to search until he finds the one lost sheep and is able to restore it to the fold. Then the woman is cited as she sweeps her house diligently for the one lost coin until it is found and placed with the other nine. Finally, He tells about the father who waits patiently to restore his lost son to the family. The lost one is important to Jesus. His desire is that he be found and restored to the fellowship.

The lost are not to be left on their own, but are brought back into the fold of the Good Shepherd. It is in this fellowship that the discipling process happens, that Christian growth and development occur. People grow in grace, grow toward maturity in Christ, minister in the name of Jesus within the context of the Church as they are fed and nurtured and cared for by the Good Shepherd. In other

words, as they seek membership in the Church, the lost who have been found are expected to grow as disciples.

A study of the theology of Baptism affirms member responsibility as an important concern of the Church. It is true that when a person is brought into the covenant of God's grace through baptism, and, therefore, brought from spiritual death to spiritual life, he is brought into a relationship with God. However, baptism is not simply a "me-and-God" relationship. Having been brought into relationship with Jesus by the regenerating power of the Spirit in baptism (John 3:3-6 and Titus 3:5-7), believers are also brought into relationship with the community of fellow believers. In discussing the abuses and uses of spiritual gifts, Paul points the individual believers to their connectedness with other believers through baptism, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body--Jews or Greeks, slaves or free--and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (I Corinthians 12:12-13). He then describes the vital interdependence of the individual members of the Church as the body of Christ using the model of the human body (I Corinthians 12:21-27). People who come to faith in Jesus by the Spirit's working in Word and Sacrament are not only grafted to Jesus as Head, but also are grafted to the body which is the Church. This speaks strongly to the need for churches to be sensitive to the needs of all

parts, especially new members with the goal of growing together in faith and love as Jesus' disciples.

The sense of community created in baptism is stressed as Luke records the early days of the Church's life and ministry. In Acts 2, after the day of Pentecost when 3,000 were added to the church through baptism, Luke notes that these new disciples "devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The fellowship to which they devoted themselves is illustrated in the succeeding verses where Luke observes:

> And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

It is important to recognize the "togetherness" that was experienced. They prayed together--worshipped together--ate together--and cared for one another's needs. They shared the Supper of the Lord together. Indeed, there was a strong sense of belonging together.

But these new disciples were not left to enjoy themselves as a closed community. The second key insight of this passage is that daily the Lord expanded their numbers. More and more people became followers of Jesus, and the circle of fellowship continued to expand according to God's purpose--the lost were found. They were brought into a re-

sponsible relationship with Christ and His Church through their participation in Word and Sacrament.

The sense of Christian community is also supported by the biblical imagery found in the words of Peter, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (I Peter 2:9). Each of the terms--race, priesthood, nation and people--reflect a complete unit. Each is an integrated whole. A race suggests ethnic unity; a priesthood suggests a vocational unity, a nation suggests a political unity, and a people suggests being together as God's select group. Each term implies a sense of community as being critical to the nature of the Church.

The togetherness of the Christian community is suggested in the imagery of the Church as the temple of God. Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone governing all the lines and angles of brick and mortar of the structure (Ephesians 2:20) while the foundation is the apostles and prophets (the Word of God). Peter, building upon the temple imagery, calls Jesus "that living stone" and urges the believers to be "like living stones" which are to be "built into a spiritual house" (I Peter 2:4,5,7). Each stone is important to the building of the spiritual temple, but there is only one spiritual house for which Jesus functions as cornerstone. The stones are not allowed to be in their own little pile or off by themselves individually. Each adds to the completeness of the temple. Each is a part of the expanding temple.

The household is another very important Scriptural metaphor used to speak of the Church as a community. Paul calls Christian disciples "members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). In I Timothy 3:15, he makes the same claim, referring to "the household of God, which is the church of the living God." The household imagery is supported further by Jesus as He invites the disciples to pray "Our Father, who art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). Logically, if all believers call God their Father, then they are members of the same family. Peter made the same point when he reminded the persecuted Christians that they could be encouraged by the example of members of the household when he wrote, "Resist him (Satan), firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world" (I Peter 5:9). The term "brotherhood" implies family.

The images of the Church as a body, a temple, the flock of God, and a household all lend credibility to the view that the Church is indeed a fellowship or a community of people who are related because of a common bond to Jesus. Theologically, people who unite with Christ in faith and baptism are brought into a bond of fellowship with other believers. Therefore, neither searching for the lost nor merely finding them is enough. Faithfulness in "folding and feeding"[12] is required of the Church. "After care" is as

---

12 Donald McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1980), p.15.

important as sharing the Gospel with the unbeliever. This

aftercare most definitely centers around the means of grace-

-Word and Sacrament. These are the channels the Spirit uses

to reach into the lives of people. The Word of God which

produces faith also sustains it. To that end, Paul encour-

aged Timothy:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned
> and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you
> learned it and how from childhood you have been ac-
> quainted with the sacred writings which are able to
> instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ
> Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and prof-
> itable for teaching, for reproof, for correction,
> and for training in righteousness, that the man of
> God may be complete, equipped for every good work
> (II Timothy 3:14-17).

Saying it another way, making converts is not enough.

Howard Snyder states the biblical understanding succinctly

when he writes, "The goal of evangelism therefore is the

formation of Christian community, the koinonia of the Holy

Spirit."[13] He likens the numerical growth of the Church to

the addition of new cells to the human body. His critique

of the approach of much of mainline Protestantism is thought

provoking:

> From its structures to its hymns and gospel songs,
> (it) has emphasized the individual over the commu-
> nity. It has had a keen sense of the individual
> person's responsibility before God but little cor-
> responding sense of the communal life of the Chris-
> tian. Too often the church has been seen more as a
> mere collection of saved souls than as a community
> of interacting personalities.[14]

---

13 Howard Snyder, _The Community of The King_ (Downers
Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977), p.104.

14 _Ibid._, 74.

Snyder's observations are supported by the researchers and authors of Habits of The Heart as they viewed contemporary and historic American culture. The authors wrote:

> Individualism lies at the very core of American culture....We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual...Yet...some of the deepest problems both as individuals and as a society are also closely linked to our individualism.[15]

The book's authors testify to the validity and importance of the Christian community in contrast to the disadvantages of the "what's-in-it-for-me" lifestyle of contemporary American culture. The authors describe the experience of Les Newman. Newman left his hometown to move to California and enter the competitive business world. He found that the only anchor to his life was the family-like bond that he shared with other people who had a faith in Jesus as Savior. The authors conclude:

> In this traditional Christian view, what connects one's self to another is the objectively given reality of their creation as God's children and God's own continuing presence in the world in Jesus Christ. This reality is one each person freely accepts, thus establishing the bonds of the Christian congregation while affirming individual identity.[16]

Similarly Paul wrote, "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (I Corinthians 12:27).

Indeed, Americans struggle with the desire to be individuals ("do your own thing;" "I have my rights") yet God calls believers into a fellowship, a community, where the

---

15 Robert N. Bellah et al., Habits of The Heart (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1985), p.142.

16 Ibid., 156.

whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A tension is created in the process of growing in and as a Christian community.

It is the Christian community's aftercare grounded upon the means of grace that brings about an individual's spiritual maturity. In Ephesians, Paul wrote about spiritual growth within the context of the body. He said that God had given gifts to the Church for that purpose:

> And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way unto him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth; and upbuilds itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

It is as people are nurtured by the Word of God that they grow as His disciples and become mature followers of Jesus. Christian growth is built upon the application of Word and Sacrament. That growth seems to happen best in small groups, where there can be more dialog and greater accountability. That growth shows itself in part as people minister according to the gifts God has given to each one of them. The exercise of these gifts through the continued support, care and concern of fellow believers regularly as-

sembling in small groups for the mutual encouragement in ministry is treated in later chapters.

Martin Luther declares in his Explanation of the Third Article of the Apostle's Creed:

> I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church, and keeps it united with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.[17]

Paul further affirms our reliance when he reminded the Corinthians, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (I Corinthians 3:6). Jesus Himself said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

The Church is the creation of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament. He alone draws people into fellowship with God and with the Church. Then He sustains people through Word and Sacrament. The Church is obviously, therefore, God's Church. George Peters correctly asserts, "The Church is not a human institution or organization. It cannot be built by techniques and methodology alone. It is principally an organism that was born by the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost" (Acts 2).[18]

While the Church is a divine creation, it also exists in the world and is composed of people at all levels of

17 Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," Concordia Triglotta (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), p.545.

18 George W. Peters, A Theology of Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p.52.

spiritual and emotional maturity. It would be foolish not to note how people differ in their own emotional needs. People's needs affect their motivation for becoming involved with the Church as it expresses itself as an institution within society. While biblically it is correct to say that all disciples are by faith and baptism a part of the "Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints," not everyone experiences the same degree of "belonging." While they belong to the Church Universal by faith through God's amazing grace, they may not feel a sense of belonging to the local congregation. It is this sense of belonging to the local church that must be addressed. It is necessary to understand that:

> Church growth is no mere sociological process....It is that to be sure; but much more than that, it is what happens when there is faithfulness to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The spread of the Church throughout the world must not be thought of in merely human terms. We are not speaking about the multiplication of branches of an American organization; that would be cultural imperialism. (The Church) is part of the new order which began at the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[19]

George Peters discusses the interplay between the work of the Holy Spirit and the psycho-social needs of people. Peters accurately asserts:

> Natural history, sociology, and psychology do not have the spiritual dimension and vitality to create in people spiritual awareness, to cause them to perceive spiritual needs, to motivate them to seek spiritual remedy. Only the Holy Spirit can cause spiritual awakenings....All spiritual experiences

---

19 McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, p.16-17.

are effected by the gracious operations of the Holy Spirit and His Word as individuals believe....[20]

Peters distinguishes between "readiness for change" and "spiritual readiness." The former is a general psychological and social phenomenon; the latter is a direct result of the working of the Spirit through the Word. He writes,

> When historic circumstances that produce psychological and social readiness to change coincide with the presence of the Word and people of God, a condition of high potentiality results and a plentiful harvest can be anticipated.[21]

To illustrate this, Peters cites the conversion of a great number of Indonesians in 1965 following an unsuccessful political coup. The same thing did not occur in Bangladesh or Pakistan following the war that gave Bangladesh its independence. Why did Indonesia experience a spiritual renewal when the other two countries living under similar social conditions did not? Research indicates that the Netherlands Bible Society and the Indonesian Bible Society had been saturating Indonesia with Bibles.[22] This had not occurred in Pakistan or Bangladesh. The Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, prepared the harvest. That is the only way that the Kingdom can be built--by God Himself through the power of His Word and Sacraments, which are the means through which the Spirit dispenses the benefits of Jesus'

---

20 Peters, A Theology of Church Growth, p.67.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

death and resurrection, namely the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation.

To put it succinctly, "two bridges must be crossed which lead to incorporation into the body of Christ. One bridge is theological....The other bridge is sociological."[23] The theological bridge is the one crossed by the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament. The spiritual gulf is the one created by people being born spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) and only the Spirit of God can bridge that gulf. He brings the "birth from above" (John 3:3) for "that which is born of flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). But because the Church is composed of people, it also has, contrary to some opinions,[24] sociological dimensions, which do not detract from the Church as God's creation. Those dimensions help us understand how to help people become what they are--a community, a fellowship of the redeemed where the lost are absorbed into that fellowship as the Spirit gives new life. God clearly desires new disciples to become members of the "Holy Christian Church." They are part of the fellowship of the redeemed not only in heaven, but on earth. But not all Christian people remain actively involved in the local congregation.

---

23 Ron Jensen and Jim Stevens, Dynamics of Church Growth (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p.189.

24 Marcus Lang, "Is Sociology Piping The Tune?" Affirm 11 (April 1987): 2.

Dr. Harold Draeger notes that psychological reasons ac-
count for why some people do not become highly involved
within the life of a parish. He states:

> Because of feelings of inadequacy in their social
> skills, some stay at a distance from the church and
> quietly come to worship at the designated hour and
> leave quickly at the end. Many admit they do not
> know how to start a conversation or feel awkward at
> keeping one going. Related to the feeling of inad-
> equacy is the fear of rejection. People frequently
> cite this fear as a reason for not approaching oth-
> ers. Others fear failure to fit in with the result
> that they stay at a distance. Some cite the fear
> of becoming too involved as a reason for staying at
> a safe distance from the church, even while being a
> member. For some, it is a fear of becoming "burned
> out" or is a reaction to feeling "burned out" at a
> previous parish, and now it is time to rest and
> regroup.[25]

For many, their involvement level seems also related to
their spiritual maturity. While this is hard to measure be-
cause only the Spirit of God searches the heart, there are
certain indicators. Worship and communion attendance, Bible
class participation and involvement in various roles, tasks
and ministries are frequently used. A life lived in consis-
tency with Christian values, commitment to ministry and to
and with the Body of Believers becomes the goal. Members
with arrested spiritual development (those who have not been
growing to maturity in Christ) and those who are relatively
young in the faith and needing to understand the Christian
growth process, may not yet see regular and frequent wor-

---

25 Harold Draeger, Member Assimilation: Closing the
Lutheran Backdoor (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological
Seminary, 1988), p.25.

ship, Bible study, group involvement, Christian fellowship and ministry as important.

There are also some who, when they arrive at a new church, bring some hurts from their former parish. In order to avoid being hurt again, they enter congregational life cautiously and slowly.

The common denominator in all these reasons (perhaps, even excuses) is that the people expect to be involved at some level and are open to some small growth in their involvement as they become familiar with the local church. They do not join to drop out. Then why do some still manage to escape out the back door? What can be learned from these dropouts? What might help churches prevent many of them from making their way to the list of inactives who may still consider themselves Lutheran but have little or no contact with the organized church?

The Director of the Research and Information Center for the Lutheran Council in the United States of America, Edward Rauff, studied 180 dropouts in seven counties across the United States. He concluded there are some who drop out and who will probably not be reached even through the best efforts of the local Church.[26] Into this category would fit persons who marry someone who has no religious background, persons who are rebelling against the values of their parents and persons who follow friends to another church.

---

26 Edward A. Rauff, Why People Join The Church (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p.50-60.

According to the interviews conducted by Rauff, one of the critical factors that dropouts who returned to the church saw for their continuing involvement within the church was that of community or friendship. One convert quoted by Rauff is illustrative of the value of community as a resource to closing the back door:

> A lot of it was wanting to have lasting friendships, because you think of all your high school friends that have since moved away. And the friendships that I have had before were nothing, even back in the parochial school. I don't see any of the kids anymore, and I really needed and wanted friendship other than my family. And I think that's what I was seeking and so I looked for it in a church.[27]

This former dropout represents those who returned and now appreciate the sense of community which met a deep need and which was absent from other churches in their experience.

Alan Harre correctly assesses the problem churches face. He writes:

> Mobility of members, sheer numbers of people in some congregations, resistance on the part of members to "taking weekly attendance at worship services," and other factors make it difficult to identify the persons who are dropping out within the relatively short time span of six to eight weeks.[28]

If, however, people within the church have a network of close friends and are involved in a small group where a loving, trusting fellowship has been intentionally established, early intervention can be effected, and the difficulties can

---

27 Ibid., 90.

28 Alan Harre, Close the Back Door: Ways To Create A Caring Congregational Fellowship (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), p.62.

be dealt with prior to a person concluding, "They do not care for me," or "I am not missed."

Further evidence of the positive correlation of friendship within the church to church accountability is found in a 1965 study by Donald L. Metz reported in The Invisible Member: A Report On Inactive Methodists. He found family situations affected the participation level of church members. Where there is lack of religious interest in one spouse, it tends to adversely affect the church involvement of the spouse.

Metz has also identified criticisms of individual churches. Ranked first among them is the lack of personal contact. The church was viewed as too impersonal. Dropouts wished that church members would reach out to them, but that failed to occur.[29]

The value of building relationships and developing accountability within small, caring groups in the church cannot be overestimated if discipleship is to occur. Dean Hoge and David Roozen in their attempt to understand church growth and decline state:

> Involvement in church life often produces recognition and esteem, which, in turn, strengthen motivation for further involvement. When recognition, esteem, and a feeling of belonging are denied a

---

29 Donald L. Metz, The Invisible Member: A Report On Inactive Methodists multititled (Berkeley, CA: California Bureau of Community Research, 1965) cited by Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds., Understanding Church Growth and Decline (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p.66.

person, that person will probably become frustrated and drop out.[30]

Harre also observes that one of the primary motivations people have for joining congregations is the relationships they have established or want to establish with others. "Since social satisfaction and social needs are motivations for affiliation, it is logical to conclude that people drop out of congregations when the relationships are destroyed or when the relationships do not meet the members' initial expectations.[31]

Harre's contention is supported by Carl S. Dudley. He writes:

> People join congregations, at least in part, for social satisfactions. They leave when these social expectations are damaged or left unfulfilled. Growing congregations have found ways--formal and informal--by which the social needs of individuals can be recognized, their achievement needs can be honored, and their social status can remain intact. Without these three strokes--recognition, esteem, and a sense of belonging--members will become frustrated and will withdraw.[32]

A key ingredient to the development of close, caring relationships is the development of small groups dedicated to fostering a climate of care.

It is in the small group context that anxiety and resultant anger can be effectively given attention. People who are potential dropouts can be reached because they begin

---

30 Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds., Understanding Church Growth and Decline (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p.67.

31 Harre, Close The Back Door, p.22.

32 Carl S. Dudley, Where Have All Our People Gone? (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979), p.77-78.

to give early signals, the first and most significant is worship attendance. Another signal is that work on committees suffers from absence. Small groups become a place where these signs can be noted and exercised. Harre suggests:

> Given the nature and intensity of these people's feelings, it is imperative that each congregation have within it both an informal structure which manifests itself in members genuinely caring about one another as they minister to one another's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs and a formal structure to make certain that no individual member's needs are left unmet or ignored.[33]

The emphasis on relationships as a major factor of assimilation of members may seem to depreciate the value of discipleship as a relationship by faith in Jesus Christ. However, this need not be the case. The theology of discipleship, in contrast to psychological and sociological explanations for church membership, is the focus of the next chapter.

---

33 Harre, Close The Back Door, p.61.

Chapter II

THE HISTORICAL THEOLOGY OF THE SMALL GROUP

In the Book of Genesis, the Abrahamic covenant asserts that in the seed of Abraham shall all the nations (families) of the earth be blessed (Genesis 12:1-2). When God reiterates the covenant and gives circumcision as the sign of the covenant, the extended family and slaves in Abraham's house were included in its provisions (Genesis 17:12-14).

Later God affirmed the status of the *oikos*, household, when He made provisions for the household in the Ten Commandments and the ceremonial laws--son, daughter, man-servant, maidservant (Exodus 20:10-17). God also gave command: "You shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household" (Deuteronomy 14:26). Such a statement parallels the command in Deuteronomy 12:12, "You shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your manservants and your maidservants." Later, Joseph was made the governor over all of the household of Pharaoh in Genesis 41:40. Frequently, reference is made to the "house of Israel" and occasionally to the "house of Judah." These illustrations confirm that "household" was a significant sociological phenomenon within the Old Testament. Household is the setting used by God to transmit His covenant (e.g., through the patriarchs) and to

teach His Word in the family (Deuteronomy 6:4-10). Thus

Otto Michel wrote in the Theological Dictionary of the New

Testament:

> All of these expressions remind us of basic Old
> Testament ideas. The *natio*, *gens*, or *familia* has
> an ancestor or leader from whom the whole group re-
> ceives its name and after whom it calls itself.
> Originally the proper name is a gen. behind *oikos*,
> but it then becomes the name of the group as
> such.[34]

Michel asserts the prominence of *oikos* in the New Testament

also when he wrote,

> Primitive Christianity structured its congregations
> in families, groups, and "houses." The house was
> both a fellowship and a place of meeting....The
> house and family are the smallest natural groups in
> the total structure of the congregation."[35]

The kerygmatic function of the early New Testament

Church was the proclamation of the good news of what God had

accomplished in Christ for the redemption of the world. It

was the heart and core of the message of the Christian com-

munity and of its teaching. Therefore, there was not always

strict separation between the didactic and the kerygmatic

functions in the New Testament (Acts 4:1; 5:42).

Hadaway, Wright and DuBose note in their most recent work:

> Another significant matter about evangelism in the
> New Testament is that much of it--if not most of
> the enduring type--took place in the house
> churches. This was true not simply because the
> larger homes were able to accommodate the function.

---

34 Otto Michel, Theological Dictionary of the New
Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI:
Eerdmans Publishing, 1967), p.130.

35 Ibid., 130.

It was also true because proclamation took place as a result of the total witness of the interrelated functions of church life in the homes.[36]

The Church Growth movement identifies these household relationships as "webs." The fact that God uses "webs" of relationships in causing His Kingdom to grow is clearly taught in the New Testament. In the calling of His disciples, Jesus used the "web" principle. He first called Andrew who in turn found his brother Peter and said to him, "We have found the Messiah," and then he brought Peter to Jesus. The next day Jesus met Philip who was from Andrew's and Peter's city of Bethsaida. Philip found his friend Nathaniel and invited him to "come and see" (John 1:45) Jesus. The gospel writers have Jesus frequently interacting with family members. He called the two sons of Zebedee and later involved Himself with them and their mother. In John 11 and 12, Jesus visits Lazarus and his sisters. Jesus also took time to be with specific classes of people such as the "publicans and sinners." In fact, He spent time eating (the highest expression of fellowship in eastern cultures) with them at Zaccheus' house, where Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this household" (Luke 19:9). Because of His fraternization with this class of people, He raised the ire of the Pharisees and scribes who murmured, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). Jesus also associated with village groups as in the wedding at Cana and

---

36 C. Kirk Hadaway, Francis M. DuBose, Stuart A. Wright, Home Cell Groups and House Churches (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987), p.66.

associated with village groups as in the wedding at Cana and the people of Capernaum (John 2:12). He spent time with fishermen (John 1:44) and with racial groups (John 4:40). As part of His own missionary effort, He sent the disciples to households and villages (Luke 8:1, 10:5, 8-9). Furthermore, John reports the conversion of the household of a Roman official at Capernaum, "So the father...himself believed, and his whole household" (John 4:53).

The case for natural relationships (*oikos*) as bridges for God's Spirit to utilize in presenting the message of salvation is convincingly made in the book of Acts. Boer writes, that while faith is always an individual commitment, the conversions in Acts took place within large social contexts. He states:

> The healthy social character of the Christianity that came into being immediately after Pentecost is emphasized by the frequent references in Acts, as also in other parts of the New Testament, to the conversion of families or households.[37]

He also writes:

> Acts is preeminently a book describing group approach to missions. It speaks of missionary approach and of conversions to the faith in terms of three thousand, five thousand, multitudes, many, cities, great numbers, households. That is how the faith spread. Acts speaks a missionary language that is hardly congenial to the individualism characteristic of so much European, Anglo-Saxon and American Christianity.[38]

---

37 Harry Boer, Pentecost and Missions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1961), p.1.

38 Ibid., 163.

In Acts, one encounters the disciples huddled together supporting each other during the post-Ascension days. While they were together as a community, the Spirit came upon them in power as a fulfillment of Jesus' Ascension promise (Acts 1:8). Immediately they went outside and proclaimed the Gospel in various languages. The multi-ethnic Pentecost gathering in Jerusalem heard the saving works of Jesus in their native languages. The result was the conversion of 3,000 persons (Acts 2:41). Some have speculated the number reflects only males who had gathered at the precincts of the temple. It had increased to 5,000 men shortly thereafter, as reported in Acts 4:4. By Acts 5:14, Luke reports "more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women."

While the infant church grew rapidly in its early months of existence, the homes of people became the focal point for nurturing activities. In Acts 2:42 and 2:46-48, Luke wrote:

> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teach-
> ing and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and
> the prayers....And day by day attending temple to-
> gether and breaking bread in their homes, they par-
> took of food with glad and generous hearts, prais-
> ing God and having favor with all the people. And
> the Lord added to their number day by day those who
> were being saved.

Before the stoning of Stephen and just after an administrative restructuring that created a deacon's ministry, Luke writes, "And the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

In the eighth chapter, Luke recorded the first major movement of the Gospel outside Judaism. Philip entered Samaria and preached the Gospel, and "multitudes with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip" (Acts 8:6). Specifically, both men and women were baptized as a response to his preaching. It can be easily assumed that these were not just single adults, but that a great many families were reached through Philip's ministry. Such a conclusion was drawn by Donald McGavran when he wrote:

> That chains of families were converted in Samaria enabled a Christward movement to gain strength in that sub-society of the Hebrews. Probably Samaritans continued for some years to intermarry only with Samaritans, even after they had accepted Jesus as Messiah. At the beginning no Jewish Christian would have thought it proper to give a daughter to the Samaritans, even to such as had become followers of Christ....But since multitudes of both men and women were baptized, there was no social difficulty over marriage.[39]

The ministry of Peter was equally effective as people in two cities became believers in Jesus. "All the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him [Aeneas, whom Peter healed in the name of Jesus], and they turned to the Lord" (Acts 9:35). Once again, building on existing relationships, the Lord drew people to Himself.

This point is amplified again when Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, "And he gave her his hand and lifted her up. Then calling the saints and widows he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed

---

39 Donald McGavran, The Bridges of God (New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1955), p.19.

in the Lord" (Acts 9:41-42). It appears that because of her many contacts with people in the community, a great number of residents in Joppa were open to hearing the Gospel message with the result that it worked the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus.

The account of the conversion of Cornelius provides an even clearer illustration of how relationships are bridges. The Gospel transverses from one life to another. It fosters a support group within in the Body of Christ by faith. He assembled "together his kinsmen and close friends" (Acts 10:24) in anticipation of the arrival of Peter. During the course of Peter's visit and sharing the message of the Gospel, the "Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word" (Acts 10:44). Peter subsequently commanded that Cornelius and his family and friends be baptized (Acts 10:48). What was shocking for Peter was that the Gospel now was shared with Gentiles. Not only had Jewish and Samaritan households come to faith in the Messiah, but also Gentile households. When he returned to his Jewish colleagues, Peter had to defend his actions among the Gentiles, and, in so doing, he recounted how an angel had commanded Cornelius to send for Peter because "he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household" (*oikos*) (Acts 11:14).

Subsequent to this humble beginning of Gospel ministry to the Gentiles, Luke records the missionary zeal of the church in Antioch, where there was a mixture of Hebrew-

speaking and Greek-speaking Jews. The rapid growth of Christianity among these two ethnic groups necessitated the return of Paul from Tarsus to spend the next year teaching the converts. The influx of Gentiles into the Church was apparently unexpected and grew rapidly along normal relationship channels. It was here that the cross-cultural Christian missionary movement flourished. It spread as Paul and Barnabas launched their first missionary journey.

In Perga and Pisidian Antioch, Paul spoke to the crowds at the synagogue. At the conclusion of Paul's teaching, "many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God" (Acts 13:43). The next Sabbath, the whole city gathered to hear Paul. The question was how did the whole city (without the benefits of mass media) hear about Paul's preaching and become motivated to come listen? Through the normal, casual network of relationships that existed--those who heard Paul the first time invited others to come the second time, and living in a trust relationship, those invited came and listened (Acts 13:42-44).

Satan used relationships against Paul and Barnabas on occasion. Because many Gentiles believed in Jesus, and because they were threatened, Jews at Antioch incited devout women and men who had prominence in the community to stir up the crowds so as to remove Paul and Barnabas from the city. The Satanic strategy worked and the two went to Iconium where a great many Jews and Greeks believed. Luke records

that this city was also divided--some favoring the Jews, some favoring the apostles. A similar fate awaited them at Derbe. Once again relationships worked for and against the Kingdom. On his return trip to each city, Paul was again effective in utilizing existing relationships to build the church into a growing organism.

On his second missionary journey, Paul met Lydia at Philippi. The Lord opened her heart (and that is the only way salvation can happen--God opening hearts through the Word), and she was baptized together with her household (Acts 16:15). Later that day Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi. After the midnight earthquake, they had the opportunity to minister to the jailer. Relationships were established and the Gospel was shared. This is such an important case of the apostolic use of families and existing relationships that the account is quoted in its entirety. The frightened jailer asks:

> "What must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God (Acts 16:30-34, emphasis added).

Crispus of Corinth, ruler of the synagogue, also "believed in the Lord with all his house" (Acts 18:8). Paul later wrote in I Corinthians 1:16, "I did baptize also the household of Stephanas." Paul also made reference to the "house of Onesiphorus" in I Timothy 1:16 and 4:19. He regu-

larly used "*oikos*" as an evangelistic and nurturing tool as is further illustrated by the statement of Paul at Miletus. The Ephesian elders, wrote Paul, should recall "How I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:20).

Just as the Church was born out of the networks of relationships, so it continued to grow and be nurtured within those networks. The Bible is filled with illustrations of outreach and assimilation strategies which are sensitive to the value of relationships. Paul extends personal greetings to friends as he requests greetings to Priscilla and Aquila and "the church in their house" (Romans 16:3).

The Scriptures are not alone in using relationships as an integral part of extending the Kingdom, i.e. the rule of Christ in the lives of people. Michael Green has studied the progress of the church during the early centuries. He concluded that the "house" was one of the most important methods of spreading the Gospel.

> It had positive advantages: the comparatively small numbers involved made real interchange of views and informal discussion among participants possible; there was no artificial isolation of a preacher from his hearers; there was no temptation for either the speaker or the heckler to "play to the gallery" as there was in a public place or open-air meeting. The sheer informality and relaxed atmosphere of the home, not to mention the hospitality which most often have gone with it, all helped to make this form of evangelism particularly successful.[40]

---

40 Michael Green, Evangelism In The Early Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), p.207-208.

Green argues that, sociologically, the household was the strongest base upon which to build the fledgling Church. Not only was there the witness of the Old Testament where God created the house of Adam, where Noah and his house were brought into the ark, where Abraham and his house were brought into the covenant, and where David and his house received the Kingdom promise, but the family is also found to be basic for Graeco-Roman culture. In fact, evidence suggests that there was controversy over the relative claims of the household and the state.[41] As the Roman Republic was in its decline, there were significant rivalries between the families much in the way one would think of rivalries between political countries.

In the patriarchal system of the Old Testament era, the undisputed head of the household was the father. His domain included the members of his immediate and extended family, and also his slaves, who were dependent on the "household" for their livelihood. The "freedmen, who frequently took the family name and remained in looser connection with it (were) known as *clientela*."[42] A further group was known as *amici* which was the group of "trusted friends to whom intimacy was granted and from whom reliable support and devotion was expected."[43] Thus in the Graeco-Roman world, *"oikos"*

---

41 Ibid., 208.

42 Ibid., 209.

43 Ibid.

was composed of blood relatives, slaves, clients and friends--this was the "backbone" of the society.

Groups and the Early Church

Relationships continued to be important as the Church and God's Kingdom moved into the next centuries. Gregory tells of the importance of this friendship with Origen. Writing about Origen, Gregory commented, "He possessed a rare combination of a certain sweet grace and persuasiveness, along with a strange power and constraint."[44] He went on to write,

> The stimulus of friendship was also brought to bear upon us--a stimulus not easily withstood, but keen and most effective--the argument of a kind and affectionate disposition, which showed itself beneficently in his words when he spoke to us and associated with us."[45]

Gregory goes on to speak of the intimate friendship he began to enjoy with his teacher, who cultivated him like a farmer in a field. Certainly the great small church father was a picture of zeal, certainly he was opportunistic. But the key was his relationship with Gregory, his friendship, his perseverance. Gregory puts it this way: "He did not aim merely at getting us rounded by any kind of reasoning, but his desire was, with a benignant, affectionate and most

---

44 Quoted by Michael Green, Evangelism In The Early Church, p.228.

45 Ibid.

generous mind, to save us."[46] What a powerful example of the value of relationships in evangelism and disciplemaking.

Because of the cumulative witnesses of the Old Testament, New Testament, and early Church, George Peters writes, "A church grows best by corporate-personality decisions in cultures of family, tribe, community and people relationships."[47] He is saying that people tend to make decisions together, with the input, encouragement and support of trusted friends and loved ones. He challenges the assumption that Western individualism is a high norm or absolute ideal. Based on this view it would follow that the Church should aim its message at key individuals who are leaders within the community, tribe or family. In a patriarchal society the obvious focal point is the family leader. Such insights also apply to the assimilation of the new Christians into the Christian community. McGavran summarizes the same thought as he states:

> The evidence actually indicates that better Christians are produced as a result of "coming to Christ in chains of families" than the method of "one-by-one out of a hostile environment"; and that spiritual starvation in any Church, whatever its cause, does certainly produce nominal Christians. It is a tragedy to ascribe the undesirable result to the only method by which the Church grows greatly.[48]

Certain affirmation that individuals most frequently come to Christ and His Church in the context of relationships and

---

46 Ibid.

47 Peters, A Theology of Church Growth, p.234.

48 McGavran, The Bridges of God, p.84.

that relationships continue to be critical in one's Christian growth and incorporation into the Body--the Church. Care must be taken in positing the reverse, namely, that unbelievers are relationless people. Boer correctly asserts:

> In considering the place of the Church in and message for the world it would, of course, be folly not to take seriously the social, political, economic, cultural, and religious milieu in which the Church in a given situation or with a given missionary task finds herself. The people whom the Church addresses live in that milieu, are affected by it, in turn affect it, and are called to live the Christian life in the relationships in which they concretely stand. To these concrete flesh and blood, living-in-various-relationships men and women the Church must speak the gospel in such a manner that she will help them to be salt of the earth at that time and place in which they find themselves.[49]

Robert Recker underscores the importance of relationships clearly as he writes:

> This web is where the most intimate of relationships take place and provide the natural avenues for the spontaneous witnessing of Christians in their immediate environment, addressed to those who are most vulnerable to that witness, and who are best able to judge the quality of the Christian life of the one who witnesses. Hence one can speak of the hope for the spontaneous expansion of the Christian church.[50]

From all that has been stated so far, it is clear that the teachings of the Bible recognize the pluralistic nature of communities and view the variety of social units as opportunities for the proclamation of the Word of God. This

---

49 Boer, Pentecost and Missions, p.175.

50 Robert Recker, Theological Perspectives on Church Growth, ed. Harvie Conn (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976), p.76-77.

is why Alan Tippet says the Church Growth Movement pays particular attention to:

> The patterns of social units within which people organize themselves for the satisfaction and supply of their human needs, for their problem-solving and decision-making procedures; that, by their decision for Christ, they may find in Him the satisfaction of all their needs and the answers to their problems.[51]

Having claimed the significance of using *"oikos"* as an evangelistic and disciplemaking strategy, it is important to reassert the prominence of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament as the agent to effect conversion and growth as a disciple of Jesus. As previously stated, right methods together with right tools do not produce Kingdom growth in and of themselves. The power and work of God's Holy Spirit is the essential ingredient. The book of Acts is most appropriately the book of the Holy Spirit's movement throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the world. The Spirit is mentioned in three-fourths of the chapters. He is the effective means for building the Kingdom. Jesus affirmed that building the Kingdom is God's business when He said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18).

Kent Hunter, Founder and President of the Center for American Church Growth, points to the value of anthropology as the study of culture, and of sociology as a study of how individuals live and function within groups, and of psychol-

---

51 Alan Tippett, Church Growth and the Word of God (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970), p.31.

ogy as the study of people's emotional and behavioral char-
acteristics. "Church growth uses the best insights of these
disciplines, along with God's biblical principles, to dis-
cover strategies for the relevant communication of the
Gospel."[52]   Hunter's words echo the implied thoughts of
Donald McGavran who wrote:

> The method we advocate does not and cannot ever re-
> place the message. God has a plan of salvation.
> This He has made clear in His Word. Only as men,
> individuals, or peoples, accept it can they gain
> everlasting life. Jesus Christ is the same, yes-
> terday, today, and forever. He is the revelation
> of God. There is no substitute for faith in Him.
> Yet through all these twenty centuries, the message
> has been presented in many ways. Some have been
> more successful than others in leading men to ac-
> cept the Savior. The way of group action is the
> one which had discipled most of the world. Through
> this method, the message will be understood better,
> by more people, in a shorter time than by any
> other. The message is the Lord. His chariot is
> the People Movement.[53]

The message is Jesus, crucified and risen. The target is
the "household," the web of influence for Christians.

Donald McGavran cites a study of the Choco Indians in
Panama by Jacob Loewen. It illustrates the value of rela-
tionships in facilitating disciplemaking. In summarizing
Loewen's work on the effect of relationships, McGavran
writes that:

> Fellowship is enhanced among new Christians by
> strengthening family, group, lineage, and other
> ties. Meaningful worship and working communal bees
> on each other's land, plus deliberate building up
> and idealizing of family and tribal ties gives new

---

52 Kent Hunter, Foundations for Church Growth (New
Haven, MO: Leader Publishing Co., 1983), p.98.

53 McGavran, The Bridges of God, p.93-94.

Christians a heightened sense of community which
they find delightful.[54]

It is clear that evangelism efforts which focus on us-
ing the normal natural networks of relationships are sup-
ported both by the biblical record and by the social sci-
ences. They are effective bridges for the Holy Spirit to
use in impacting lives with the Gospel. The church member
will need to grow in his or her life with God in the context
of the local body of believers. In fact, the depth of
friendships members have (or perhaps do not have) with oth-
ers in the church seems to be the most important variable in
predicting whether they will become active, contributing
members or whether they will slip out the "back door." We
can conclude that the more close friends a person has, and
the stronger his relationships are, the greater the proba-
bility that person will be an active, responsible member.
Those with few friends within the congregation in contrast
are much more likely to slip out the "back door."

It is well known that friendships are created and main-
tained through shared experiences. Low and non-threatening
experiences provide the opportunity to test whether the
other person is trustworthy, caring and compatible with "my
needs." As experiences are shared, trust is built and bond-
ing can occur. People who can "remember back then" together
tend to develop a relationship. This is seen as older peo-
ple talk about one of their shared experiences--the Great

---

54 McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, p.327.

Depression, or when veterans talk about their experiences in Viet Nam. It is through the shared experiences of dating that two people grow toward intimacy and marriage. Likewise, through shared experiences with other members of the church, newcomers develop a sense of belonging, a sense of relationship.

Unfortunately, the development of good, healthy relationships cannot be left to spontaneous generation. While some might assume it is easier to "break into" a smaller church than a larger one, because the small size makes it more difficult to go unnoticed or to blend into the masses, churches need to intentionally create opportunities for building friendships and, therefore, relationships. The next chapter addresses the development of these small groups.

CHAPTER III

THE SMALL GROUP IN PROCESS

The question is how might the Church provide for the
deeper relational needs that lead to spiritual growth? One
possible answer is the small group.

A famous church that successfully uses the small group
process has been Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea,
where Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho is the Senior Pastor. In Septem-
ber 1986, the church numbered 503,041 members. In July
1987, the unofficial membership exceeded 525,000. How does
a church grow by 22,000 in less than a year? How does the
church minister to that many people? How does the church
nurture that many people? How does such a large church
maintain any sense of intimacy? The answer to each of these
questions is simply stated, "through small groups." How
many? In September 1986, there were 43,834 small groups.
By January 1987, the total was 46,208. It is through small
group ministry that Yoido Full Gospel Church evangelizes and
disciples members. Cho writes:

> There is practically no back door to our church.
> The reason is that each home cell group is like a
> family circle. Through these family circles people
> feel a sense of belonging, and they are kept in the
> church. On top of that, each cell leader watches
> over his or her flock, just as a hen watches over
> her chicks. He is constantly caring for the needs
> of his flock. But at the same time, if one member
> of his cell group "plays hooky" from church, the
> following day the leader calls to find out if any-
> thing is wrong....Once a person ncomes into our
> church through the cell system, we are not likely

to lose him. Someone is always watching out for him, caring for him, helping him.[55]

Cho is convinced of the primacy of the small group for attracting and sustaining members. He believes that, "A cell group is the basic part of our church. It is not another church program--it is the program of our church."[56]

Cho is not alone in his claim of the small group as the most significant ingredient of both church growth and Christian nurture. Howard Snyder writes, "A small group of eight to twelve people meeting together informally in homes is the most effective structure for the communication of the Gospel in modern secular society."[57] Such groups, he argues, are often better suited to the urban setting in which the church typically finds itself today.

The argument for the use of small groups as a key to outreach and disciplemaking is not based on the mere proliferation of the neighborhood Bible study groups. It is grounded in the Bible, history and the needs of people. As one looks into the Scriptures, one can quickly identify the use of small groups as a resource for the development of the church. Paul went from "house to house" teaching and preaching (Acts 20:20). The writer of Hebrews challenged the early Christians (who did not have church buildings)

_____

55 Paul Yonggi Cho, Successful Home Cell Groups (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1981), p.67.

56 Paul Yonggi Cho, More Than Numbers (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), p.42.

57 Howard Snyder, The Problem of Wine Skins (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varisty Press, 1975), p.139.

saying: "Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer." (Hebrews 10:24-25, Good News translation). The New Testament enjoins us to live in community (koinonia) with each other and that process was certainly expressed and nurtured in small groups. Evidence of the community which was characterized in a deep commitment to Jesus and to one another is found in Luke's report of how the early church understood its need for growth in Christ and growth together:

> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about 3,000 souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together, and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved (Acts 2:41-47).

The argument from the Scriptures is enhanced by the biblical understanding of the need for community. Inherent in humanity by virtue of its creation and redemption is the desire for community. People were created to be in relationship with God. The numerous admonitions to love God above all else demonstrates the reality that people find their identities in a relationship with God. Adam's attempt

at hiding from God, whose presence he had enjoyed prior to the Fall, shows that the perfect relationship is fractured. His awareness of his nakedness demonstrates that now, after the Fall, he is able to reflect on himself as separated from God. Until this time, God had been the center of his attention; now that primary relationship is ruined by sin. The result is also a skewing of the relationship with his "helpmeet." He blames both God and the woman for his own failure--"the woman you gave me." The sense of healthy community that was there at creation is now badly ruptured. It is only restored by the grace of God reflected in Jesus' death and resurrection which reconciles individuals to God and individual to individual (II Corinthians 5:17-21). It is through faith in the redemption that was won by Jesus that puts people back into a personal relationship with God and, derivatively, with each other. John addresses this reality in his first letter:

> That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life--the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us--that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.
>
> This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship

with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (I John 1:1-7).

Within the larger context of community, created by being in relationship with God through faith and Baptism, are smaller fellowship groups. One such group was the smaller fellowship of Peter, James and John which was nurtured and developed on the mountain where Jesus was transfigured before these wide-eyed disciples. These three were also invited to share in a special way with each other and Jesus, a time of great struggle when Jesus invited them to accompany Him into the deeper recesses of the Garden of Gethsemane to pray in those final hours before His betrayal and trials.

It was the larger band of disciples who were gathered together for mutual support when Jesus appeared to the ravaged fellowship on Easter evening. A week later they were gathered again for mutual support and fellowship when He appeared a second time.

From the time that Jesus called the Twelve to follow Him and even nurtured some within that fellowship more personally, Christians have enjoyed a remarkable relationship with each other. They have shared hurts, weaknesses, personal problems, material needs, aspirations, prayer concerns and victories. Their fellowship has been marked by a climate of acceptance, openness, encouragement, assistance, support and trust. They were bonding together as family so that each might grow in the context of the fellowship that centers on Jesus. The welding occurred as the disciples (the Twelve and those who became the Church after Pentecost)

lived out in community the "one anothers" of Scripture. For a listing of many of these "one anothers," see Appendix 1.

Sidney Rooy considers these when he writes:

Individuals' essential characters become reality to the extent that God's love calls them into community with each other. Only through the biblical word, "Fear God and keep his commandments," a word of love to God and to neighbor, can we be truly human. Humanity's unity is found precisely here--all people as persons before God are mutually bound to a responsible covenant with each other. God's love becomes the paradigm for human stewardship of all creation. Human freedom to love all things in Christ is at the same time the ethical norm that makes possible true self-realization-in-community, a full social life.

However, people not only love God and each other; they must be loved in return by them. In the concreteness of human creaturely existence lies a basic in-created dependence upon a person's ecosystem and upon the ministry and support of the other referents in a relation-defined life. The basic male-female dimension of creation constitutes an interdependence within the structure of humankind's being and permeates all of its existence. To be fully human is to be ministered to and completed by the love of female (if male), or male (if female), and of all the other extensions of this basic relationship in family, tribe, ethnic community, and the race.

Individual life can be realized only in community life, and that community life has meaning to the extent that living, interrelational units create social cohesion.[58]

The Bible clearly portrays human beings as especially interdependent, requiring elaborate relationships to flourish and thrive, even as individuals. The biblical term for this is "*koinonia*."

---

58 Sidney Rooy, "A Theology of Humankind," Exploring Church Growth, ed. Wilburt R. Shenk (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), p.195-196.

Jesus initiated fellowship by choosing twelve men to be with Him in ministry. For three years He interacted with them, taught them, forgave them, ever moving them toward maturity in their relationship with God. As he interacted with them he taught them how to relate to one another. He modeled interaction most vividly when He fulfilled the words "Greater love has no man that this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). He modeled a new relationship when He, the Teacher, washed the feet of His disciples and then said to them, "For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). In the same setting, He challenged them to live in a new fellowship, a fellowship they had enjoyed individually with Him. He commanded it when he said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34).

As previously noted, the early Christian community used the "household" (*oikos*) as the basic structure of the Church. It was conveniently both a place of fellowship and a place of meeting. It was the home, not the catacombs, that was the primary meeting place for the early Church. Likewise, it was the home that provided a significant gathering point for Christians in the era of the Reformation.

It was around the table in his home, that Dr. Martin Luther gathered students, friends and young professors together with members of his family to share the joys and sorrows of his life. His students often recorded the sayings,

pithy remarks, and literal words of wisdom into what has become known as the "Table Talk" of Martin Luther. It was the Luther home, "the black cloister" and the Word of God proclaimed from the dining room table among friends and family which provided this opportunity.[59]

A bamboo curtain went up around China in the late 1940's, and Christian missionaries were expelled. Would the Christian movement be able to survive? The word from China today staggers even the optimist. Not only has Christianity survived in China—it has flourished. How? Not with ordained clergy preaching to filled pews, but through thousands of home fellowships where people gather for worship, Bible study and prayer. This is another example of the impact of small groups.

The small group has much to commend it beyond the witness of the Scripture and history. It provides a supportive environment for spiritual growth. Sermons, no matter how exciting the delivery and impeccable the exegesis, are monologs that are quickly forgotten. Educators frequently point out that people typically remember 10% of what they hear, 50% of what they see, 70% of what they say, and 90% of what they do and experience.[60] Small groups provide a positive arena for an interactional learning experience. Because of the smaller numbers, there is a reduction in the

---

59 Theodore Tappert, editor, Luther's Works, (Vol 54) Table Talk (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), Introduction.

60 Edgar Dale, Audio Visual Methods in Teaching, (rev. ed.) (New York, NY: Rinehold and Winston, 1954), p.59.

fear of speaking and involvement which, in turn, fosters learning. The more passive the participant, the less likely the learning and spiritual growth.

Small Groups Meet Needs

People who visit or attend a church come with a variety of needs. Among the theoretical explanations used to understand the needs of people, including church people, is the proposal by the psychologist A.H. Maslow.[61] He has provided a descriptive set of human needs ranging from lower order to higher order. His hierarchy reveals that higher order needs cannot serve as motivators until levels ranked below are fulfilled. His ranking from lowest to highest are: (1) physiological; (2) safety; (3) belongingness and love; (4) esteem; and (5) self-actualization. For example, one who is hungry will not be interested in discussing theological or philosophical issues until one's appetite has been satisfied.

```
               /\
              /  \
             /    \
            / Self- \
           /Actualization\
          /              \
         /    Esteem      \
        /                  \
       / Belongingness      \
      /    and Love          \
     /                        \
    /      Safety              \
   /                            \
  /     Physiological            \
 /_____\
```

---
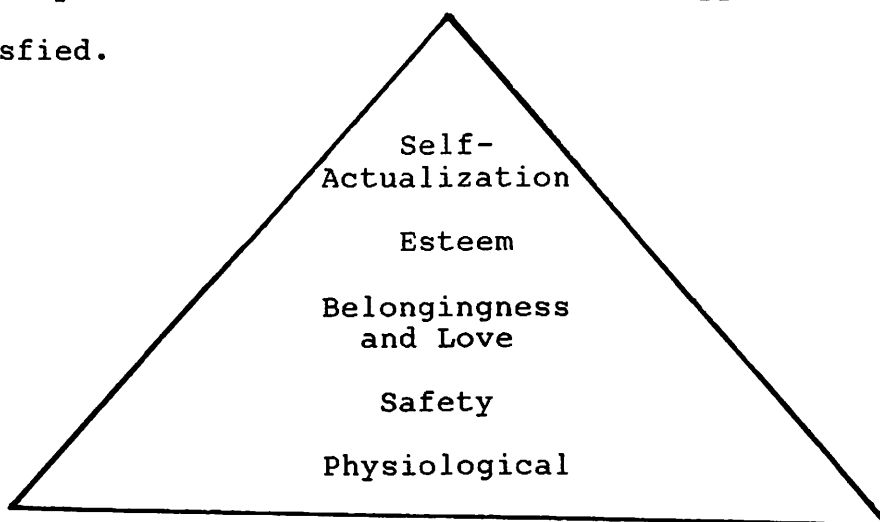
61 See A.H. Maslow, Motivational and Human Behavior (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1970).

The most basic level of need is the physiological. Food, shelter, clothing and warmth fit into this category. Until these desires are met, all resources will be focused on satisfying them. Our Lord was sensitive to this level of need and its primacy. When these needs dominated, He stopped and ministered to those needs first.

The second level of need is safety. Included are concerns about security, physical safety and emotional assurance. Concerns about unemployment, recession and social unrest are examples of this level of need. Also prominent is the fear that comes when things are changing rapidly and are creating chaos. Being able to rest securely in the arms of one who forgives and works all things for the good of those whom He has called to be His own is a great benefit. What comfort there is in a God who offers a peace that the world cannot give nor take away or even understand!

The third level of need is belonging and being loved. Included is the need to both give and receive love. Engel, Kollat and Blackwell studied consumer behavior. It is illustrative of the attention that deserves to be placed on this need level through an intentional ministry in small groups.[62] They have noted a difference between people born before World War II and the children of those born in the depression and post-depression years. Engel and Associates observed that only a minority of those who were raised dur-

---

62 James F. Engel, David T. Kollat, and Roger D. Blackwell, Consumer Behavior (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), p.96-108.

ing the depression years had their economic security needs met to the extent that they became free of security needs as a motivator. This generation has carried the need for economic achievement and success into recent decades. They are inclined to view life from an economic perspective. They view ministry in terms of two questions: "Can we afford it?" and "Where is the funding coming from?" Their emphasis is upon management rather than upon leadership.

Their children, however, seem motivated by a different set of needs. Because of the successfulness of their parents and the provision that "they don't have to miss out like I did," the needs for economic security have been met. The younger generation has been able to focus on love and belonging as a motivator. They speak in words indicating loneliness, isolation, rejection. They seek companionship, appreciation, acception, inclusion and friendships. In a recent study by the Alban Institute, newcomers to churches cited warmth, welcome and a caring community as their primary concern when they looked for a new church.[63]

The next level of need described by Maslow is that of esteem. Related to love and belongingness, this need deals with a sense of self-worth and self-respect, the need to be recognized as a person of real worth and real value. It implies a need for affirmation. What better source of affirmation than God's forgiving, renewing love in Jesus Christ

---

63 Roy M. Oswald and Speed B. Leas, The Inviting Church: A Study in New Member Assimilation, (New York, NY: The Alban Institute, 1987), p.54.

that makes each believer special, a unique creation and re-creation (through Baptism). Related to that is the acceptance that comes through the Christian community which mirrors the unconditional love of the heavenly Father.

The highest motivational level described by Maslow is that of self-actualization. It is the need to realize one's inner potential by fully developing one's capabilities through creative activities. It is achieved by commitment of one's personal resources to a cause outside oneself and results in involvement in some mission in life. Joseph Aldrich suggests that the non-Christian will always be frustrated at this level because of a God-shaped vacuum that can be filled only by the living God through faith.[64] The Christian's life is not centered in self-actualization but in God's already accomplished activity, i.e.: the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and upon being that embodiment of Christ in the world today.

In reflecting on hierarchy of needs and on the American society in which the Church is seeking to minister, one is impressed with the compelling need for intentional development of community. In increasing numbers, people today are struggling with their self-image. This struggle is important because self-esteem is often tied to vocational effectiveness. The transitional period between an industrial society and an informational (high-tech) society will continue

---

64 Joseph Aldrich, Life-Style Evangelism (Portland, OR: Multnoman Press, 1981), p.93.

to impact individuals who are caught in the modern era of change. As they re-tool for meaningful contributions in the work force, the Church can be a support community to assist them through the transition. The Church provides a sense of value and meaning through Christ and His Body, reminding them of forgiveness, newness of life and salvation.

John Naisbitt, in an interview for PSA Magazine, refers to the high-tech, high-touch phenomenon. With the advent of the computer and high-tech industries, people are able to do more work at home. Yet, he observes a "high-tech backlash" in which people are still desirous of working at the office where they can be with people.[65] God created us social be-ings ("It is not good for man to be alone"), and the new technology is underscoring this need for relationships. One place where these needs can be met intentionally is in the Church--"the communion of saints."

The sense of community that once was provided in the family setting is no longer an integral part of our society. Today only 7% of American families maintain traditional nu-clear family roles with the husband gainfully employed and the wife at home with 2.2 children.[66] Many homes more closely resemble restaurants and motels than close family circles. The changing role of women has intensified this phenomenon since more than 50% of women are employed outside

---

65 Roger Rapport, "Interview: John Naisbitt" PSA Magazine (September 1983), p.95.

66 Ibid., 98.

the home. Women traditionally have been tending the relationship at home, but now are often too exhausted to fulfill that role. Men are not picking up the slack. The energy that once was directed toward building deep and caring relationships is not present for many couples and single parents because of the economic necessity to work. Once again the Church can provide a supportive environment to foster the development and growth of community through an intentional small group ministry. Small groups help meet human needs at all levels but especially at the levels of love and belongingness, of self-esteem and self-actualization.

Perhaps what science has discovered about geese illustrates the need for small groups. Research indicates that geese fly in a "V" formation because as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in this formation, the whole flock adds at least 71% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own. Whenever a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone, and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front. When the lead goose gets tired, it rotates to the rear of the pattern and another goose flies point. The geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed. Finally, when a goose gets sick, or is wounded by gun shot and falls out, two geese fall out of formation and follow him to the ground to protect him. They stay with him until he is ei-

ther able to fly or dies. It is only then that they rejoin
the original group. The Church and its small groups symbol-
ize a "V" formation for each Christian. Groups provide the
greatest opportunity for developing lifegiving, supportive
relationships.[67]

Paul Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the world's largest
church with more than 46,000 small groups at the center of
the ministry style, comments that small groups provide a
setting for mutual caring, support and spiritual growth. He
states:

> Home cell groups, on the other hand, provide a real
> opportunity for people such as these to find mean-
> ingful involvement in the life of their church.
> Not everyone can be an elder or a deacon in a large
> church; not everyone can teach Sunday school or
> provide counseling. But with home cell groups,
> there is an opportunity for everybody to become
> involved.
>
> I like to describe Full Gospel Central Church as
> the smallest church in the world as well as the
> biggest church in the world....But it is also the
> smallest church in the world--because every member
> is part of a home cell group consisting of fifteen
> families or fewer.
>
> Each week these members gather in their neighbor-
> hood cell meetings, where they have an opportunity
> to worship the Lord, to pray together, to learn
> from the Word, to experience the working of the
> gifts of the Holy Spirit, to see miracles and heal-
> ings and to enjoy loving relationships with their
> fellow Christians. In the cell groups they are no
> longer numbers; they are people--individuals. A
> person who comes into the cell group discovers he
> is an "I" and not an it. The cell leader becomes a
> kind of pastor to him, although one who is respon-
> sible to the church. The cell leader knows each of
> the members of his group and can relate personally

---

67 St. Peter Lutheran Church, The Net News, Arlington
Heights, IL, (November 1989), p.2.

to their joys and problems with a kind of familiarity that a senior pastor cannot develop.

The Sunday services in our church are very structured, very traditional....But in the home cell groups each one has an opportunity to be used by God to minister to the others in the group....There is much security for the members in the cell groups. Each one becomes a family member with the others of the group in a kind of community relationship that is more than a community. In the group each person is free to discuss his problems and seek counsel and prayer for them. In fact, the relationship goes beyond counsel and prayer; the members really take care of one another.[68]

It is this caring, supportive climate that enables "outsiders" to become "insiders," that helps lonely people find love and the satisfaction of basic needs.

It appears that some churches are more capable of expressing warmth and love. It is interesting that those churches which freely exhibit warmth, caring and love also demonstrate a ten-year trend of growth, while churches which have more difficulty expressing love demonstrate decline over the same period. The Institute for American Church Growth conducted surveys of 8,658 persons representing 168 churches in 39 denominations. The purpose was to measure a church's love in action by determining the "Love/Care Quotient" (LCQ) and its ability to reach and incorporate new people. The results were reported in Who Cares About Love? as:

The ease of difficulty with which people can say "I love you" varies by denomination. Of the 39 different denominations responding, people in The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have the most difficulty in using these words. Members in the Assem-

_____

68 Cho, Successful Home Cell Groups, p.50-53.

blies of God, by contrast, find it easiest to say,
"I love you." Hugging and touching among members
in the Lutheran Church is also rated "very uncom-
fortable," compared to the Assemblies of God where
it is rated "very comfortable."[69]

A comparison of select denominations is provided below on a

rank of 0-100, with 100 being the highest:

DENOMINATION	LCQ	10-YEAR TREND
Southern Baptist	74	Growth
Church of God (Cleveland, TN)	73	Growth
Foursquare Gospel	72	Growth
Missionary Church	72	Growth
Assemblies of God	71	Growth
Church of God (Anderson, IN)	70	Growth
Presbyterian Church in America	70	Growth
Church of the Nazarene	69	Growth
Evangelical Free	68	Growth
Free Methodist	68	Growth
Independent	68	Growth
Baptist General Conference	66	Growth
Christian Church and Churches of Christ	65	No change
American Baptist	64	Decline
United Presbyterian in USA	64	Decline
Christian Church (Disciples)	63	Decline
Episcopal	63	Decline
Christian and Missionary Alliance	61	Growth
United Methodist	61	Decline
Brethren	60	Decline
Moravian	59	Decline
Other Lutheran (combined)	58	Decline
Independent Baptist	58	Not available
Reformed Church in America	57	Decline
Conservative Baptist Association	56	Decline
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod	54	Decline
Christian Reformed	52	No change[70]

The study also suggests a significant correlation between

growing churches and loving churches regardless of size.

This factor lead Arn to write, "Thus, if your congregation

---

69 Win Arn, Carroll Nyquist, Charles Arn, Who Cares
About Love? (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1986),
p.116-117.

70 Ibid., 118.

is plateaued or in a decline, a factor that must be immedi-
ately studied is: How loving is your church? There is in-
creasing evidence to indicate that the foundation principle
of church growth...is love."[71] While Lutherans will quickly
point out that Word and Sacrament are foundational to church
growth, Lutherans also acknowledge that in a loving climate
where needs are being met, God's Word can readily be heard
because attention is not distracted by loneliness and
alienation.

The value of small groups is again apparent. A small
group strategy is important, especially as one remembers the
observation of Yeakley:

> When a person has no meaningful personal contacts
> with the congregation in the process of his conver-
> sion, he is likely to feel no meaningful sense of
> identification with the congregation after his con-
> version and is therefore likely to drop out.[72]

Not only is that true of converts, but those who come by
transfer or by a re-affirmation of faith. In this regard,
Schaller, based on his years of consultation with churches,
asserts:

> The ones least likely to become inactive mem-
> bers...are the individuals who become part of a
> group, where the membership in that face-to-face
> small group is meaningful, before formally uniting
> with that congregation. They are assimilated be-
> fore they join.[73]

---

71 Charles Arn, ed., The Win Arn Growth Report, 14:4.

72 Flavil Yeakley, Why Churches Grow (Broken Arrow, OK,
Christian Communities, 1979), p.65.

73 Lyle Schaller, Assimilating New Members (Nashville,
TN: Abingdon Press, 1978), p.76.

He goes on to comment on the value of small groups in the process of assimilation:

> (These people) gain a sense of acceptance and be-
> longing through membership in that smaller face-to-
> face group. This is an especially important part
> of the assimilation process in congregations with a
> hundred or more members where it is difficult for
> most newcomers to feel a real sense of acceptance
> except through participation in a subgroup of that
> congregation.[74]

Schaller underscored the point in his monthly newsletter, The Parish Paper, when he wrote:

> Subgroups are important! In addition to the pri-
> mary purpose of these small face-to-face groups,
> such as Bible study, program planning, personal and
> spiritual growth..., many of these small groups are
> where people find fellowship. It is difficult to
> overstate the importance of this dimension of
> church membership for millions of people.[75]

To better understand how a small group provides a safe, warm, transforming climate, it is important to remember that intimacy, trust and concern are raised dramatically as the number of people in a group is reduced. What might be the reason? People are hesitant to share their innermost thoughts, hopes, dreams, fears or joys with others. Why? John Powell answers that question simply when he quotes one of his clients, "I am afraid to tell you who I am, because, if I tell you who I am, you may not like who I am, and it's all that I have."[76] In order to protect their vulnerabil-

---

74 Ibid.

75 Schaller, Lyle, The Parish Paper 11 (December 1981):
2.

76 John Powell, Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?
(Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1969), p.12.

ity, people tend not to interact at intimate levels in large groups. With fewer people, it is more likely a person will begin to open up. The more that one senses the love, care and concern of the group, the more likely it is that individuals will share. It is in this sharing of oneself that individuals become interactive with the group and, thus, become more likely to respond with personal growth. This is particularly true of small groups that have as their goal spiritual growth--growth based upon the study of God's Word. The power of God's Word is at work growing the Church. Such growth is accelerated when there is a deeper level of communication--the more one interacts with the group, the greater the sense of belonging.

Powell identifies five levels of interpersonal communication. Only the highest level facilitates deeper levels of caring.[77] Win Arn and Charles Arn likewise describe levels of communication and friendship in A Shepherd's Guide To Caring and Keeping.[78] They define the courtesy level as merely recognizing other people exist by a casual "Hello." Encounters are usually done "in passing." The next level is that of greeting. At this level it is suggested that people can know by name 60-120 others. Conversation is made up of cliches and focuses on the weather, sports and local events. The third level is the functional level. Conversation centers on information and facts, and involves 20-40 people.

77 Ibid., 54-62.

78 See Appendix 2.

Groups of this size would include Bible study groups, Lutheran Women's Missionary League, the altar guild and the choir. The next level is the caring level and includes 8-17 people. At this level, relationships are built around common interests and problems where significant conversations occur and active, mutual support is experienced. Group members see each other once or twice a week. They share values and perceptions which encourage confidence and growth. There is an awareness of and response to an individual's needs, both formally and spontaneously. The fifth level is sharing. It is composed of 5-7 people and characterized both by indepth sharing of hopes and hurts, and by a mutual understanding of one another's feelings. The uniqueness of this group is the high level of trust and openness which provide a marvelous milieu for growth. The highest level is intimacy. It is characterized by a high degree of transparency and is the deepest level of relationship.

At the top three levels, caring, sharing and intimacy, openness, transparency and vulnerability are experienced. At these levels, therefore, the greatest potential for growth occurs--whether intellectual, emotional or spiritual. The higher the level of trust and sharing, the greater the probability of growth and change. The greater the levels of trust and caring, the greater the probability that there will be an associated feeling of belonging which in turn increases the likelihood that members of the group will feel

assimilated into the congregation.[79] It is in small groups
characterized by these upper levels of relationship that
good, loving relationships occur. Deeper friendships are
established. People who show early signs of dropping out
can be the object of loving ministry. People can give and
receive love. People can experience an environment for
growth that involves both the emotional and spiritual lev-
els.[80] Spiritual growth produces a more mature response of
discipleship which demonstrates the fruits of faith. A re-
sult not based on "my friends being here," but because the
Spirit of God has worked renewal through the Gospel.

What Is A Small Group?

Having set forth a theological and psycho-social ratio-
nale for small groups, how is a small group defined? The
working definition provided by Roberta Hestenes has much to
commend it and should be given full consideration as a vi-
able definition within Lutheran circles:

> A Christian small group can be defined as an inten-
> tional face-to-face gathering of three to twelve
> people on a regular time schedule who share the
> common purpose of exploring together some aspect of
> Christian faith and discipleship.[81]

---

79 Draeger, Member Assimilation, p.98.

80 Ibid.

81 From a lecture by Roberta Hestenes, Fuller Seminary,
Pasadena, California, at the "Second National Conference on
Growing Churches Through Small Groups," Pasadena,
California, March 1-4, 1988.

Several key thoughts emerge from this definition. First, quality Christian community seldom develops accidently. Meaningful, indepth relationships germinate and grow to fruition when they are cultivated according to an intentional plan. Purposeful activities can then be incorporated which foster closeness, cohesiveness, and the resulting trust which allows for deeper association to develop.

Secondly, small groups, if they are to meet the goal of building up the Christian community, must be face-to-face groups where individuals are not lost in a crowd. Changes in beliefs, attitudes and action patterns are more likely to occur in a small group. The reason is the opportunity exits for interaction among all the members for purposes of clarification, expansion of ideas, feedback and reflection. Group size is important because of its potential effect on both the number and quality of relationships in the group. The number of relationships in small groups increases much more quickly than the number of members. A formula developed to calculate the number of potential individual relationships in a group is $\frac{N\ (N-1)}{2}$. N represents the number of group members. A group of four people, for example, has six potential individual relationships.[82] A group of twelve has sixty-six potential individual relationships. The formula, it should be noted, does not account for the array of possible individual-subgroup relationships.

---

82 Ibid., 200.

It appears that although the size of a group does not completely determine the quality of the relations among members, size does set some limits on what kinds of relations are possible.[83]

For somewhat obvious reasons, Christian community in small groups is also fostered by the quantity of time spent together. Regular, frequent meetings tend to make more focused groups because less time is required to re-gather and to re-connect. Groups that meet weekly, therefore, tend to generate deeper relationships and greater growth both for individuals and the group as a whole when compared to groups that meet monthly.

A Christian community of support and care develops more rapidly when the group has a common purpose. It is important for a small group to have a clear statement of purpose which is owned by the group and not announced by the leader. A group without a clear purpose lacks a sense of direction and is like a ship without a compass lost in the fog at sea. One umbrella purpose for small groups in a Christian context is to discover and grow in the possibilities of the abundant life available through a relationship with Jesus Christ (John 10:10). Even non-Christians, inactive members and marginal members can be involved in a group with this goal. In fact, the goal is the Great Commission for all people.

Possible small group goals are:

---

83 W. Richard Scott, Social Processes and Social Structures, (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p.215.

1. To provide a place for the development of healthy, supportive relationships within the local Body of believers;

2. To provide an environment for spiritual growth through sharing, Bible study and prayer;

3. To provide a forum for the discovery, development and deployment of spiritual gifts;

4. To provide an avenue to more effectively assimilate members within the local parish;

5. To provide opportunities for strengthening the Christian witness of group members.[84]

Furthermore, small groups provide an environment for growth and change. Through the supportive climate created by affirmation and feedback, individuals can experience growth in their own beliefs, attitudes and action patterns. Loving affirmation tends to encourage growth along a certain course. Feedback sensitively shared reveals blind spots each individual possesses. New insight into ourselves and creative ways of initiating growth and change come from sharing with other Christians. The growth should be in ideas, opportunities, service, spirituality and relation- ships, not in numbers.

In summary, the definition of a small group focuses on "the abundant life in Jesus Christ." Small groups are not therapy sessions or encounter groups. They are not "coffee klatches" or a forum for gossip. Rather, they are a micro- cosm of the church; a growing organism which has Jesus Christ as its head and spiritual nerve center (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16). The basis for such growth is the Bible which has

---

84 Draeger, Member Assimilation, p.100-101.

as its center the Lord Jesus--"Jesus did many other signs
which are not written in this book; but these are written
that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of
God, and that believing you might have life in His name"
(John 20:30-31). The Lord Jesus Christ must be the center
of all that is said and done, fulfilling the overall min-
istry of the church.

Five Kinds of Small Groups[85]

There are five distinctive small groups which are espe-
cially conducive to disciplemaking and to the development of
Christian community. The groups are study, sharing, min-
istry, covenant and house church.

Study groups have as their primary focus to gain knowl-
edge and understanding through interaction with specific in-
formation. Bible studies, book studies, word studies, bib-
lical character studies, tape studies and film studies char-
acterize this category.

Sharing groups have as their primary focus interaction
with the Scripture and the application of the insights
gleaned from personal circumstances and relationships by
means of discussion and reflection. Sharing groups allow
for a great deal of self-disclosure and personal sharing of
how the Scriptures relate to the individual group members.
A small amount of time is devoted to indepth study of bibli-

---

85 Roberta Hestenes, Using the Bible in Groups, March
1988, (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1985),
p.25-26.

cal content. One shortcoming of the group is frustration for those who are content or knowledge-oriented.

Ministry groups form a third category. There are three sub-categories in this group: committee, accountability and mission sub-groups. All three sub-groups are task-oriented and emphasize applying what has been learned from Scripture to a specific ministry.

The first ministry group is the committee. They are frequently the task-oriented program committees within the local congregation. Because of the infrequency of the meetings and the need "to get the job done," committees often fail to provide for individual growth and for the development of community. However, if time is allocated, if the Bible is used as a resource, and if people will not only work together but also care for and encourage each other, committees can function as meaningful communities and spiritual growth often does occur.

A second sub-category is an accountability group. They offer participants the opportunity to report back on commitments to serve the Lord in some specific area of life. The intention to be serious about letting the Gospel affect lifestyle in a practical way characterizes those who belong to accountability groups. A frequent statement made at the conclusion of a session is, "My goal for the week is...." At the subsequent session, the group will hear, "My success or failure was...."

Mission groups form the third sub-category of ministry groups. These are groups of people banded together to focus on a common ministry task. Examples of these include a hunger task force, a lay counseling team or a visitation team. The motivation for mission groups comes from their study of Scripture. Without study and sharing time, mission groups become completely task-oriented. The opposite danger is to only study and never minister. The result is stagnation and very limited spiritual growth.

Covenant groups are the fourth category. They are a mixture of the other groups. There is often opportunity for Bible study, sharing, prayer and growth in discipleship, making these groups the most desirable for beginners in the faith and for people to begin group experience. These groups have frequently been called Christian growth groups, discipleship groups, or Koinonia groups. (This category of group will receive additional consideration as the intentional group for growing the Church.)

The fifth group is the House Church. Here the full range of the gifts of the Spirit may be exercised, including worship, communion, etc. It functions on a variety of levels. It may be either loosely or intimately connected to a larger fellowship. It is likely that this group will be seldom experienced in a Lutheran church, but certainly will not be absent from other Christian churches in the community. Within this group, the charismatic gifts of the

Spirit are often exercised and often claimed as mandatory by charismatic fellowships.

The simple act of bringing people together is no guarantee for a positive, healthy, growing group experience. Effective small groups do not just "happen." Instead, they are created through a blend of both art and science--art, in that good groups are the result of skilled performance and ingenuity by participants; and science, in that groups generally follow principles of human behavior. Christian groups also depend upon the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel to foster community and inclusion.

Signs of a Healthy Group

There are seven indications of healthy group life. The indicators, though not exhaustive, are guides to help an exciting, growing group experience.

1. Covenant or Contract: A shared understanding of the group's purpose and the general means that used to accomplish that purpose.

2. Commitments: The disciplines which the group is willing to adopt in order to accomplish its purpose.

3. Caring: The quality of life together in which members learn how to love each other and develop caring in all aspects of life.

4. Content: The growing edge of study and reflection usually centering in the Scriptures in order to know God and ourselves better.

5. Communication: The glue which binds all relationships together and which connects members with each other and, through prayer, with God.

6. Crying, Conflict and Congruence: Feelings are an important part of life together and need not be denied, delayed or despised.

7. <u>Christ Jesus</u>: The Center of community without whom good meetings can be held, but life will not be transformed.[86]

<u>Contract or Covenant</u>. Healthy groups have a clear sense of purpose and direction. It is not enough for the leader to know the purpose, but it must be shared by the members of the group. Consequently, the purpose cannot be simply announced by the leader who assumes that his pontificating is adequate. It must be pointed out that the covenant does not deal with the activities or the ingredients of the group, but focuses on <u>why</u> people are present. To illustrate this differentiation, a contract would be: that the participants grow in Christian understanding and action. Methods, on the other hand, would answer the question: What will we do to that end? If one knows the purpose of the group, activities can always be designed which will help achieve that purpose.

The contract cannot be informal or casual, yet to write it down invariably destroys the group. As the group progresses throughout its being together, it will need to evaluate the covenant and make midcourse corrections. The lack of a good contract or statement of purpose can lead to dissatisfaction by group members, a feeling of frustration or anxiety, divergent expectations and ultimately drop-outs.

<u>Commitment</u>. Commitments test the contract. If the contract is need-fulfilling, people will commit to the group

---

86 Based on a lecture by Roberta Hestenes, Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, California, in March 1988.

in ever deepening ways. At the inception of a group, members may not be inclined to very deep commitments. The minimum commitments for a new group should be:

1.	Regular attendance;
2.	Confidentiality;
3.	Strictly limited prescriptive advice giving.

One of the basic commitments necessary to develop a growing and responsible Christian community is "regular attendance." If the purpose of a group is to be a place where people can come and go, irregular attendance is acceptable. Irregular attendance guarantees superficiality. "Regularity" needs to be determined by the group. Community is hindered where deeper relationships are not allowed to develop through regular and frequent contact between group members, for it is through these contacts that trust is established. Continuously feeding new members into a covenant group is a prescription for killing the group. It is for this reason that groups should be closed to new members after week two. Once the contract period has concluded, the group becomes a closed group until week three of a new contract period. The rule of thumb is: the deeper a group goes (the more personal information being shared), the more closed it has to be. This type of strategy allows for member assimilation at new contract periods while providing depth experience.

Outreach groups, such as neighborhood Bible studies (where the goal is reaching the unchurched), will of necessity be open groups. Open groups sacrifice intimacy and

maintain a level of superficiality. Mission groups which are continuously being fed new people require special leaders with a high sensitivity to the needs of the members. Most groups, even with regular attendance, still take three to four meetings for cohesion to develop.

The need for "confidentiality" is paramount if the group is a covenant or sharing group where self-disclosure occurs. This assumes that group members will not share with others outside the group (even one's spouse) unless specific permission has been given by the person sharing. This discipline is essential if trust is to be developed and maintained at high levels. To violate this principle will impede the group's ability to bear one another's burdens (Galations 6:2).

The third fundamental commitment for a healthy small group is "strictly limited prescriptive advice giving." The temptation when one listens to another's problem is to be a little "messiah" who jumps in with some handy solutions to rescue the "poor devil." The person giving the advice implies "I'm OK, you're not," and leaves him or her one up on the person sharing and thus creating a dependency cycle. Advice quickly given may be more harmful than helpful. The problem may not have been clearly defined and the person seeking help may not yet be prepared to accept advice. More appropriate responses might be to ascertain what solutions the individual has tried or intends to implement. Helping a

person discover solutions is much more effective than merely giving advice or "telling them what to do."

Caring. Small groups which develop a sense of community and inclusion have a circle of concern within the group. Group members seek to meet all levels of human need in the group--physical, emotional, social and spiritual. Such concern extends to the ones who are loved by those within the group. Basically, this caring is only for those "within ear-shot," or those who are seen regularly. Group caring may not develop into institutional caring (by the whole church system) without a well-planned design for the whole church.

Content. Bible study yields Bible living. It is the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, that changes people. Techniques of psychology are of great benefit, but are no rival for the renewing, regenerating power of the Spirit working through the Word. If Christians are to grow to maturity, the Scriptures are the indispensable base upon which growth is built. Without the Bible as the chief resource, the group becomes a social club. The mere sharing of personal experiences and feelings in a Christian group is an exercise in spiritual naval-gazing. The result is less than adequate spiritual growth among participants. As the Word of Christ dwells in God's people richly (Colossians 3:17), hearts and minds are transformed.

Communication. Healthy groups foster a climate where participants experience such a feeling of safety that they

find it permissible, even desirable, to share their thoughts, feelings, concerns, changes of mind and controversial ideas. The goal would be to experience roughly equalized participation by each group member. Another element of communication is directed toward God who is present in the midst of the group (Matthew 18:20). This aspect of communication is focused in prayer.

Crying, Conflict and Congruence. Crying, in this trilogy, represents feelings which are an important part of life. Human beings are not only rational, but also emotional and spiritual. Feelings are a natural part of relationships, including those in groups. Unfortunately, too many people overreact when feelings are expressed in groups. Occasionally, they under-react, and no one does anything about the strong feelings which have been expressed. One temptation to be avoided is to tell someone, "You shouldn't feel that way."

Conflict in groups is unavoidable. In fact, in a community of sinners, it is normal. Not everyone will argue on every issue. Conflict can be constructive if it is managed properly, out of a servant attitude which is concerned about the well-being of the other person. Protect a group from conflict and its potential will be flattened. As a cliche puts it, "You can't have the highs without the lows."

Congruence is the ability to identify one's feelings and make decisions about how to express those feelings appropriately. To put it another way, it is the ability to

weigh "how I'm feeling" and "how the other person is doing" and share accordingly.

There is a danger in this sixth indicator of healthy groups. There is a tendency for individuals to assume the role of junior therapist. To do so is a way of manipulating the group either to control it or to distance it from the real need.

Christ Jesus. The seventh sign of a healthy group is not last because of lack of importance, but because without Jesus Christ, there is no Christian community. Healthy groups are joined and knit together by Christ. He is the One who impacts lives in practical and growing ways. He is the One who keeps small groups from becoming cliques as He keeps the members focused on their mission--to make disciples of all nations, reaching out in Christian love, support and concern. Being, as Martin Luther has often stated: "Little Christs to one another."[87]

When God created Adam and Eve, He ordained relationships in two dimensions--the vertical, people in relation to God, and the horizontal, people in relationship with people. The Fall resulted in a fracturing of both relationships. After the Fall, Adam and Eve hid from God out of fear. Their sin separated them from God. Another separation was from each other. Adam epitomizes the idea of blame projection when he said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with

87 Gerhardt Ritter, Luther: His Life and Work, (New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1959), p.245.

me, she gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). Adam blames both Eve and God, showing that relationships in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions are ruptured. God took upon Himself the ministry of reconciliation by sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sin. Thus, He reconciled people to Himself. Christians are the bearers of that message of reconciliation. They bring it to others with the result that people now have the possibility of being reconciled with one another through the reconciliation of Christ. But merely stating this truth does not guarantee its becoming a reality in the lives of people.

Simply grouping people together does not insure their coming into a positive, growing relationship with each other. The building of relationships, the development of Christian community and a strong sense of inclusion come through planning. Growth does not just happen because it is desired. Skills and principles of communication must be applied and activities designed that facilitate building community. The concept of a community is vital to group life and vital to the Church as a whole.

Communication is fundamental to all human interaction, including small group Bible study. The effectiveness of any cooperative action hinges on the effectiveness of communication. Through good communication, group members develop an understanding of one another, they build trust, they plan strategies that facilitate goal accomplishment, they assign responsibilities and they coordinate actions for growth.

In their classic work on group theory and skills, Johnson and Johnson define interpersonal communication as:

> A message sent by a person to a receiver (or receivers) with the conscious intent of affecting the receiver's behavior....All communication involves persons sending one another symbols to which certain meanings are attached. These symbols can be either verbal (all words are symbols) or nonverbal (all expressions and gestures are symbols)....Effective communication exists between two persons when the receiver interprets the sender's message in the same way the sender intended it.[88]

Community is key in the small group process.

Skills To Be Identified[89]

There are skills that can be strengthened by all group leaders and members. The skills of leaders enhance effective communication, leading to more and more self-disclosure and deeper relationships, allowing even more new members to bond to the group and the church. The next pages are devoted to an introductory treatment of some important skills especially meaningful to small group participation.

Attending is an important skill which involves letting a person know that one is with them physically and emotionally. It conveys interest and concern for the other person and signals one's intention to listen, thus facilitating trust and openness. The absence of good attendance is indi-

---

88 David W. Johnson and Frank W. Johnson, Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills, 3rd ed., (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987), p.173-174.

89 The following material is based on a lecture by Roberta Hestenes, Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, California, March 1988 and included in her book, Using the Bible in Groups, 1983, p.105.

cated by the frequently heard statement, "You're not even listening to what I have been saying." The equally frequent response is, "I am, too; I can repeat everything that you said." People covet more than one's physical presence; they desire a deeper emotional presence.

Body language" communicates how one is listening to the person who is speaking--how interested or disinterested the listener is in the message and/or person. Often people in groups do not "attend well" because they are busy preparing mentally for their own rebuttal. One can become so concerned about how he or she is attending that the speaker perceives the distraction. Good attending helps one listen carefully to what people are saying with their words and their nonverbal behavior.

Listening is a specific skill that is vital to developing a deep sense of caring and good communication. One excellent model for listening is known as active listening. It involves the whole process of listening to another person and striving to understand the thoughts, feelings and meanings behind the speaker's words and reflecting these understandings back to the speaker for verification. The listener only reflects back his or her perception of the speaker's meanings without succumbing to the temptation to analyze, criticize, judge, evaluate or question what the speaker said. Active listening is a skill that requires patience, sensitivity, alertness, acceptance and understanding. One active listening skill is paraphrasing. This in-

volves reflecting back to the speaker in one's own words what the speaker has just said. Paraphrasing consists of two parts: the content of the speaker's message, and the feelings the speaker has with respect to the message. Active listening requires good attending skills in order to interpret facial expressions, body language and tone of voice, as well as the words that are being spoken. Good communication occurs when the listener understands the speaker's message in the same way the speaker intended it.

In addition to attending and active listening, a third skill to enhance group communication is information and opinion seeking. This is a successful way to involve individuals who have not been particularly involved in group discussion.

Still another way to build communication in groups is through "I messages." This communication tool allows individuals the opportunity to take ownership for their own feelings. By contrast, "you messages" project blame to someone else for how one feels. Using "I messages" deepens the level of self-disclosure and trust while indirect messages sabotage constructive communication.

As groups grow in the ability to communicate effectively, they will find relationships deepening. Good communication fosters a climate of openness, caring and trust that builds interpersonal relationships. Showing scriptural love in this way is not theoretical but practical. Building

group relationships fosters a sense of inclusion and acceptance for new people.

Another avenue open for enhancing group life and building meaningful relationships, is the use of <u>sharing questions</u>. Sharing questions come at the beginning of the group meeting and give people an opportunity to relax and talk about themselves. They also provide the group with an opportunity to make the transition from being "out in the world" to being back in the group. Sharing questions allow the group to move away from chit-chat to a more personal sharing and allow for some elementary self-disclosure. Sharing questions allow people to talk about themselves-- their joys, successes, struggles, sorrows, hopes, dreams, past, present, future. The focus is not on issues, ideas or concepts, but on personal experiences.

Guidelines for using sharing questions are:

1. Sharing questions should be appropriately matched to the level of relationships within the group. Beginning groups should focus on safe experiences. More intimate questions are appropriate for groups functioning on deeper levels of trust.

2. Sharing questions do not ask for personal opinion or for information. A poor question would be: What is your opinion about abortion?

3. Care should be taken to assure that everyone can answer the question. If there are individuals in the group who came to Christ and the church as adults, it would be unwise to ask: Share one of your more memorable experiences in Sunday school as a child. The purpose of the sharing question is to involve each member of the group in talking about himself or herself.

4. A climate for sharing should be developed. Everyone should be encouraged to share, but do

not force participation. Individuals should be allowed to pass but after everyone has shared, they should be given the opportunity to share. Some people may feel more comfortable reshaping the question to make it more comfortable for them.

5. While questions should be open-ended, calling for more than "yes" or "no" as a response, the responses should be kept brief. If the first couple of responses are too long, others need to be encouraged to be more brief so everyone has an opportunity to share. The temptation to ask people to extend their thought-line in the sharing question should be avoided so everyone has time to share. The Bible study portion of the meeting is designed to deepen discussions. The sharing question is part of the beginning process.

6. Sharing questions should not focus on the negative nor are they a time for "true confessions." A poor question is "What is your greatest weakness?" At the same time, care should be taken that triumphalism is avoided. There should be balance between positive experiences and the difficult. For instance, "What has been a high and low point in your experience of prayer?[90]

Sharing questions are developed in three categories: past, present and future. Past tense sharing questions are good, safe questions for the early stages of group life and promote the development of group building and cohesiveness. Present tense sharing questions require a modicum of trust and focus on what is currently happening in one's life. History is much safer to share than present feelings. Future tense sharing questions give people an opportunity to express their hopes, dreams, expectations or desires for change. Examples of sharing questions are found in Appendix 3.

---

90 Ibid.

Prayer

The third major means available to small groups for building relationships is prayer. One of the glorious privileges God gives to His people is prayer. Through prayer, believers express their love and appreciation for the Lord, share their concerns and make requests on behalf of others. When another person's specific need is prayed for, the group is brought closer together by the Lord.

While group prayer is a tremendously beneficial experience, for many it is a most frightening experience. People who have not prayed out loud in a group easily find themselves either with a mind that has gone blank or a tongue which has been tied in knots (knots which are rivaled only by the ones in their stomachs). One concern is simply over style, "I don't know the spiritual language." Another concern emanates from self-image, "I don't want to appear ignorant or illiterate spiritually" or "I just don't feel comfortable with speaking in any group." Many people are intimidated by the polished prayers which they have heard and read. Somehow they seem to either consciously or unconsciously assume that all prayers are of this high "caliber," and they are afraid of what others will think of them by comparison.

Lutheran people seem especially uncomfortable in public prayer. A possible reason for this is their limited private prayer lives. Another reason may stem from the Church's

teaching about and modeling of prayer, and its readiness to "pick up" the prayer book and to "pick out" the prayer. The feelings of inadequacy and unpreparedness need to be dealt with by the group. Prayer is a conversation with a friend who knows us very well, a close friend who wants to hear from and about us.

Jesus called His disciples His "friends" (John 15:12ff.), and that is how Christians feel about themselves today, "friends" of Jesus. Friendships imply relationships of intimacy and acceptance, which allow for self-disclosure without the risk of embarrassment or rejection. Prayer is conversation with a friend, God Himself, so it might be helpful to even imagine God is present. To do so would be consistent with the Scriptures which teach that Jesus is with His people always (Matthew 28:20) and that He is Emmanuel, "God with us" always (Matthew 1:23).

Typical of most conversations, prayer has two components--speaking and listening. The listening aspect has, in part, to do with hearing God speak in His Word to us. Prayer, then, is a response to the God who has revealed Himself through Bible study. As with any conversation, there may be periods of silence during prayer time. The temptation to fill silences with inane conversation should be avoided.

In order to give those who are less comfortable with conversational prayer an opportunity to feel comfortable with this valuable experience, time should be taken to care-

fully allow them to experiment in small doses. To that end, the initial group prayer time is lead by the designated leader with simplicity and brevity. Simply encouraging each member to say "thank you" for something or someone in their lives is a beginning. Prayer time at the conclusion of the meeting should include some brief instruction. Since a circle prayer is preferred to free-form as a way of beginning, care must be taken not to place anyone in an awkward position which will cause him or her embarrassment. Therefore, people should be given the prerogative to pass. Care should be taken to explain that no specialized spiritual vocabulary is required nor are lengthy petitions desired.

To help people understand the various subjects for prayer, the acronym ACTS may provide assistance. The ACTS of prayer include: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Focusing some attention on the components of prayer should assist the participants.

Adoration is praising God for who He is. Many hymns focus on adoration. Included in the list are such favorites as "How Great Thou Art" and "Praise To The Lord, The Almighty." However, hymns of praise and adoration need to be supplemented by spoken prayers of adoration where people join the angelic host proclaiming "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive...honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 7:12). Such a loving, gracious God can be the focal point of prayer at the conclusion of small group Bible studies.

Another element of prayer is Confession. John tells
the Church that God is faithful and just and forgives and
cleanses those who confess their short comings and failings
(in short, their sins) to God (I John 1:9). This may happen
in more specific ways as the group matures but most likely
will not occur at the inception of a group. Confession re-
quires a high degree of trust to admit one's sins to an-
other. Confession may be focused on the Scriptural lesson
just completed by means of a personal application.

The third element of prayer is Thanksgiving. Many ini-
tial prayers are one-liners focused on thanksgiving. This
is a non-threatening way to begin. The leader should give
examples such as:

Thank you for the gift of life.

Thank you for Jesus.

Thank you for my salvation in Jesus.

Thank you for this group and that I could be here.

Thank you for the teaching you have brought me tonight.

Thank you for my family.

It should be explained that it is quite permissible to be
thankful for the same thing that someone else mentioned, and
one could easily pray, "I, too, thank you for...."

Other prayer petitions might be subsumed under the word
Supplication. These are requests either in behalf of one-
self or others. Once again, these prayers can be very sim-
ple and brief. They could begin, "Lord, help me...." or
"Lord, help so-and-so with...." The Lord invited such

prayer when He said through Peter, "Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you" (I Peter 5:7). As Christians exercise prayer for one another, they are engaged in a marvelous act of horizontal love.

In order to facilitate prayer of this kind in the group, sufficient illustrations should be provided so that first time people will have something to say. It should be underscored that no one is pressured to pray. The result of pressure is that a person will likely not return again. Silent people may be praying--just silently. They should be granted permission to do that. One technique that could be used is to join hands for the group prayer time as a symbol of Christian community. Those who would like to pass may merely squeeze the hand of the next person indicating "you're next."

Subjects for prayer may be suggestions made by group members. Members are encouraged to offer prayer requests. The group addresses these requests without being limited to them.

Another option is for the leader to introduce a subject and then invite the members of the group to offer sentences related to the same theme. The leader then introduces another subject through his or her prayer and, again, the group focuses on that theme.

Initially, the closing prayer time may only require ten minutes. As the group matures, the amount of time needed for prayer may increase. This represents significant growth

and should be encouraged and planned into the evening agenda. A danger to avoid is allowing too much time to prayer. A variation of this theme is for one person to record prayer requests from the group and then offer petitions relating to those prayer concerns. Care should be exercised so that the broader needs of the group are considered. The temptation is that prayers habitually focus only on the sick and not on the wider needs of others.

Something to be considered for the prayer time is a prayer journal maintained by one member of the group. It is simply a log reporting the subjects for prayer and the date. A journal is a good basis for follow-up prayers as well as a record of how God has answered prayer. It affords many opportunities for petitions of thanksgiving. In addition, the growth of the group is traced by reviewing the prayer journal.

In summary, the desire in small groups to foster the development of relationships and the building of Christian community has been discussed. Communication skills, sharing questions, and prayer time have been identified as three significant factors which affect the group while formally convened. Two other times have been identified as important for group life--the time just before the group convenes and the time after the group adjourns.

Simply saying, "Let's begin" does not signal the beginning of the small group meeting. The small group actually begins when the second person arrives. How individuals are

received when they arrive is very important. People who have been absent should be told they were missed (but this should not be overdone). Questions about the week (cliche conversation and information level communication), questions about the family and any follow-up to the previous session would be quite useful at this time. For the leader to be available (and not making last-minute preparations) can be valuable.

The group really does not end with the final "Amen" but when the last person leaves. Some significant sharing often occurs after the meeting. Listening skills need to be employed after the meeting, as well as before and during.

Three other after-meeting activities are productive in building relationships. One activity for group building is social events for all the members. For instance, a picnic, a concert, a ball game, a swim party, provide opportunities to enjoy each other in a relaxed setting. Some activities could be extended to family members in order to give other group members the opportunity to meet and appreciate those who are a vital part of one's family system.

Having looked at the rationale for small groups, at strategies for building community and at types of small groups, it is apparent that the deepest relationships, the great possibilities for spiritual growth, and the most significant opportunities for disciplemaking are the covenant group and growth group experiences. These groups are relational and are characterized by an agenda that would include

casual fellowship, study (Bible or topic), prayer, ministry and outreach. Other types of groups also exist in a healthy small group ministry. Possibilities for developing community within the family of God include groups centered around special needs (e.g., parent groups, groups for recently singled adults, senior groups, etc.) and around tasks or interests (e.g., choir, sewing for missions, crafts, fishing, photography, aerobics, etc.). Regardless of the reason for a group's existence, intentional time spent on developing community (e.g., sharing questions, prayer for specific needs) is highly desirable. The time spent fosters the experience of community that already exists by virtue of an individual's baptism into the Body of Christ. Not everyone is equally ready for a deeper encounter with God in His Word or with people in the Church. Small groups at a entry level with respect to risk and commitment are essential.

But how many groups does a church need? Both Schaller[91] and Arn[92] suggest one group for every fifteen members. Since people are different, variety is important. Among the considerations are groups that offer a variety of meeting times, levels of intimacy, and interests or focal points. Variety enhances the opportunities for new people to be absorbed into a church, a place where the individual member can find a sense of belonging and will be missed if

---

91 Schaller, Assimilating New Members, p.95.

92 Arn, "How to Use Ratios to Effect Church Growth," p.99.

absent.   Schaller also observes that the variables of the more urban, the older the church, the larger the proportion of new members to existing members, the longer the church is in the same location, the more pluralistic and diverse the membership, the greater the need for 6-7 groups per 100 members.[93]

A corollary to Schaller's observation is the formation of new groups.   Schaller's dictim is "new groups for new people."   The rationale is two-fold.   First, it is much easier for a new person to penetrate a new group than one that already has an established history of shared experiences and relationships.   One of the key advantages of small groups is the close bond of fellowship that is developed.   One way to honor that is to develop new groups for new people.   Secondly, it is more exciting to be a pioneer than to join an existing, established group that has moved a long way toward goal attainment.   Arn suggests that one out of every five groups should have been started within the past two years. This time frame is suggested because the saturation point is reached in nine to eighteen months.   Based on observation, Arn believes that after that period of time, the group plateaus with two or three leaving and two or three filling their places.[94]

The frequency of small group meetings also is a consideration.   The amount of time devoted to meetings and their

---

93 Schaller, Assimilating New Members, p.96.

94 Arn, "How to Use Ratios," p.99-100.

frequency is determined by a group's purpose. If the group is a softball team playing in the city league, its length of meeting is determined as is its frequency. Most groups seeking to develop closer bonds and deeper growth as God's people will find it is advantageous to meet weekly for ninety minutes to two hours. Groups that meet bi-weekly or once a month will find that building personal relationships takes longer and that each meeting requires more time to re-establish cohesiveness. Their task orientation and their infrequency of meeting makes committees difficult places to build meaningful community. To summarize, physical, psychological and spiritual growth require time.

Building Community Through Small Group Methods

The most frequently observed small groups in churches are committees and organizations established by the women (e.g., altar guild, Lutheran Women's Missionary League, etc.). After a brief devotional opening or prayer, these groups engage in their task. Roberts' parliamentary rules govern communication in these groups. Needs are often met through influence, power and decisions. Ministry is carried out, but too often more out of a sense of duty, rather than out of a sense of participation in meaningful ministry. Relationships between committee members seldom develop beyond the superficial and the conversations focus around the task assigned to the committee. Contact with other members is often limited because the group usually convenes once a

month for about two hours. Consequently, little depth of community is fostered through these associations. However, committees can become significant circles of care and concern. They can facilitate spiritual growth and good assimilation while still accomplishing their necessary tasks, roles and responsibilities.

A helpful way to facilitate the growth of community within committees is the use of the sharing question at the beginning of each meeting. Initially, sharing questions clearly relate to the task of the committee. The questions keep the initial part of the meeting from appearing to be an "add-on." The questions cultivate a vital sharing of members' lives with the group's experience. For instance, at a Board of Christian Education meeting, one might ask, "What was your experience of Christian education as a child, and how does that impact you today?" An elders' meeting or altar guild meeting might interact with the question: "What has been your experience of Advent?" Thirty minutes devoted to this type of sharing builds community, trust and cohesion. Such activities take away time from the task, but in the broader view enhance group effectiveness.

Prayer time that goes beyond a perfunctory exercise is developing a circle of care and concern within a community. As individual members share prayer concerns and pray for one another, the bond of fellowship is strengthened. Conversational prayer needs to be taught to committee personnel in the same way as it is taught to other small groups.

As with small group Bible study participants, committee members need to give and receive care. Since the committees usually meet once a month, it is important that soon after a meeting, members follow up any personal concerns raised at the meeting. This is particularly important when issues have been committed to the Lord in prayer. A simple phone call or card can express love and concern and build caring relationships. As love and trust grow, so does the effectiveness of the meetings in accomplishing the task. Morale is high because heartfelt needs are being met. The committee no longer needs to be a collection of task-oriented individuals, but soon they form a close-knit spiritually-oriented team.

Another factor contributing to the movement from committee to community is the acceptance of group goals. Johnson and Johnson in their work, Joining Together, note:

> For any group to survive or be effective, the personal goals of group members must be structured cooperatively. Coordinated action, pooling resources, division of labor, open and accurate communication, trust, cohesion, and many other aspects of effective groups depend on cooperatively oriented group members and a cooperative goal structure within the group.[95]

Johnson and Johnson further state:

> There is considerable evidence that cooperative experiences, compared with competitive and individualistic ones, result in more positive relationships among members, relationships characterized by mutual liking, positive attitudes toward each other, mutual concern, friendliness, attentiveness, feel-

---

95 Johnson and Johnson, Joining Together, p.153.

ing of obligation to each other, and a desire to win each other's respect.[96]

The authors also observe that:

> Cooperative groups are more cohesive than groups dominated by competitive or individualistic relations and that the members of cooperative groups like the group better, like their tasks better, and like the organization within which the group is embedded better. The self-esteem and overall psychological health of group members is higher when the group is dominated by cooperative rather than competitive or individualistic relations.[97]

Johnson and Johnson maintain that effective groups know, understand and accept common goals. This suggests committees conduct retreats in order to focus on interpreting goal statements that are found in the Constitution and Bylaws of the congregation. While changes to official statements are always undertaken with care, time spent discussing existing goals will clarify the members' understanding of them. Such discussion may lead to rewording or reorganizing the goal until the majority of members feel a sense of personal ownership.

Within the framework of the general goals for the committee, there are subgoals which are also accepted and supported by the group. Subgoals are established and evaluated at yearly committee retreats or planning sessions. To facilitate effective evaluation and planning, these sessions should include segments of time devoted exclusively to spiritual growth and relationship building. To keep clearly fo-

---

96 Ibid., 156.

97 Ibid., 158.

cused on a Christ-centered ministry, the group needs to allow ample time for meaningful Bible study. The only appropriate vision shared and caught is God's vision. The source for His-vision is the Word, studied and restudied by individuals and in groups.

Several suggestions are helpful for accomplishing the goal of refocusing task-oriented committees and groups from committees to communities engaged in meaningful Scriptural missions. One key suggestion is the establishment of group goals. Another is the use of sharing questions to facilitate self-disclosure and openness which, in turn, yields trust. Yet another is the amount of time devoted to prayer together, which is a further demonstration of personal care, concern and love. Also important is the care expressed for group members between meetings. Intentionally implementing these suggestions enhances morale, effectiveness and the sense that the new and older members are growing together in the Lord and in His service.

Small Groups Fit Into A Total Parish Program

After examining the rationale, strategies and methods of small groups, a further question still needs to be raised. How do small groups fit into the ongoing ministry of the local parish? Understanding the infrastructure of a healthy church is an important consideration for answering this question. One can point to the Church as having three

main skeletal parts: celebration, congregation and cell.[98] These divisions also occur in the writings of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor, Kent Hunter, and are introduced here.[99] The three parts may be thought of as levels of membership from a loosely experienced sense of belonging to intimacy. Kent Hunter explains the importance of the three levels when he writes:

> When new members join the church, they should be assimilated into all three structures simultaneously. This is the key that opens the door to a long-lasting, growing, developing, healthy membership.[100]

"Celebration" refers to the "membership circle."[101] Typically, this is the entire worshipping community. In worship the focus is primarily on God. Relationships with the other people gathered together are no more necessary for enjoyment of worship than knowing the other 70,000 fans at a football game makes enjoying the game any better. It is quite possible to be a certificate-holding member, to come every Sunday to nominal worship at a local church and have few, if any, relationships with others in the church membership circle. But such membership is important and so is worship as a celebration of God's grace in Jesus. "Celebration" refers to the excitement of a big group, where

---

98 C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Grow (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976), p.100.

99 Kent Hunter, Your Church Has Doors, (Corunna, IN: Church Growth Analysis and Learning Center, 1982), p.42.

100 Ibid., 44.

101 Schaller, Assimilating New Members, p.69.

you don't have to know anyone. The celebration group numbers 120 people or more.

A second level of membership is called "Congregation." As C. Peter Wagner uses this term,[102] it refers to the fellowship circle and is composed of groups of people numbering approximately 35 to 140 people. In these smaller groups, people have a greater opportunity to know and be known. There is a general sense of belonging and loyalty to this group. Falling into this group are larger Sunday school and Bible classes, large choirs, and some women's groups. In a larger church this is often the coffee hour between services. It is much more difficult to miss meetings without being noticed. Many social groups also fit into this category. It is an excellent entry level place where involvement and risk are minimal, but where caring is experienced. Low level relationships are fostered here, and friendships are initiated. Much of what is presented in the membership circle is fostered at this level. It should be noted that in the smaller church, the fellowship group is the membership group. Absorbent churches have a variety of fellowship groups where people feel they belong.

The third and more intimate level of membership is the small group. Variously identified, some may call it the "kinship group," others, "the cell." It is this part of the total parish program to which this chapter is devoted. It is here that intimate needs are met and opportunities for

---

102 Wagner, Your Church Can Grow, p.100-107.

greater growth occur. It is here that the individual most likely finds the deepest level of caring and concern. "Cell group" ministry sounds sterile. Some have tried "Circles of Concern," others identify them as "Care-ciple Ministry" (Steve Wagner, Prince of Peace Lutheran, Carrollton, Texas). Still others call them Growth Groups (Churches Alive) or Care Groups (Inter-Varsity Fellowship). However they are named, there is one essential ingredient. The small group is characterized by the fostering of an encouraging strong sense of belonging to the local church and, therefore, to more effective member assimilation, i.e., involvement in the day-to-day ministry of the congregation.

The larger the parish, the more necessary the intentional involvement in small groups. Schaller describes in his book, Growing Plans, the path that most people follow in their pilgrimage into the church. The sense of belonging to the whole congregation comes through an involvement in a face-to-face group regardless of whether or not the person's invitation came from a personal acquaintance or the church's pastor.[103] He patently asserts:

> It is difficult to overstate the role of these face-to-face groups in reaching, attracting, and assimilating new members. Part of the supportive climate for this role is for every one to think of the large church as a congregation of congregations--of groups, classes, choirs, circles, fellowships, and organizations.[104]

---

103 For chart, see Appendix 7.

104 Lyle Schaller, Growing Plans (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983), p.95.

Howard Snyder summarizes the high priority of all three levels when he writes for The Small Group Letter,

> If I could peel everything else away in a church--building, Sunday School, boards and committees; and various other programs and ministries--I would hold on to the basic structures of large-group worship, house meetings, and cell groups. Everything else is dispensable. But where these basic structures are in place, other things can be evaluated in proper perspective and priority and made to fit the goal of equipping believers for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12) and to "present everyone perfect in Christ" (Colossians 1:28).[105]

While Lutherans would like to see the inclusion of Word and Sacrament in the above list as priorities and as informants of perspective, the point is made. A local church, whatever its size, needs to have the skeletal structure of celebration, congregation and cell to assimilate and foster growth for new members.

Small Groups: A Caution

With the positive emphasis this chapter places on small groups, a caution needs to be offered. Small groups provide a milieu where assimilation and disciplemaking can occur. However, it must be remembered that real growth always comes as people are nurtured by Word and Sacrament. Paul urges, "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). The Spirit of God working through the

---

105 Howard Snyder, "What We're Learning About Cell Groups," The Small Group Letter 1 (March 1985): 2.

Word fosters growth and belonging. However, an individual's needs and spiritual life may make it difficult for growth to occur or for assimilation to happen because their defenses are so high. They are focused upon meeting their own needs rather than the needs of others or the will of God. People may sometimes join a group where they do not fit.

One of the greatest values of small groups is that they can enhance the fellowship life of a church. An obvious danger would be that of enjoying the fellowship too much and the cell becomes an independent entity suffering from "Koinonitis," i.e., fellowship inflammation.[106] This is the problem of becoming insular, of being exclusive and impenetrable, of being a church-within-a-church and often becoming self-centered. Good leadership training, including monthly support meetings for leaders, help prevent this problem from becoming serious.

Summary

Christian people are called to live together in community. That Christian community occurs in an atmosphere marked by acceptance, sharing, listening, affirmation, sensitivity and caring. A sense of fellowship (koinonia) develops when people share themselves, their past, their present, their hopes, their dreams. Caring and sharing fosters a sense of belonging which is a critical need of all mem-

---

106 C. Peter Wagner, Your Church Can Be Healthy (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), p.78.

bers, even before official membership commences. It happens best when people gather in small groups. Groups of eight to twelve people who meet regularly around the Word of God, that Lamp unto the believer's feet (Psalm 119:105), is indispensable for any substantive spiritual growth within the Body of Christ. The Church is concerned not only with numerical growth, but also discipleship growth. Paul challenged the Christian congregation in the city of Rome:

> I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

Small groups are a place for this renewal to occur as Christians gather around the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and the life-giving Sacraments.

It is important, too, that we recognize the importance of some of the principles of group dynamics at work in every group. Em Griffin speaks passionately about this concern in his work, Getting Together: A Guide for Good Groups:

> I've tried to base my advice on the most solid theory in the field. Students of group dynamics will recognize McClelland's theory of motivation, Fiedler's contingency model, Festinger's theory of informal social communication, Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory and many more.
>
> Occasionally I run across believers who are uneasy applying principles of group dynamics to their Christian group. "What you say may be O.K. in a secular situation," they say, "but our group operates under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so we don't need that stuff." Apparently they feel that

when people commit their lives to Jesus Christ they somehow put their humanity in the attic.[107]

The theoreticians noted by Griffin, along with many others working in the field, ought not be discarded. They need refinement and adaption in the light of Scripture to meet the needs of the spiritual group process. Truth is truth wherever it is found--in the Scriptures, in our own experiences and in the social science laboratory. All truth wherever it is found, however, needs to be normed by God's truth.

When Christians gather in a supportive, nurturing group, a key element is prayer. Not only can members pray for and with one another conversationally while engaged in the group experience, but prayer continues on an individual basis as a way of caring. Prayer is a spiritual action with very real natural consequences.

Outreach and ministry are two other ingredients of small groups which are related. Outreach is a natural part of discipleship. The ability to share one's faith grows dramatically as a result of sharing in a small, accepting group. As groups come together on a regular basis, the temptation to become a clique is always lurking nearby. To avoid turning inward and stagnating, developing an outward expression of service as an expression of life together pro-vides opportunities to develop ministry gifts. It is

---

107 Em Griffin, Getting Together: A Guide for Good Groups (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varisty Press, 1982), p.10.

through ministry opportunities that a sense of inclusion in the local church is fostered. The great value of small groups as a resource for disciplemaking is summarized by Roberta Hestenes when she identifies the important needs that are met in small groups:

> The need for spiritual growth
> The need for friendship, support, and encouragement
> The need for strength in the face of trial and of temptation
> The need to give and receive love
> The need to serve others.[108]

---

108 Hestenes, <u>Using the Bible in Groups</u>, p.5.

CHAPTER IV

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has had a strong but limited sense of missionary outreach from its beginning. The Synod's founders were instrumental in shaping an early awareness to the needs and opportunities for proclaiming the love of God in Christ to the scattered German immigrants who came to America in the mid-Nineteenth Century. As a result of this missionary zeal, the Synod grew to become one of the largest Protestant bodies in America by the early decades of the Twentieth Century, but was often limited to German speaking people.

In 1953, an evangelism department was organized as part of the Board for Missions in North and South America. An immediate thrust of the department was the "Preaching-- Teaching--Reaching Mission" which resulted in accelerated growth. The Synod increased by 35,000 members each year thereafter. In the 1960's, "lay evangelism workshops" as well as special workshops for pastors and teachers brought more emphasis upon growing the church.

At the 1986 convention of the Synod, the Board for Mission Services reported that "in the 80's, one emphasis was on a Lutheran visitation training program, Dialog Evangelism. Its purpose was to train callers. The second emphasis was on the Witness Workshop. Its purpose was to train all members to witness in their daily lives. In addi-

tion, there was a new interest in evaluation, research, backdoor losses, and the principles of Church Growth."[109]

Despite their best efforts, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has experienced a decline in membership over the past fifteen years. (Note Appendix 9) Data reported by the Parish Services Department of the Synod indicate that only 58% of the children baptized are ever confirmed.[110] This means a loss of 25,000 to 30,000 children each year.

Gains in membership from those new to the faith have also declined. "About 25% of the congregations of the Synod do not gain a single adult from the outside each year, and another 12% gain only one."[111]

The 1975 convention of the Synod affirmed the Lutheran understanding of evangelism to be "sharing the Gospel with those who do not yet confess Jesus Christ as Lord, to the end that they, too, may enjoy with us all the benefits of our Lord Jesus Christ."[112] The convention also resolved that a study of the Lutheran understanding of evangelism be continued and that evangelism materials produced by non-Lutheran sources be examined and evaluated.[113] The conven-

---

109 1986 Convention Workbook of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, p.1.

110 Ibid.

111 The Commission on Theology and Church Growth, Evangelism and Church Growth, p.6.

112 Convention Proceeding, 1975, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, p.79-80.

113 Ibid.

tion inferred that the pastor's judgement could not be trusted.

In 1987, twelve years later, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Synod published the document, Evangelism and Church Growth: With Special Reference to the Church Growth Movement. The commission intended to present an examination of "the fundamental missiological principles of Church Growth as they are set forth in the writings of Donald McGavran and others involved in Church Growth at the Fuller School of World Missions in Pasadena, California."[114]

The fifty-three page report of the commission concluded with words of caution, emphasizing the importance of the inclusion of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. "They are the most crucial dimension of the church's life and work." "Where the means of grace are taken seriously, the whole life of the church will be shaped by them."[115] Yet, it confidently stated: "In Christian freedom, though with Biblically tested criteria, the church will gladly make use of methods and techniques designed to accomplish this end."[116]

Among "the Biblically tested criteria" are the missiological principles set forth by Donald McGavran which set the stage for the development of small group ministries

---

114 The CTCR, Evangelism and Church Growth, p.7.

115 Ibid., p.50.

116 Ibid.

throughout the Church. We consider in this project those ministries "growing in the Lutheran Church."

People Movements

In _The Bridges of God_, McGavran's thesis is stated: "the church grows most effectively through people movements rather than through individual conversations because in nearly all non-western societies decisions are normally made within the group clan or tribe rather than individually."[117] In his book, McGavran traces the expansion of the Christian Church from its early period down through the Roman Empire and the conversion of northern Europe, on to the time the book was written (1936). He demonstrates that his thesis has been obscured by the traditional methodology of the Mission Station Concept. In fact, McGavran writes:

> The thesis of this book may now be fully stated. The era has come when Christian Missions should hold tightly all mission station work which cannot be proved to nurture growing churches, and should support the Christward movements within peoples as long as they continue to grow at the rate of fifty percent per decade or more. This is today's strategy."[118]

As we see in the enunciation of his thesis, People Movements are the strategy for today's missions. It is church growth's major mode. McGavran believes at least two-thirds of all converts from non-Christian religious homes came to Christ by way of people movements, although he does

---

117 Donald McGavran, _The Bridges of God_, p.107.

118 _Ibid._, p.109.

not cite specific data to support his claim.[119] It is indeed posited that people movements bring a beneficial quality and wholesomeness to the Church in contrast to Christianization out of hostile non-Christian groups based on individual conversions. The reason for this is that in people movements men and women are converted to the Christian faith without the sacrifice of social dislocation or economic deprivation, the result being that the possibly emerging leadership and loyalty are not detached from the community from which the converts came.[120] Churches are likely to be more stable and indigenous and, as a result, more able to live under persecution. McGavran believes that in such conditions, "conviction is buttressed by social cohesion."[121]

A people movement is approximately five families of about fifty members which makes up some segment of society. Such a group makes a joint decision to become Christian based on each individual's consent. This makes it easier for them to function in the same social economic structure without having to dislocate themselves.[122] They can remain in touch with their relatives and friends in their own community thus enabling them to witness to other groups of the same people (tribe, caste or section of society). McGavran

---

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid., p. 87-91.

121 Ibid., p.87

122 Ibid., p.90-91.

sees in the dynamics of people movements "multi-individual mutually-interdependent" conversions. Such a conversion allows each member of the group to participate, as we have already noted, in the decision of his group to follow Christ, "while observing others of his kin making similar decisions at the same time."[123]

To be sure, the people movement does not mean a large number of unrelated individuals become Christians as has happened in large evangelistic crusades. Also, a people movement should not be understood to foster careless and hasty baptism of masses. According to McGavran, a people movement is usually "a small group of well-instructed converts" who are baptized at the same time. Therefore, a people movement should never be understood as a mass movement. It is McGavran's belief that God has given thousands of beginnings and opportunities for viable church growth through people movements but Christian churches have often been negligent in recognizing them. When they were recognized, churches grew rapidly. McGavran cites the Hebrew, Celts, Krens, Bataks, Madigas, Chilean and Brazilian masses, *et al* as examples of church growth through people movements. [124]

The people movement principle of fostering sociological ripeness supports the premise of small groups. The stimulus

---

123 Ibid., p.91.

124 McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, p.116-119.

for support and care among members of a small group is very similar to that posited by Dr. McGavran as he considers conversion. Disciplemaking is concerned with sanctification rather than justification, but similar principles are present. While the Lutheran Church has been "group sensitive" for many years, maintaining its strong identification with congregational autonomy in all matters of church polity, the study and implications of group dynamics is a more recent concept to the Church.

It was Lyman Coleman, founder of the Serendipity group process, who originated the "group building process model" many years ago to help small groups develop a feeling of community in the first few weeks together. He has taught this "Serendipity model" to about 200,000 people over the last 20 years.[125]

It was the Board of Youth Ministry of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod that encouraged youth leaders, advisors and pastors to attend Serendipity workshops, and many did. My own first experience took place in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1972. I attended a second time in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1975, and began using the insights in my own parish ministry. The insights include the same basics Coleman uses today:

What to do in the first few weeks to build a sense of community.

125 Lyman Coleman, Small Group Training Seminar, Serendipity Press: Littleton, CO., 1990, p.3.

How to relate Bible study with the telling of your own "spiritual story."

How to overcome "group jitters" by splitting into groups of four when the time comes for sharing.

What the four basic small group systems are for a local church.

How to modify and develop your own model for the particular size and need of your church.

How to create an administrative structure that supports your small group program.

How to learn from your mistakes and build on your failures.

Why certain churches are growing while others are declining in the same neighborhood.

Why non-churched people are attracted to certain churches and not others.

Why people drop out or fall through the cracks within six months.[126]

Coleman now includes case studies of twenty churches from around the United States that have effectively developed a model for small group ministry. His topics are the philosophy of ministry, organizational flow chart, leader recruitment, training, publicity, life-cycle, evaluation and supervision.[127]

Among the twenty churches, only one bears the Lutheran banner: St. John's Lutheran, Bakersfield, California. In a recent interview with the church's pastor, Dr. Donald Reed, (March 1990) he revealed that the congregation presently had

---

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid., p.5.

thirty-three functioning "Covenant Groups." Pastor Reed

noted in the interview:

> I started one small group in 1985 as a part of my
> doctorate project. I wrote a leadership manual
> and organized the one group for "in service"
> training as well as the concept of caring. It was
> very successful, so I trained other leaders and
> got the concept started. We now have 33 groups
> with a little over 500 people involved. Not all
> are Bible study groups, but all are active members
> who really care about and for each other. If it
> is not a Bible study group, the leader is to
> encourage the members to be involved in Bible
> study somewhere, sometime.[128]

> People who are or have been a part of a Covenant
> Group enjoy the fellowship, caring and love that
> those few people are able to show to each other.

> Covenant Groups take work, planning and continued
> maintenance as does anything that is worthwhile.
> Yet, the joy and assimilation that takes place as
> a result makes the work well worth the effort.[129]

It is Pastor Reed's opinion that "Covenant Groups work

best in larger congregations where people do not know each

other very well." He notes too, "Small groups are an excel-

lent way of doing some extremely important pastoral care by

members themselves, especially when the pastor cannot get

around to all the members." "In fact," he notes, "the group

members can (and do) offer care that the pastor could never

give."[130]

---

128 Donald Reed, Small Group Survey, St. John's
Lutheran Church, Bakersfield, CA, March 1990.

129 Donald Reed, Leadership Training Manual for
Covenant Groups, Bakersfield, CA, 1986, p.6,7.

130 Reed, Small Group Survey, p.1.

Dr. Reed is pastor of a congregation of 2200 baptized members with 1350 communicant members and a worship attendance of 650, including some 30 visitors each week.

Also, among the twenty churches listed by Coleman is the Willow Creek Community Church of Barrington, Illinois. It is one of the fastest growing churches in the United States and built solidly upon a small group model for ministry. I was privileged to serve a Lutheran congregation which exists in the same neighborhood and observe the dynamic growth first-hand. The Willow Creek model is an adaption of another nation-wide ministry entitled Churches Alive a program used by many Lutheran congregations.

Churches Alive is an organization founded by Dr. Howard Ball, a Presbyterian pastor who communicates the biblical concepts which are at the heart of his study guide, "Growing by Discipling." As Ball says, "We've acted as though Jesus said, '...teaching them all things I have commanded you...,' not, '...teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you...'" He emphasizes, "That's the great omission in the Great Commission." He presents biblical answers and alternatives to fulfilling Christ's Great Commission.[131]

The goal of Churches Alive is to provide quality materials for small groups and adult classes. Most of the books in their catalog are written by members of their staff, but they also work in cooperation with the Navigators Bible

---

131 Howard Ball, Celebrating! Small Groups and Adult Classes, San Bernadino, CA: Churches Alive, 1989, p.14.

Study Group and co-publish a key discipleship series which is offered by both ministry organizations. Many Lutheran congregations use the material both in beginning and developing a small group ministry. The groups are called "Growth Groups" and focus attention upon mutual spiritual growth for the purpose of outreach. St. Peter Lutheran Church, Arlington Heights, Illinois, the largest congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod with over 5,000 members, has had twelve such groups operational. The Growth Group commitment is for two years of weekly meeting together for Bible study, prayer and fellowship with regular outreach opportunities.

These same elements are involved in the "Care-Ciple Ministry" of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Carrollton, Texas, under the tutelage of Dr. Stephan Wagner, senior pastor. Dr. Wagner noted in an interview (February 1990):

> The Care-Ciple Ministry is a network of small groups meeting in homes through the north Dallas area. For both members and friends of Prince of Peace, they are a primary place for caregiving...a primary place for Christian Growth.[132]

As facets of the ministry, Dr. Wagner emphasizes outreach, inclusion, nurture and reclaiming, all in an atmosphere of prayer. The title page of "The Care-Ciple Ministry" manual prepared by Wagner states: "The Care-Ciple

---

132 Stephen A. Wagner, Small Group Survey, February 1990, p.3.

ministry is a place to build friendships, a place for care-
giving and a place for Christian growth."[133]

Several congregations of the Lutheran Church have cho-
sen to use adaptations of the Coleman and Ball programs.
Grace Lutheran Church, Visalia, California, has 540 baptized
members, 445 communicant members, and averages 300 in wor-
ship each Sunday with an average of 10 visitors.[134]   Dr.
Harold Draeger, pastor, identifies "five covenant" and
"seven fellowship" groups.[135]

Draeger identifies Covenant as "developing deeper dis-
cipleship while developing relationships with other members"
and Fellowship as "facilitating a sense of belonging for new
and potential members."   He notes that the "fellowship
groups" have been easier to maintain and require less formal
leadership training."   But, both groups train leaders
through the use of a leadership manual entitled: Building
Christian Community Through Small Groups.   The preface
states:

> Life with God is a thrilling adventure.   As we
> walk with Him, He continually leads us into new
> and exciting areas.   One new horizon for our con-
> gregation has been growth in discipleship through
> small groups.   This manual is designed to enhance
> your own relationship with the Lord and to assist
> you at being an enabler for others, helping them
> grow spiritually, in their relationships with the

---

133 Stephen A. Wagner, The Care-Ciple Ministry, Prince
of Peace Lutheran Church, Carrollton, TX, 1987, p.1.

134 Harold Draeger, Small Group Survey, March 1990,
p.4.

135 Ibid.

> Body of Christ, and in their circle of friends and
> acquaintances.[136]

Draeger noted in an interview that he feels very positive about the concept of small groups, but often feels frustrated keeping the participants and leaders committed to the many challenges.[137]

St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Eureka, Missouri, is a congregation of 1200 baptized members, with 850 communicant members and a worship attendance of 475 with 40 to 50 visitors almost every Sunday. The Reverend Darwin Karsten is pastor of the congregation. He identifies eight to ten functioning groups, but with no stated purpose, no name for the process and no continuity of leadership. He notes that the groups that are functioning "are presently operating because of common interests or purposes."[138] The group process has been in place for twelve years with periods of strength and weakness, but with little organization or sense of direction. The lack of a clearly defined purpose is a relevant concern.

St. John's Lutheran Church, Denver, Colorado, lists 1120 baptized members, 932 communicant members and a worship attendance of 659 with "numerous" visitors each week. Small groups have been an identified ministry for five years and

---

136 Harold Draeger, Building Christian Community Through Small Groups, Grace Lutheran Church, Visalia, CA, 1984, p.1.

137 Draeger, Small Group Survey, p.4.

138 Darwin Karsten, Small Group Survey, January 1990, p.5.

twenty-five groups are presently meeting. They are titled

"Share Groups" and Pastor David Koch states their purpose:

> To involve every member and potential member in a
> relationship that fosters Christian growth, mutual
> encouragement and use of spiritual gifts, as well
> as developing a commitment from the Share Group to
> draw others into the circle of Christ's love
> (evangelism).[139]

Pastor Koch is enthusiastic about the process and obvi-

ously invests time and interest in continually developing

this ministry. He noted as he was asked for a personal

comment:

> I believe that Share Groups or their equivalent
> can and should be the heart of congregational
> life. Our leaders are given careful, thorough and
> ongoing training and support. They can carry much
> of the mantle of pastoral ministry often placed
> upon a small group of elders. The professional
> staff then becomes (sic) trainers and equippers
> for these people in ministry. Lay people thrill
> to do significant ministry as opposed to sitting
> on what often are dull boards and committees.
> They themselves grow, others grow because of their
> efforts and we can reach for more unbelievers and
> nominal Christians. In my estimation, congrega-
> tions should devote much of their time and energy
> and resources to developing and maintains (sic)
> groups that grow and multiply.[140]

King of Kings Lutheran Church, Chesterfield, Missouri,

has a membership of 850 baptized and 656 communicant mem-

bers. The attendance averages just over 400 each Sunday

with an average of 12 visitors. I have served as pastor of

the congregation for the past three and one-half years. I

recognized the need for disciplemaking as a key ingredient

to ministry. As a result I have attended three Serendipity

---

139 David Koch, Small Group Survey, February 1990, p.6.

140 Ibid.

workshops, and two Churches Alive "Building a Discipleship Ministry" programs. Out of these experiences I recognized the need for caring and sharing and began an in-home group Bible study with prayer and fellowship. The initial group divided the next December into three groups, then ten groups were formed in September 1989, as 140 persons were involved. Improving Your Serve, by Charles Swindoll, was used as the study guide for the Fall 1987 series. The two previous studies were: Charles Swindoll's, Striking the Original Match, and Earl Gaulkes', You Can Have a Family Where Everybody Wins. The Fall 1988 studies were Lyman Coleman's, Success: Does the One With the Most Toys Really Win?, Singles, Looking Out for Number One, and the present study (Fall 1989), also from Coleman's series, Lifestyles, Going in Style.

As the number of individuals involved in Bible study increased, so have opportunities for fellowship and caring. A proper chain of assimilation has been developed and new members are invited to join one of the groups even before they join the congregation.

In the work, Home Cell Groups and House Churches, the authors note:

> The house church has a strong sense of affinity, harmony, and interconnectedness among its members. Generally, commitment may be described as total or undivided. It typically exceeds other types of house groups in its emphasis on group involvement, mutual responsibility for members, and the preservation of community.[141]

---

141 Hadaway, Wright, and DuBose, Home Cell Groups and House Churches, p.106.

The mutual care and support experienced by King of Kings as a result of Koinonia groups have spurned new life and growth into ministry. The feeling of belonging to a small church where everyone knows everyone emerged from the Koinonia groups. The fellowship achieved in the group Bible studies and the opportunity for communication have greatly increased the congregation's desire to understand and define its ministry.

The administration of a Spiritual Gifts inventory resulted in the additional congregation goal that every member be involved in at least one avenue of Bible study and one avenue of service. An increased understanding of spiritual gifts (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4) allowed members of the "Body" to affirm one another in their varied ministries and have encouraged many to be involved that would otherwise have shied away.

The time spent in the Koinonia group is divided between fellowship, study and prayer. The groups generally meet for two hours, but several have gone as long as four or five hours. Twice each year the groups meet together. The format is similar, but more time is given to fellowship and less to prayer on these occasions.

As groups have grown, so also has the understanding and desire "to make disciples." Evangelism and outreach have taken on new meaning and special purpose as people see themselves, not just their church, involved in disciplemaking.

Dr. Paul Yonggi Cho, in his work, <u>Successful Home Cell Groups</u>, notes:

> In all of my sermons, whether in Korea, Japan, the United States or Europe, I always have three goals: to introduce people to Jesus Christ, to make them successful and to motivate them to serve God and their fellow man. Then I have a sure foundation as a minister.[142]

An acceptance and recognition of the growing pains and "plateau success" of King of Kings congregation has made this aspect of ministry exciting. Gathering the harvest and introducing people to the excitement of service to God and one another are blessings which I enjoy.

The leaders of the New Testament, according to Hunter, take on a servant role not identified in the role of the Old Testament patriarchs. Following what they learned from their Master, leaders were empowering, equipping and releasing others for ministry. Hunter notes:

> The leadership of the New Testament Church reflected a vision for change--real change, revolutionary change. When people were introduced to Jesus Christ, they became radically different. The people of the New Testament were not primarily interested in social change on the surface. They zeroed in on change of the heart, knowing that a change of the heart would address the real problems of people, not just the symptoms. They knew that, in time, this change of heart would bring about real change in social justice and social systems--under divine, not human control.[143]

Hunter continues:

> The actionary church is marked by a refocus on practice. Where the Reformation planted the seeds

---

142 Cho, <u>Successful Home Cell Groups</u>, p.149.

143 Kent Hunter, <u>Moving the Church Into Action</u>, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1989, p.21-22.

through theology and theory, the age of action
centers on the practice--the action taking the
Gospel out to the world. The pure doctrine that
was the primary concern of the Reformation--and
that creates solid disciples--is a means to an end
rather than an end in itself. At the time of the
Reformation the challenge often was to defend the
truth. In the age of action the priority is to
take that truth of the Reformation, which is the
New Testament truth of Jesus Christ, and to share
it.[144]

The small group process is dynamic change in action.
Entrusting the Gospel to be shared "without benefit of
clergy" being present is often a very new experience. It
becomes the experience of the Great Commission--literally
discipling our "high-tech" society. It brings the Good News
to the real hearts and lives of people.

In his book, Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance,
Dr. David Luecke, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod pastor and
faculty member of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena,
California, says it well:

While the appearance of disorder in the Evangeli-
cal wing of God's people may seem "revolting" to
Lutherans, the real question is how it looks to
God. Does minimally organized individualism stand
in His way of calling people to faith in Him, of
enlivening those who follow, and of extending His
kingdom through them? A recurring theme in these
observations is that God is indeed able to work
His will through this style--not just despite
poorly organized leadership but perhaps even be-
cause of it, at least as evidenced by the expand-
ing import He appears to be growing. His direct
control seems adequate to compensate for the miss-
ing human controls other parts of His church would
prefer.[145]

---

144 Ibid., p.24.

145 David S. Luecke, Evangelical Style and Lutheran
Substance, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1988,
p.149.

The small group can be a mighty force in fulfilling the Great Commission and is being employed in the Lutheran Church. When asked to comment upon the place of the small group in the church's ministry, Mr. Alex Guebert, Chairman of the Board of Elders of King of Kings congregation, stated:

> The marvelous thing to observe in our Koinonia is the Holy Spirit influencing the discussion and guiding the lifestyles of the members. Although some members have new relationships in the congregation, they have been accepted and participate as equals. A deep loyalty to the group has developed along with a concern for the spiritual and physical welfare of fellow members. Apparent as well is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the willingness of members to share their innermost feelings with the group. The innermost feelings may be deep rooted problems at times or the sharing of successes on other occasions.

CONCLUSION

It is true that the leadership of the small group process movement is from outside the Lutheran Church. Lyman Coleman is from a Mennonite background; Howard Ball is a Presbyterian pastor; Charles Swindoll is a representative of Evangelical Protestantism. They are the three key authors of small group materials in the United States.

The materials which they have produced to date are biblical and based upon the sociological needs and trends of Twentieth Century Americans. They, however, are also clearly lacking in a sacramental presence as their traditions have not included this emphasis. This emphasis can

and must be included. While Baptism is often addressed, the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar is absent. Leaders should be so instructed and encouraged to present additions to the materials which include an emphasis upon the "Means of Grace" as opportunities present themselves. A review of the Lutheran theology of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as they relate to other Christian traditions might be included in leadership training.

The small group process is involved in many Lutheran congregations and is presenting new opportunities to share the Great Commission--indeed, "teaching them all the things I have commanded you."

The use of the small group process in my congregation continues to foster greater sensitivity to the mission of the Church--to friendship opportunities, and to being the "Body of Christ" in the world today.

In his classic treatise, Everyone a Minister: A Guide to Churchmanship for Laity and Clergy, Dr. Oscar Feucht discusses "passing the torch" from one generation to another:

> Pastors need to ask themselves: How can we effectively teach this central fact of the Great Commission to every group of new members? Has our parish lost this Christian heritage? Did it every really possess it? Does our present ministry of pastor and people reflect it?...Is it taught and caught? Or is it merely a mental concept, a mere metaphor already fueling away as insignificant? A single minister's pastorate at any one place can lose or can retrieve the "torch of the ministry of all God's people."[146]

---

    146 Oscar E. Feucht, Everyone A Minister, St. Louis,
MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1979, p.52-53.

The small group process can make the difference "as the torch is passed!"

KOINONIA LEADERS

MINISTRY

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 NUMBER
DAILY THOSE WHO WERE BEING SAVED.

Acts 2:42,46-47

This manual is designed to foster the continual development and leadership of the Koinonia process and envisioned for use at monthly breakfast meetings of the leadership.

I. KOINONIA

Meeting together in small groups is not new to the Christian Church. The leaders of the New Testament Church met together to provide support for each other in ministry, to study God's Word, to care for one another in special ways, (especially through prayer) and to take new members into the larger group (the Church) in a personal way. These four activities continue to be the concern of the maturing Christian community. Support, study, care, and assimilation through fellowship within the body of believers continue to be not only the glue which holds the Christian Church to-gether but also that which provides the stimulus for a growth response to the Great Commission of our Savior.

Support, Care and Prayer

"They returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:12-14).

Study

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you
think that by them you possess eternal life.
These are the Scriptures that testify about me..."
(John 5:39). "They devoted themselves to the
apostles' teaching..." (Acts 2:42).

Assimilation of New Members and Fellowship

"Those who accepted his (Peter's) message were
baptized, and about three thousand were added to
their number that day. They devoted themselves to
the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to
the breaking of bread and to prayer." "All the
believers were together and had everything in com-
mon." "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 number daily those who
were being saved" (Acts 2:41-42, 44, 46b-47).

Lutheran Theology

The Lutheran Church believes and teaches that God's

Holy Spirit continues to work through Word and Sacrament.

As God's Word is read, studied and/or applied to the lives

of people it is powerful and effective not only in creating

faith but in nurturing, supporting, and reproducing that

faith. We believe, too, that the same Spirit works through

the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper--the "means

of grace" which our God has given to His Church for nurture,

support and growth. Our Lord's Great Commission compels us

to use these means which he empowers and places at our dis-

posal: "Jesus...said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth

has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of

all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and

the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you'..." (Matthew 28:18-20).

The power and authority for the Church to be the Church does not originate in an institution or a denomination, nor does it come in the means of organization or even in the clergy or professional workers. The power and authority are found in the Word, as our former liturgy states, "as it is read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested"[147] and in the sacraments as they are administered according to our Lord's institution. Word and Sacrament are the means by which our God shows His love and continues to love each one of us and all mankind.

We gather around His Word, apply it to our hearts and lives and share in our common faith and life experiences. We are nurtured and supported personally and individually and we nurture, support and care for one another.

As the church grows larger and as our lives and the lives of family members become more complex the opportunities for fellowship, study and caring support become more remote and continuously more impersonal. As a growing church which has made the decision to continue to grow, we must recognize the importance and the need for fostering opportunities and situations where support, Bible study, and fellowship flourish and are encouraged in a relational way. The small group process which we have called Koinonia, a New

---

147 The Lutheran Hymnal, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1941), p.68.

Testament Greek word meaning "a caring Christian fellowship community", is such a process.

In his training manual for small group leaders, Lyman Coleman notes the changes of our society and culture in the past 50 years and organizes them as follows:

Changes in Society and Culture[148]

The Extended Family

In 1940, most family members lived within one hundred miles of each other and got together regularly for family times, with all of the uncles, aunts, grandparents and grandchildren sharing life together. Today, the average family consists of 1.5 parents and 1.7 kids, with no other blood relatives within a hundred miles.

The Neighborhood

In 1940, the average person lived in the same neighborhood for a lifetime and got to know and care about the other people in the neighborhood like a family. Today, the average person moves every five years and the neighbors are often total strangers. In fact, the densely populated condominium sections of a city are more likely to avoid contact with neighbors than farming communities where distance is measured in miles.

The Secure Job

In 1940, the average person stayed with the same job for twenty-five years. Today, the average working person changes jobs every seven years or is moved to another city to keep their present job. In many of the high-tech fields, a person can quickly become obsolete, resulting in loss of job, career and benefits.

---

148 Lyman Coleman, Training Manual for Small Group Leaders, 1987.

The Neighborhood Church

In 1940, the neighborhood church was also the cen-
ter of the life of the average member...from the
cradle to the grave. Scouts, athletic teams, Sun-
day school, men's and women's societies provided
natural habitats for the social, recreational,
spiritual and support systems for the members.
Today, the average church member is involved only
on Sunday, only at a large worship experience, and
only for an average of five years.

We seek to address these changes as we share a change-

less Christ with a changing world. Koinonia groups seek to

foster the development of a discipling church within the

context of change.

Three key ingredients are important for Koinonia to

function properly. We present them in no specific order for

they are independently important and their appropriate mix

is a part of the process. They are:

1. The appropriate material to study;

2. The correct mix and match of people to build a
   community; and

3. The right leader for the group.[149]

Material

Christian denominational publishers and non-denomina-

tion publishers have released a wide variety of materials

suitable for use in the Koinonia process. The selection of

material will be delegated to the pastoral staff in consul-

tation with those who have previously served as group lead-

ers. All groups will use the same materials during the cal-

---

149 Ibid., p.44.

endar year beginning each September. The similar pace of study will be monitored in the monthly meeting of the group leaders. Materials appropriate to themes of support, care, prayer and fellowship will be sought and selected.

Mix of People

The pastor, in consultation with the Ministers of Evangelism and Christian Education and the group leaders, will prayerfully place individuals into their respective groups at the beginning of each yearly cycle. Care will be taken in considering age, occupation, marital status, geography, stage of faith development, and evidenced personality traits in the interest of again carrying out the themes of support, care, prayer and fellowship.

Groups need be limited to no more than 14 members as they begin and members will be invited to bring friends during the first two meeting times. By the third or fourth meeting the group will be closed to new members and guests. Groups will be open again with each member encouraged to bring a guest to the seventh meeting. The closing of a group is not to be exclusive but to encourage a deeper level of intimacy and confidence.

Koinonia meetings will be held on the second Friday of each month at 6:30 p.m. unless otherwise indicated or agreed upon by the group members.

Each Koinonia meeting will include a fellowship meal, a topical Bible study, and a time for ex corde prayer. Appropriate time allotment might be:

6:30 - 7:00 p.m.: Social time of arrival

7:00 - 7:45 p.m.: Fellowship meal begun with prayer
                   by the host and each unit requested
                   to bring a main dish and either a
                   salad or dessert

8:00 - 9:15 p.m.: Study in round with members facing
                   one another and leader and begun
                   with brief prayer by the leader

9:15 - 9:30 p.m.: Prayer begun by leader and
                   encouraging each member to contri-
                   bute to the prayers but forcing no
                   one

9:30 p.m. -   : Informal visiting

Membership in Koinonia will be encouraged for all mem-
bers of the congregation but will not be a requirement but
rather a privilege and opportunity. New and prospective
members will be invited to attend. The Minister of Evange-
lism will continue to encourage existing members to invite
new and prospective members to participate. This will be
done in consultation with the staff and at an appropriate
time in the Koinonia process. All staff members will be en-
couraged to participate but none will serve in a group lead-
ership position. As the congregation and staff continue to
grow, a group of only staff persons may be included.

II. A PROFILE OF SMALL GROUPS

For the purpose of our ministry, we define a small group as:

> A Christian small group can be defined as an intentional face-to-face gathering of three to twelve people on a regular time schedule who share the common purpose of exploring together some aspect of Christian faith and discipleship.[150]

From this definition, several key thoughts emerge. Christian community seldom develops accidentally. Rather, for meaningful, deep relationships to germinate and grow to fruition, they must be carefully cultivated according to a plan.

For small groups to meet the goal of building Christian community, it should be obvious that they must be face-to-face groups where individuals are not lost in a crowd. Changes (growth in beliefs, attitudes and action patterns) are more likely to occur in a group where there is the opportunity for interaction among all of the members for the purpose of clarification and the expansion of ideas. Fourteen is usually suggested as the upper limit for a group in which the members can participate meaningfully.

Christian community in small groups is also fostered by the quality of time spent together. Regular, frequent meetings tend to make better groups because less time is required to re-group. Weekly meetings, therefore, generate

---

150 Hestenes, Using the Bible in Groups, p.26.

deeper relationships and greater growth for both the individuals and the groups as a whole.

Christian community develops more rapidly when the group has a common purpose. It is, therefore, important for a small group to have a clear statement of purpose which is owned by the group, not announced by the leader. Without a clear goal, groups have difficulty having a clear sense of direction and are like a ship without a compass lost in the fog at sea. One umbrella purpose for small groups in a Christian context would be to discover and grow in the possibilities of the abundant life available through a relationship with Jesus Christ (John 10:10). Even non-Christians and marginal members can be involved in a group with this goal.

Furthermore, small groups provide an environment for growth and change. Through the supportive climate created by affirmation and feedback, individuals can experience growth in their own beliefs, attitudes and action patterns. Loving affirmation tends to encourage growth along a certain course. Sensitive feedback reveals individual blind spots. New insights into ourselves and creative ways of initiating growth and change come from sharing with other Christians.

Finally, a small group is focused on Jesus Christ. Small groups are not therapy sessions or encounter groups. They are not a "coffee klatch" or a forum for gossip. Rather, they are a microcosm of the church which is a growing organism with Jesus Christ as its head and spiritual

nerve center (cf. Ephesians 4:11-16). The basis for such growth is the Bible which has as its center the Lord Jesus--"Jesus did many other signs which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you might have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

Five Kinds of Groups[151]

There are many types of small groups. Five types are particularly conducive to the growth and development of Christian community.

Study groups have as their primary focus gaining knowledge and understanding through interacting with content. Bible studies, book studies, word studies, biblical character studies, tape studies and film studies are in this category.

Sharing groups have as their primary focus interacting with the Scripture to apply insights to personal circumstances and relationships through discussion and reflection. Sharing groups allow for a great deal of self-disclosure and personal sharing of how the Scriptures relate to the individual group members while only a small amount of time is devoted to deep study of biblical content. This is frustrating to those who are content/knowledge oriented.

Ministry groups form a third category which can be separated into three sub-categories. These task-oriented

---

151 This section is based on lectures by Roberta Hestenes, Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1988.

groups emphasize applying what has been learned from a study of Scripture to a specific ministry.

One kind of ministry group is the committee. These are frequently the task-oriented program committees of the local congregation. Because of the infrequency of the meetings and the need "to get the job done," committees often fail to provide for individual growth and for the development of community. However, if time is allocated, if the Bible is used as a resource, and if people will not only work together, but also care for and encourage each other, committees can function as meaningful communities.

A second sub-category is accountability groups. These groups offer participants the opportunity to report commitments to serve the Lord in some specific area of life. The intention to be serious about letting the Gospel affect life-style in a practical way characterizes those who belong to accountability groups. A frequent formula at the conclusion of a group session might be, "My goal for the week is...." At the subsequent session, the group will hear, "My success/failure was...."

Mission groups form a third sub-category of ministry groups. These are groups of people banded together to focus on a common ministry task. Examples of these include a hunger task force, a lay counseling team, a visitation team. The motivation for mission groups come from their study of Scripture together. Without study and sharing time, mission

groups can become completely task-oriented. The opposite danger is to only study and never minister.

Contract or Covenant. Healthy groups have a clear sense of purpose and direction. It is not enough for the leader to know the purpose, but it must be shared by the members of the group. Consequently, the purpose cannot be simply announced by the leader who assumes that his pontificating is adequate. It must be pointed out that the covenant does not deal with the activities or the ingredients of the group, but focuses on why the people are there. To illustrate this differentiation, a contract would be that the participants grow in Christian understanding and action. Methods, on the other hand, would answer the question: What will we do to that end? If you know your purpose, you can always design activities which will help achieve that purpose.

The contract is almost always informal, casual. To write it down invariably kills it. As the group progresses throughout its life cycle, it will need to evaluate the covenant and make midcourse corrections. The lack of a good contract, statement of purpose, leads to dissatisfaction by group members, a feeling of frustration or anxiety, divergent expectations and ultimately drop-outs.

Commitment tests the contract. If the contract is need-fulfilling, people will commit to the group in deepening ways. As time passes and trust develops, the level of

commitment is likely to grow deeper. The minimum commitments for a new group are:

1. Regular attendance;

2. Confidentiality;

3. Strictly limited advice-giving.

One of the basic commitments necessary to develop a growing and responsible Christian community is regular attendance. If the group's purpose is to be a place where people can come and go, irregular attendance is acceptable. Irregular attendance is a guarantee for superficiality. Community is hindered where deeper relationships are not allowed to develop through regular and frequent contact between group members. Frequency of contact promotes and establishes trust among members. Continuously feeding new members into a covenant group is a prescription for killing the group. It is for this reason that groups should be closed to new members after week two. Once the contract period has concluded, the group becomes a closed group until week three of a new contract period. The rule of thumb is: the deeper a group goes, the more closed it must be.

Outreach groups such as neighborhood Bible studies (where the goal is reaching the unchurched) will be of necessity open groups. They sacrifice intimacy yet do maintain a level of warmth and friendship. Mission groups which are continuously being fed new people require a special kind of leadership.

Most groups, even with regular attendance, still take three to four meetings for cohesion to develop.

The need for confidentiality is paramount if the group is a covenant or sharing group where self-disclosure is necessary. This assumes that group members will not share with others outside the group (even one's spouse) unless specific permission has been given by the person sharing. This discipline is essential if trust is to be developed and maintained at high levels. To violate this principle will impede the group's ability to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

The third fundamental commitment for a healthy small group relates to advice-giving. The great temptation when one listens to another's problems is to be a little "messiah" who jumps in with some handy solutions to rescue the "poor devil." To do so fosters in the person giving the advice a position of "I'm OK, you're not," leaving him or her one up on the person sharing and creates a dependency cycle. Advice quickly given may be more harmful than helpful because the problem may not have been clearly defined and because the person seeking help may not yet be prepared to accept advice. More appropriate responses ascertain what solutions the individual has tried and/or intends to implement. Helping a person discover solutions is more effective than merely advice-giving.

Caring. Small groups which develop a sense of community have a circle of concern within the group which seeks

to meet all levels of needs of group members--physical, emotional, social and spiritual. Such concern extends to the ones who are loved by those within the group. Basically, this caring is only those we see regularly. The caring within the group may not develop into institutional caring (by the whole church system) without intentionality by the whole church.

Content. Bible study yields Bible living. It is the Word of God, which is the Sword of the Spirit, that changes people deep within. Techniques of psychology are of great benefit, but are no rival for the renewing, regenerating power of the Spirit working through the Word. If Christians are to grow to maturity, the Scriptures must be the indispensable base upon which growth is built. Without the Bible as the chief resource, the group becomes a maintenance group. The mere sharing of personal experiences and feelings in a Christian group is inadequate to produce growth. As the Word of Christ dwells in us richly (Colossians 3:17), our hearts and minds are transformed.

Communication. Healthy groups foster a climate where participants experience such a feeling of safety that they find it permissible, even desirable, to share their thoughts, feelings, concerns, changes of mind and controversial ideas. The goal is to experience roughly equalized participation by each group member. Another element of communication is directed toward God who is present in the

midst of the group (Matthew 18:20). This aspect of communication is focused in prayer.

Crying, Conflict and Congruence. Crying, in this trilogy, represents feelings which are an important part of life. Human beings are not only rational, but also emotional (and spiritual). Feelings are a natural part of relationships, including those in groups. Unfortunately, too many people overreact when feelings are expressed in groups. Occasionally they under-react, and no one does anything about the strong feelings which have been expressed. One temptation to be avoided is to tell someone, "You shouldn't feel that way."

Conflict in groups in unavoidable. In fact, in a community of sinners, it is normal. Conflict can be constructive when it is managed properly, out of a servant attitude which is concerned about the well-being of the other person. Protect a group from conflict and you limit its potential. As a cliche puts it, "You can't have the highs without the lows."

Congruence is the ability to identify our feelings and make decisions about how to express those feelings appropriately. To put it another way: it is the ability to weigh how I'm feeling and how another person is feeling and then to dialogue.

The danger in this sixth requirement for healthy groups is the tendency for people to assume the role of junior

therapist. To do so is a way of manipulating the group either to control it or to distance it.

Jesus Christ. The seventh sign of a healthy group is not last because of lack of importance, but because without Jesus Christ there is no Christian community. Healthy groups are joined and knit together by Jesus. He is the One who impacts lives in practical and growing ways. He is the One who keeps small groups from becoming cliques as He keeps the members focused on their mission--to make disciples of all nations, reaching out in Christian love.

Goals for our Small Groups

The general goals for the small group experiences at King of Kings are:

1. To provide a place for the development of healthy, supportive relationships within the Body of believers at King of Kings;

2. To provide an environment for spiritual growth through sharing, Bible study and prayer;

3. To provide an avenue to more effectively assimilate members within our parish;

4. To provide opportunities for strengthening the Christian witness of our members.

The Ingredients of Small Groups

In order to attain the foregoing goals, each small group experience should include:

1. Fellowship

2. Study

3. Prayer

4. Outreach and ministry

Christians are called to live together in <u>fellowship</u> (koinonia). Fellowship occurs in an atmosphere marked by acceptance, sharing, listening, affirmation and caring. Members share of themselves, their past, their present and their future hopes and dreams.

By taking time to <u>study</u> the Bible and related resources, individuals grow in their life with the Lord. God's Word, the lamp unto our feet (Psalm 119:105), is the indispensable base for any kind of growth within the Body of Christ.

When Christians gather in a supportive, nurturing group, a key element is <u>prayer</u>. Not only can members pray for and with one another conversationally while engaged in the group experience, but prayer continues on an individual basis as a way of caring for one another.

<u>Outreach</u> and <u>ministry</u> are two other ingredients of small groups which are related. Outreach is a natural part of discipleship. The ability to share one's faith grows dramatically as a result of sharing in a small, accepting group. As groups come together on a regular basis, the temptation to become a clique is always lurking nearby. To avoid turning inward and stagnating, developing outward service as an expression of life together provides opportunities to employ ministry gifts.

III. THE KOINONIA LEADER

Characteristics of Leaders

Small group leadership is no small task. While leadership may not require the skills of oratory, the theological expertise of a seminary professor, or the skillful apologetics of a Josh McDowell or the background and training of a master teacher, small group leaders should possess certain qualifications. From I Timothy 3:1-13 we learn that a leader must:

1. Be a mature Christian, growing in his/her own discipleship in the Lord and able to soundly apply Scripture and to discern when additional help is needed.

2. Have a good reputation, having proven to be faithful and reliable.

3. Be willing to be a responsible servant of the group, helping it to accomplish its goals.

Tasks of Leadership

Leading within the context of a small group should not be thought of in terms of a traditional, lecture-style method of teaching. Rather, a Koinonia leader is a facilitator who helps people discover truths for themselves. The leader is a guide, an enabler, and often times a participant.

A Koinonia leader initiates, guides, and summarizes each section of the study. The key to presentation is in the asking of good questions--questions which will invigorate the discussion. Some questions will likely appear in

the study materials but some of the leader's own questions will personalize the study as closeness and some level of intimacy develop within the group. The leader will begin to know which questions will illicit the most valuable discussion. The leader will also learn to vary the style of the question so as to not become predictable but rather creative. Questions should be brief, use familiar words and concepts and should avoid the words "but" or "what if".

Questions which help the Koinonia members focus application of God's Word upon their lives are the best kind of questions. However, don't put anyone on the spot. Be sensitive to what you are learning about one another. The opportunity to ask application questions and to make applications as a leader will continue to grow as the group levels of friendship, trust and intimacy continue to develop. This is an important goal of the Koinonia process and you as a leader facilitate this development.

Always attempt to encourage and affirm the group members. Especially encourage those who are reluctant to share. Look for openings and opportunities to include them in the dialogue. Exhibit a positive attitude and create a positive experience for everyone. Consider these points after every meeting:

1. Did we deal with the material?

2. Was everyone involved?

3. Did you lead or were you lead?

4. Were you prepared?

5. Did you really listen?

6. Was the experience positive for everyone?

7. Was anyone or anything a surprise?

A Navigators article entitled, "How to Lead Small Group Bible Studies,"[152] lists some of the common errors in leading small group Bible study discussions. These errors include:

1. Not making the questions conversational.

2. Being afraid of silence after asking a question.

3. Limiting yourself to asking questions and then answering them.

4. Combining two or more questions.

5. Trying to maintain too much control and direction.

6. Not explaining what you expect from the group.

7. Not keeping the group from wondering.

8. Asking questions with "yes" or "no" answers.

9. Asking complex questions.

10. Stressing your personal application.

11. Not finishing on time.

12. Answering all questions of the group.

13. Being afraid to admit you don't know.

14. Lecturing.

15. Being afraid to show weakness or vulnerability.

16. Hurrying through the lesson.

Building supportive, trusting relationships is an important part of the Koinonia process and leadership can fos-

152 Navigators, The, Navpress Leader's Guide, (San Bernadino, CA: Navpress, 1986), p.39.

ter or curtail this goal. Listening is the beginning of caring. Opportunity must be given to listen to the joys and sorrows, the confessions and victories of every group member. Some will be quick to respond. Others will need to be nurtured and encouraged. Sensitivity is important.

Group leaders are prayerfully chosen because they portray spiritual qualities of caring, sensitivity, and leadership. Exercise these qualities and they will develop just as your muscles develop when your body is exercised. Flex your spiritual muscles and praise God as you too develop in this special service. Your own witness and testimony will continue to be important.

As the Koinonia group gains insight and trust levels deepen, sensitive issues may be revealed or discussed. Encourage group members to seek counsel if that seems appropriate. Respect the confidence of your group members. You are not a policeman or an ear of the pastoral staff. Only in extreme situations should you feel compelled to "report in" concerning something or someone in your group. Your prayerful discretion will be expected and respected.

Ministry of Care

One of the chief avenues to meaningful caring both during and between meetings is careful listening which takes people seriously. In group meetings, being sensitive to moods, to what is said and what is not said, and body language can be very helpful. Caring for the person who gets "dumped on" is important. When someone's pain and trouble

are more than the group can handle, it may be necessary to say, "I hear your pain (or trouble), how can I assist you get some help?" It is important for leaders to remember that while small groups are often therapeutic, they are not therapy sessions, and group leaders are not junior therapists. Sometimes referrals to a pastor or Christian psychologist may be necessary. In less serious situations, the group leader and members of the group can provide the necessary love and support, particularly in physical and spiritual areas. At all time the leader communicate love and acceptance through praise and encouragement.

The foregoing responsibilities are most productively fulfilled when framed by a servant attitude. To be a servant in the group means the leader services the needs of the group, not the needs of the leader. Servanthood was the hallmark of Jesus who said, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:43-45). Leaders are servants of the group, not masters of the group. Servanthood involves making the resources of one's life available to the group. It means being available to the group and manifesting the fruits of the Spirit--"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

Prayer

An important part of the Koinonia process is the time
spent in prayer by both the leader and the group members.
Prayer before preparing the material. Prayer for individual
members of the group as their needs and concerns are evi-
denced. Prayer after each meeting in gratitude and thanks-
giving for the continual work of God's Spirit among His
people.

The Koinonia process is an arm of the pastoral office
of King of Kings congregation. As a group leader you are a
part of the pastoral team concerned with the continued spir-
itual care, support and growth of our membership. This pro-
cess is supervised by the Board of Elders and flows directly
from the functions of the pastor to care for and groom the
flock committed to his care. You, like the members of the
board of Elders, are "under-shepherds" of our pastor with
specific responsibilities for the nurture, support, and as-
similation of our membership. Take this responsibility se-
riously, joyfully, and prayerfully - "the effective, fervent
prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16 KJV)

Styles of Leadership

Having considered leadership in a general way, it
should now be observed that there are various styles of
leadership. While many styles could be suggested
(Authoritative, Democratic and Laissez-faire), the chart in
appendix 5 reveals some of the characteristics of each

style. The difference between these styles is the degree to which the leader exerts control over the group.

As group life progresses, the most desirable leadership style is democratic. To remain with an authoritative style could foster an excessively dependent group. The democratic style of leadership in contrast allows the group to make more of the decisions together. The result is a shared ownership of the group by its members.

The transition from an authoritative to a democratic style needs to be intentional. Gradually, as the weeks go by, the leader will shift more of the responsibilities to other members. For instance, someone may be asked early in the initial contract period to keep a prayer journal in which may be recorded both prayer requests and God's answers to prayer. Someone else may be asked to do some extra research on a particular issue which surfaced as the group interacted with Scripture. Solicit active participation from group members concerning the future plans and procedures. These steps will help ease the group into more involvement in group life by the second contract period.

Patterns of Leadership

The most frequent pattern is to have a designated leader who directs the meetings for a specified period of time. This pattern allows for continuity from week to week and permits more depth of study.

A second pattern is that of partnerships between two or three members. One of the most common partnerships is that of husband and wife. The partners negotiate how they will distribute the leadership roles among themselves.

The third and least desirable pattern is "pass the leadership around." While this rotating method allows everyone to serve as leader, it suffers from a lack of continuity. Unclear expectations develop from the fact that not everyone in a group possesses the same qualifications and skills necessary to lead groups effectively. Good groups are the result of good leadership.

Regardless of the leadership pattern that is chosen, the designated leader remains the spokesperson for the group. In addition, the designated leader is the one to whom the pastor and/or small groups coordinator will go when it is necessary to communicate with the groups. Even though there may be rotating leadership, there needs to be someone to whom the group is accountable.

As a Leader

Encourage the group members to pray for you as the leader. Rely upon the knowledge that this is and has been taking place as you lead each month.

Encourage the members to pray at the conclusion of each meeting. Allow ample time and model appropriate concerns in your own prayers. Encourage every member to contribute something to the prayer time. Timid members might be as-

signed a thought of thanksgiving to help "break the ice". *Ex corde*, from the heart, prayers are difficult for Lutherans. We run to the prayer book or worry about "saying it right". A part of our responsibility as spiritual leaders is to help God's people to pray. To remove their reluctance is a goal of the Koinonia process. To aid in the development of a more active and personal prayer-life within the lives of each of our members is our hope.

Never force anyone or belittle anyone reluctant to participate. Always encourage, support and strengthen each member of your group. We commit them to your care and you have the power of God's Holy Spirit at your disposal. Use it wisely, willingly, and in a spirit of expectation knowing that "He does all things well". God will produce a blessing in you and in your service. His Kingdom will "truly come among us also."

In summary, remember who you are:

. discussion facilitator

. tangent stopper

. schedule maintainer

. student encourager

. Bible teacher

. prayerful participant

Your commitment to regular attendance at the monthly Koinonia leaders breakfast will offer continued support and encouragement to your important ministry as a Koinonia leader. Coordination of the group process, topical helps,

and problem-solving will be a part of these monthly meetings. A major event in which all groups will share will be planned at the breakfast meetings held on the first Wednesday of each month at the Schnuck's Station Restaurant in the Hilltown Center, at 6:45 a.m. Your commitment to lead is also your commitment to follow.

We pray for your service and in partnership we pray for:

1. Christian fellowship,

2. Enhanced prayer lives,

3. Assimilated members,

4. Applied study of God's Word, and

5. Opportunities to share and care for one another.

RESOURCES

The following books have been placed in our church library for your help.

Cho, Dr. Paul Yonggi, Successful Home Cell Groups, South Plainfield, NJ, Bride Publishing Co., 1981.

Coleman, Lyman, Training Manual for Small Group Leaders, Littleton, CO, Serendipity House, 1987.

Griffin, E., Getting Together, Downers Grove, IL, Inter-Varsity Press, 1982.

Hadaway, C. Kirk; Wright, Stuart A. & DuBose, Francois, Home Cell Groups and House Churches, Nashville, TN, Broadman Press, 1987.

Kuehne, Steven J., Training Small Group Study Leaders in the Congregation, Minnesota South District - LCMS, 1987.

Navpress, Leader's Guide, San Bernadino, CA, The Navigators, 1986.

Schaller, Lyle E., Assimilating New Members, Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 1978.

Willow Creek Community Church, Small Groups I, Barrington, IL, 1988.

Willow Creek Community Church, Small Groups Study Manual, Barrington, IL, 1988.

CONCLUSION

The Church exists as part of the "high tech" age. It needs to identify "high touch" opportunities within the membership as they present themselves. Why? Because the church recognizes the mandate of The Great Commission. We have defined a small group as "an intentional face-to-face gathering of three to twelve people in a regular time schedule and with the common purpose of discovering and growing in the abundant life in Christ."[153]

The small group is to be intentional, that is, planned. If the future of the group is not planned and, to some extent, structured, it will probably be short-lived. The group should be small enough that people can interact in a personal way with each of the other group members. Intimacy is encouraged and planned.

Regularly scheduled meetings with a common purpose will foster commitment to the concern for growing. The measure of growth should not be in numbers, but in ideas, opportunities, service, spirituality and relationships. The members look forward to their meetings together because positive growth is occurring. Encouragement, care, support, identity and personal needs are all being felt and evidenced, and the group members can feel it. God's Spirit is working through His Word as it is read, studied and applied.

---

153 Roberta Hestenes, Building Christian Community Through Small Groups (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary), lecture, March 1988.

The group function is centered in the "abundant life in Christ" and Christ must be the center at all times. Everyone has time to talk, dig deep, grow together and personally share what is important as members help one another grow in their personal faith and commitment.

The small group process assists the Church in becoming what it is meant to be--those set free from the bondage of sin for the service of the King by the love of Christ. As people are freed, the Church can seek to share Christ's love with others. Through prayer, study, care, witness and service, the group participants grow the Church--the Lutheran Church.

If the Church is to continue to grow and remain alive, we are going to have to get involved and small groups are a proven method. Otherwise, people will seek other avenues to fulfill the need for intimate relationships. Unfortunately, many of these avenues are non-Christian or may even be anti-Christian. As Charles Swindoll puts it, "This is not automatic. I am personally responsible. So are you."[154]

---

154 Charles Swindoll, Dropping Your Guard (Waco, TX: Word Publishing Co., 1983), p.65.
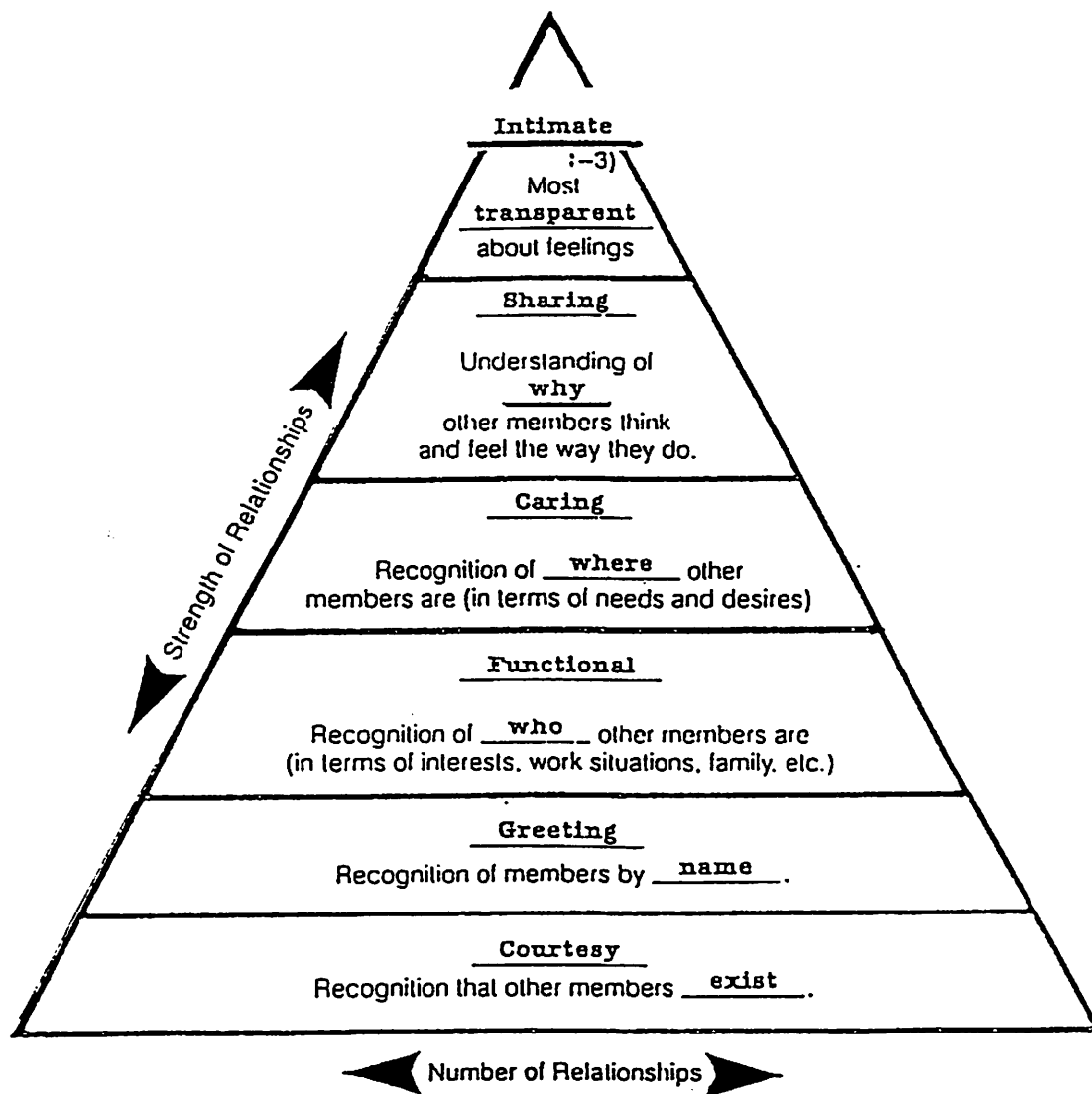
APPENDIX 1

"ONE ANOTHER" BIBLICAL REFERENCES

John 13:34-35

John 15:12

John 15:17

Romans 12:16

Romans 13:8

Romans 14:13

Romans 14:19

Romans 15:5

Romans 15:7

Romans 15:14

Romans 16:16

1 Corinthians 12:25

1 Corinthians 16:20

2 Corinthians 13:12

Galatians 5:13

Galatians 6:2

Ephesians 4:2

Ephesians 4:32

Ephesians 5:21

Colossians 3:13

Colossians 3:16

1 Thessalonians 3:12

James 4:11

James 5:16

1 Peter 1:22

1 Peter 4:8

1 Peter 4:9

1 Peter 4:10

1 Peter 5:5

RELATIONAL PYRAMID

Intimate

:-3)

Most
transparent
about feelings

Sharing

Understanding of
why
other members think
and feel the way they do.

Caring

Recognition of ___**where**___ other
members are (in terms of needs and desires)

Functional

Recognition of ___**who**___ other members are
(in terms of interests, work situations, family, etc.)

Greeting

Recognition of members by ___**name**___.

Courtesy

Recognition that other members ___**exist**___.

Strength of Relationships

Number of Relationships

---

155 Source: David Wood, <u>A Shepherd's Guide to Caring and Keeping</u>, ed., Charles Arn (Pasadena, CA: Church Growth, 1986), Participant Workbook, p.3,4.

APPENDIX 3

SAMPLE SHARING QUESTIONS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY[156]

Past tense sharing questions are good, safe questions for the early stages of group life. Examples of these questions are:

Where did you live when you were twelve years old, and what is one strong memory you have from that time?

Who was the most influential person in your childhood and why?

What was the most memorable vacation you every took and why?

When, if ever, did God become more than a word to you, and how did that happen?

What is one experience of success that you can remember, and what did it mean to you?

What is one quality from your parents that you want to keep and one quality you wish you could change?

When was the first time you heard about Jesus, and what did you think about Him?

When did you meet your spouse, and what do you remember from that moment?

What were the Christmas holidays like for you when you were growing up, and how did you feel about them?

What has been your most important spiritual experience?

---

156 Source: Hestenes, Using the Bible in Groups, p. 102-105.

What has been your relationship to a church as you grew up, and how did you feel about it?

What was the most exciting (challenging, difficult, growth-producing, enjoyable, terrible) part of your life up to now and why?

What Bible passage has had a great impact on your life and why?

Present tense sharing questions focus on what is going on now in one's life. The very recent past may also be included. Examples are:

What is one part of your life that you enjoy and one part that is difficult for you?

What is your favorite spot in your home or yard and why?

What is a good thing happening in your life right now, and what makes it good?

What do you like to do for fun?

When you have some free time to yourself, what do you like to do?

What is one thing that you worried about or struggled with this past week?

What are you looking forward to, and what are you reluctant to face during the next week?

What is one decision facing you that you find difficult and why?

What is a satisfying relationship and/or a frustrating relationship in your life, and what makes it so?

When do you struggle with yourself and win, or when do you struggle with yourself and lose? How do you feel about that?

What is the most important or most meaningful or most satisfying thing that you do in a week and why?

What is one thing that gave you joy or a sense of accomplishment this week?

What three adjectives describe last week?

What is one thing you are proud of about yourself?

What is one thing you are good at and one thing you are bad at?

Where are you changing or growing in your life and what helps and what hinders that process?

What spiritual discipline do you find the easiest or the most difficult?

What do you like about your job, and is there anything you find boring?

Future tense sharing questions give people an opportunity to express their hopes, fears, dreams, expectations, desires for change. Some examples are:

If you knew you could not fail and money were no problem, what one thing would you like to do in the next five years?

If you could change one thing about yourself or develop one quality that you do not now have, what would it be?

What is one relationship you would like to strengthen, and what steps could you take to develop it?

What would be the perfect vacation for you? Where would it be, and what would you do?

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be and why?

If you could be doing anything you wanted to this time next year, what would it be?

If you could accomplish one positive change for the good in our church, what would it be? How might you go about it?

If you went home and found a check written to you for $1 million, how would you spent the money?

What would you like to have said about you at your funeral?

How do you want your children to remember you, and what are you doing to insure those memories?

What is one change you would like to make in your life in the next two years and why?

What is one dream or hope you have for the future?

What is one anxiety you have about the future, and how do you handle it?

What is one unmet ambition you have?

Affirmation questions invite group members to say positive, affirming things about each other. This assumes that your group members have some knowledge of each other. These questions are helpful for building a sense of belonging and

experiencing care and love from the group. Furthermore, it helps people recognize and appreciate what God has been doing through them. Some examples are:

What is one quality that you value or admire in one or more of the members of this group?

If you could give a special gift to each member of the group, what would it be and why?

What spiritual gifts do you see present in one or more members of this group? How are those gifts being used in a helpful way?

What has been meaningful to you in this group?

What do you value especially about this group?

If you were called on to give a speech describing the good qualities of the members of this group, what would you say?

Accountability questions focus on living out the implications of one's Christian faith and, therefore, are good application questions. Examples are:

What do you believe God wants you to do this week, and when and how do you intend to do it?

What changes do you believe you should make in your habits or actions this week? How will you tackle these?

What Christian action will you attempt this week, and what help will you need to accomplish it?

What spiritual disciplines are you going to follow this week and why?

How did you do with your commitment from last week?

What success and what failure have you experienced this week in your attempt to follow Christ?

What relationship should you work on this week, and how will you do it?

How will you practice thankfulness to God this week?

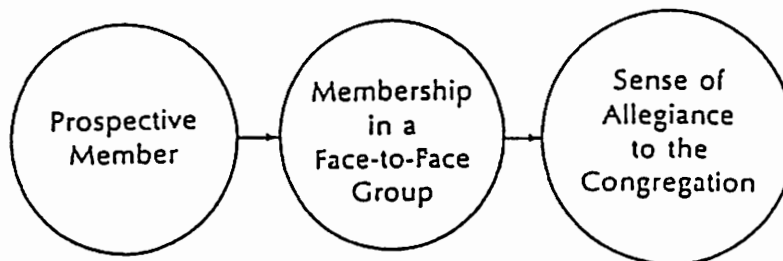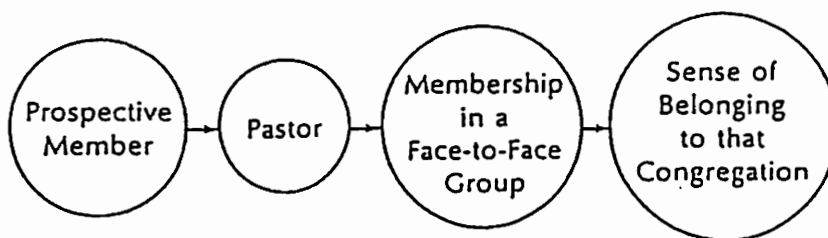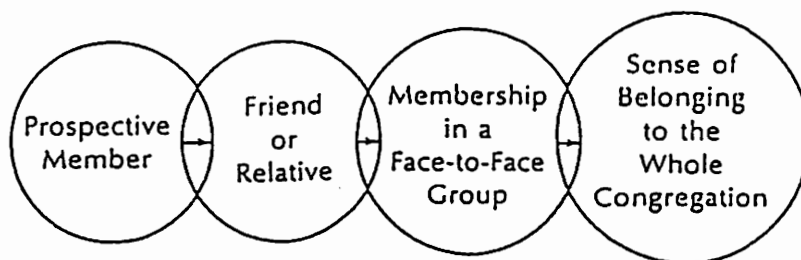How is the Spirit prompting you as a result of our Bible study? What will you do about it and when?

How will you share the good news of the Gospel this week and with whom?

What prayer discipline do you intend to observe this week?

What is one responsibility that you have to fulfill this week, and how do you feel about it?

APPENDIX 4[157]

PATHS INTO MEMBERSHIP

Prospective Member → Friend or Relative → Membership in a Face-to-Face Group → Sense of Belonging to the Whole Congregation

Prospective Member → Pastor → Membership in a Face-to-Face Group → Sense of Belonging to that Congregation

Prospective Member → Membership in a Face-to-Face Group → Sense of Allegiance to the Congregation

---

157 Source: Schaller, Growing Plans, p.95.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

AUTOCRATIC	AUTHORITATIVE	DEMOCRATIC	LAISSEZ-FAIRE
(Dominooring, dictatorial)	(Definite yet responsive)	(Group-centered)	(Permissive, passive)
1. Total control with members as listeners and followers	1. Strong control with members actively involved as discussants	1. Shared control with leader and members sharing functions and decisions	1. Minimal control with members directing
2. Determines goals and policies and wants the group to choose the goal ho has chosen	2. Has a definite purpose and plan but is open to modification	2. Shares leadership responsibility	2. Doesn't prepare and lets things drift
3. More interested in the subject matter (content) than with the people (process)	3. Active and energetic and seeks the activity of others	3. Believes in other people	3. Doesn't seem to care
4. Makes decisions regardless of other viewpoints	4. Prepared to give direction and support as needed	4. Creates a sense of security and belonging in the group	4. Causes the group to accomplish very little
5. Talks too much	5. Uses communication skills to involve others	5. Ensures that other members have opportunity of leadership	5. Encourages fragmentation through indiscipline and unreliability
6. Focuses attention on himself or herself	6. Takes responsibility until others can assume it	6. The leader's withdrawal will not mean that the group will fall apart	6. Makes no attempt to appraise or regulate the course of events
7. Group members are almost puppets	7. Uses personal power to empower others. Asks others to take functions	7. All policies a matter of group discussion encouraged and assisted by leader	7. Lacks courage in making decisive plans
In a Bible study:			
8. Asks and answers all questions	8. Prepares and asks questions; members respond and discuss	8. May ask other(s) to lead discussion; leadership may be passed around, using study guide	8. Asks one vague or general question, then is silent

---

158 Items 1 and 8 in each column and all of the items in the "Authoritative" column are from Hestenes. The other items are taken from John Mallison, Building Small Groups in the Christian Community, Renewal Publications, Australia, 1978.

APPENDIX 6

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

In the summer of 1964, the first idea of King of Kings began to sprout. A request was made by St. Paul Lutheran Church, Des Peres, MO, to initiate a ministry in the Creve Coeur-Chesterfield area. After several meetings, it was decided that a new ministry should be provided west of Highway 141 (Woods Mill Road) in West St. Louis County, Missouri.

In 1968, Rev. Walter F. Strickert of Sedalia, MO, was extended a Call as Missionary-at-Large. In a special service at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Olivette, MO, Pastor Strickert was commissioned.

The first church service was held at River Bend Elementary School on November 10, 1968. One hundred seventy people attended. On the following Sunday, Bible classes and Sunday school were begun. A name was subsequently chosen and the mission congregation became King of Kings Lutheran Church.

A constitution was adopted on May 4, 1969. On May 25, 1969, ninety communicants and one hundred forty-two baptized members were received. The Rev. Walter F. Strickert was installed as Pastor of King of Kings on November 23, 1969.

A women's organization was formed and named "Adelphai Diakonias," Greek meaning "Sisters in Service." From this main group came the various women's Circles now active in the church.

A fund raising drive and a $10,000 grant from the Lutheran Women's Missionary League hastened the building of a permanent church structure. Plans were approved in October 1970, for the structure to be built in the shape of a fish. Ground breaking ceremonies were held on May 2, 1971.

By March 19, 1972, the building was completed and a Day of Dedication Services and Celebration was held. Within a year's time, a choir was organized and two morning services were in effect. A Bible study hour was held between the two services along with a growing Sunday school program.

The King of Kings Youth, better known as KOKY, was formed for special ministry to the high school and college age youth. Meeting space became difficult with the growing congregation and the need for an education building became apparent.

Approval for an education building was given in May 1974, with ground breaking on Sunday, January 5, 1975. The education building was dedicated on October 12, 1975.

A Director of Christian Education was called and the installation service was on July 23, 1978. He remains with the congregation in the person of Mr. Randall R. Smith.

The Rev. Strickert announced his retirement plans (at the age of seventy) in the fall of 1985 and the congregation set out on a self-study to again evaluate its own needs and to begin the selection of a new pastor.

In the spring of 1986, the Rev. Alan H. Bachert was called and was consequently installed on August 17, 1986.

The congregation had consciously decided to call a pastor schooled in and supportive of the Church Growth Process as they had just completed a two-year growth study with the Rev. Dr. Kent Hunter of Corunna, Indiana.

Small group Bible studies began the same summer and have grown to twelve in number. Eight additional Bible studies are operational. To assist visitors, the entire worship service is printed each week.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated every Sunday in at least one service. An additional Monday evening worship service was added June 1, 1987. During the Lenten seasons of 1989 and 1990, Holy Communion has been celebrated in every worship service.

In the spring of 1987, three additional Boards were added: Fellowship

Public Relations

Social Ministry

to the existing Boards of:

Elders

Christian Education

Finance

Evangelism/Church Growth

Stewardship

Trustees

Youth Ministry.

An additional fifty-six car parking lot was completed and an additional 1.3 acres with dwelling was purchased

immediately west of the church building. In 1990, a second dwelling with an additional 1.1 acre attached was purchased.

Architectural plans for the expansion of the chancel, the narthex and fellowship areas, including the addition of a choir loft, were unveiled the summer of 1988 and were adopted on March 5, 1989. The plan also included a preschool wing at a total cost of 1.5 million dollars.

An Assistant Pastor, Minister of Discipleship (Evangelism and Assimilation), was called in the spring of 1990 as a result of having an Evangelism Intern from Concordia College, St. Paul, Minnesota, serve an eleven-month internship in the congregation.

King of Kings Lutheran Church has truly been blessed and desires to be a blessing. The membership now includes:

847 baptized members

656 communicant members

342 households.

APPENDIX 7

Group History Addendum:

King of Kings Lutheran Church is a twenty-one year old congregation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. It has been served by two pastors during the course of these years. The first pastor was originally the mission developer assigned by the Missouri District of the LCMS who was then called by the congregation to serve as pastor. He served for eighteen years before his retirement in 1986 at the age of 70. His style of ministry was non-directive and very traditional. He aimed at serving the needs of a growing Lutheran community in the fast developing western suburbs of the city of St. Louis.

In 1984, recognizing that the pastor would soon be retiring, leaders of the congregation began searching for help and direction in meeting the needs of the expanding congregation ministering in the dynamic and growing Chesterfield community. They joined the two-year church growth process of the Center for Church Growth of Corunna, Indiana and began identifying, understanding and implementing many of the concerns and themes of "church growth" with the passive support and involvement of their pastor. They soon recognized an impasse in continued dynamic growth and a polarization of the congregation concerning an understanding of the mission and ministry of their church.
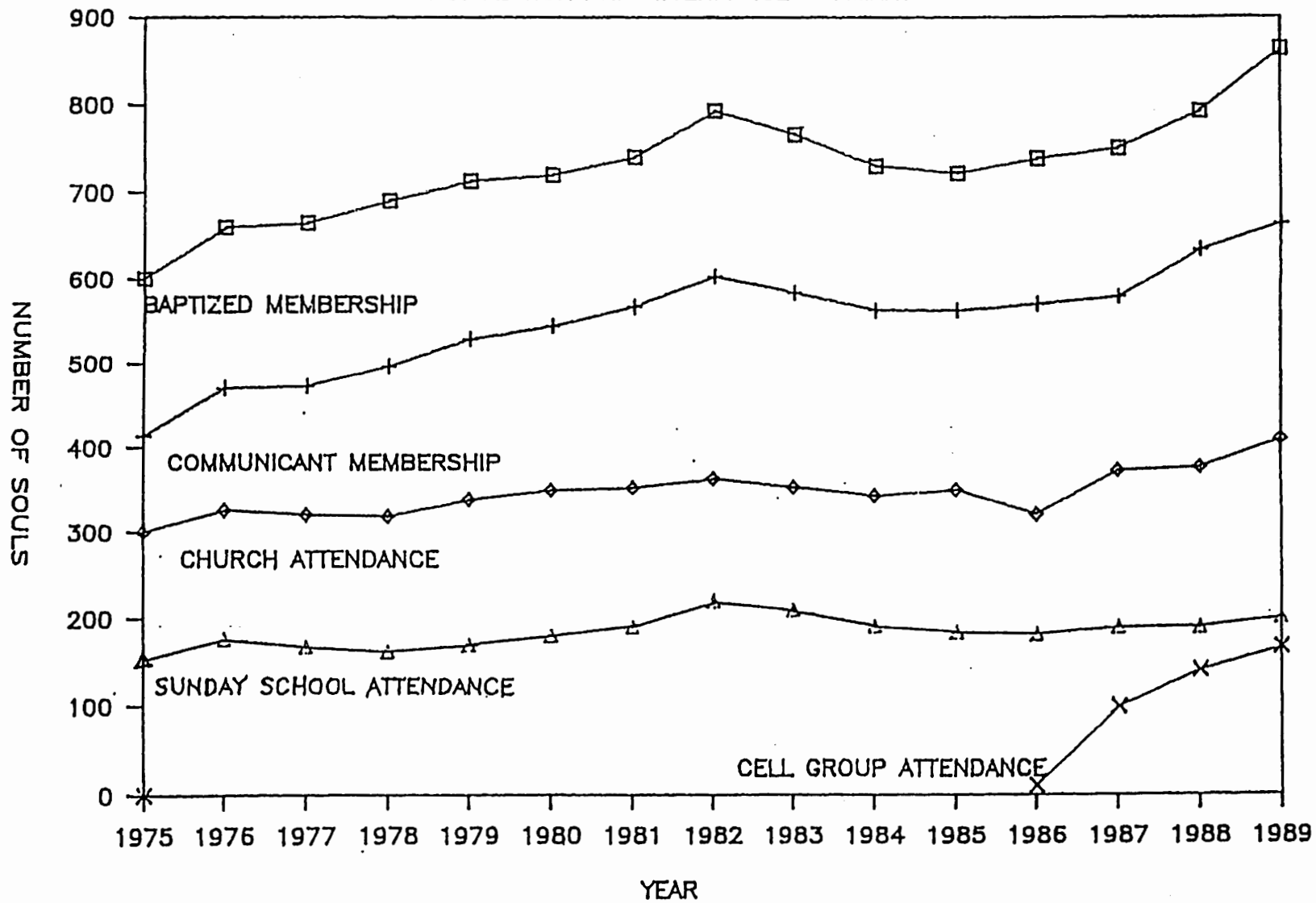
The two year church growth process was completed. The pastor announced his plans for retirement and the congregation indicated a desire to choose a new pastor who was both supportive of and knowledgeable about the church growth process.

The second pastor began his ministry in Chesterfield in July of 1986 and a small group (Friday evening) Bible study was begun in September. It met in alternating homes of members once each month. The group grew in size and in the second year of operation totaled fifty participants. In the fall of 1988, nine groups were underway with 150 participants. Nine leaders were chosen and trained by the pastor who also assumed the responsibility for placement of persons (couples and singles) into the groups. The groups were called "Koinonia Groups" and continue to meet each month for: 1.) a fellowship meal, 2.) a topical study of God's Word, and 3.) a time of *ex corde* prayer focusing upon the needs and support of group members, their friends and King of Kings Lutheran Church.

In the Spring of 1990, 180 persons were listed as members of "Koinonia." The eleven group leaders meet monthly for an organizational breakfast meeting and mutual support and prayer. Church attendance and involvement increased dramatically as can be seen on appendix 8.

KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH

POPULATION AND ATTENDANCE SUMMARY

BAPTIZED MEMBERSHIP

COMMUNICANT MEMBERSHIP

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

CELL GROUP ATTENDANCE

NUMBER OF SOULS

YEAR

APPENDIX 9

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH-MISSOURI SYNOD

EVANGELISTIC GAINS AND LOSSES[159]

YEAR	TOTAL CONFIRMED MEMBERS GAINED FROM OUTSIDE*	BACK DOOR LOSSES	NET OUTREACH
1970	40,450	50,282	- 9,832
1971	41,293	48,455	- 7,162
1972	39,392	52,012	-12,620
1973	40,804	52,618	-11,814
1974	41,056	51,494	-10,438
1975	41,368	51,210	- 9,842
1976	41,023	51,230	-10,207
1977	39,726	47,742	- 8,016
1978	38,580	48,195	- 9,615
1979	38,836	49,573	-10,737
1980	43,105	49,387	- 6,282
1981	43,576	50,769	- 7,193
1982	43,537	48,094	- 4,557
1983	42,822	51,096	- 8,274
1984	42,143	50,497	- 8,354
1985	41,599	50,019	- 8,420
1986	40,862	49,721	- 8,970
1987	40,561	50,501	- 9,940
1988	53,337	51,567	- 1,770

Statistics from the Statistical Yearbook published annually by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

* Includes adults gained by baptism or confirmation, those Lutherans whose membership had lapsed through inactivity and who have been reinstated, and teens that were confirmed and who came from non-Lutheran homes.

---

159 Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Department of Human Resources, 1988 Statistical Yearbook, (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1989).

VITA

Alan Harold Bachert was born in Aurora, Illinois, where he also attended both elementary and high school. After attending Valparaiso University, he graduated from Aurora University in 1965 with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in the Liberal Arts. In 1969, he graduated from Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois. He was awarded the Master of Divinity Degree in 1971 and ordained into the ministerium of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.

He has served parishes in Steeleville, Illinois, Cape Girardeau, Missouri, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Arlington Heights and Tinley Park, Illinois, and presently serves as Senior Pastor of King of Kings Lutheran Church, Chesterfield, Missouri. He has served as campus pastor, institutional chaplain, and minister of discipleship.

He has served as chairman of the Northern Illinois District Board of Evangelism, chairman of the Northern Illinois District Great Commission Convocation, and twice as presenter at the Great Commission Convocation of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. He has authored materials for Youth Ministry Magazine, as well as being a frequent lecturer on the mission and ministry of the church of today and on Spiritual Gifts and the organization of the Church.

He and his wife, Judith, have three children and reside in Ellisville, Missouri.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aldrich, Joseph, Life-Style Evangelism, Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1981.

Arn, Charles, ed., The Win Arn Growth Report, 14:4.

Arn, Win, "How to Use Ratios to Effect Church Growth" in Church Growth: State of the Art, edited by C. Peter Wagner, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986.

Arn, Win, Carroll Nyquist, and Charles Arn, Who Cares About Love? Pasadena, CA: Church Growth Press, 1986.

Ball, Howard, Celebrating! Small Groups and Adult Classes, San Bernadino, CA: Churches Alive, 1989.

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, Habits of the Heart, New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1985.

Boer, Harry, Pentecost and Missions, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1961.

Cho, Paul Yonggi, More Than Numbers, Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984.

_____, Successful Home Cell Groups, Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1981.

Coleman, Lyman, Training Manual for Small Group Leaders, Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1987.

_____, Small Group Training Seminar, Littleton, CO: Serendipity Press, 1990.

Coleman, Lyman, Peter Menconi, and Richard Peace, Lifestyles: Going In Style, Littleton, CO: Serendipity Press, 1988.

_____, Singles: Looking Out For Number One, Littleton, CO: Serendipity Press, 1988.

_____, Success: Does the One with the Most Toys Win?, Littleton, CO: Serendipity Press, 1988.

Coleman, Robert E., The Master Plan of Evangelism, Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963.

Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Evangelism and Church Growth, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1987.

Culver, Robert D., "What is the Churches' Commission?, _Bibliotheca Sacra_ (July 1968)

Dale, Edgar, _Audio Visual Methods in Teaching_, (Rev. Ed.), New York, NY: Rineholt and Winston, 1954.

Draeger, Harold, _Building Christian Community Through Small Groups_, Visalia, CA: Grace Lutheran Church, 1984.

_____, "Member Assimilation: Closing the Lutheran Backdoor" Dr. Min diss., Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1988.

Dudley, Carl S., _Where Have All Our People Gone?_, New York, NY: Pilgrim Pres, 1979.

Engel, James F., David T. Kollat, and Roger D. Blackwell, _Consumer Behavior_, New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Feucht, Oscar, _Everyone A Minister_, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1974.

Gaulke, Earl H., _You Can Have a Family Where Everybody Wins_, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1975.

Green, Michael, _Evangelism in the Early Church_, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970.

Griffin, Em., _Getting Together: A Guide for Good Groups_, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982.

Hadaway, C. Kirk, Francis M. DuBose, and Stuart A. Wright, _Home Cell Groups and House Churches_, Nashville, TN: Broadman Pres, 1987.

Harre, Alan, _Close the Back Door: Ways to Create a Caring Congregational Fellowship_, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1984.

Hestenes, Roberta, _Using the Bible in Groups_, Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary, 1983.

_____, _Building Christian Community Through Small Groups_, Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, lecture notes, March 1988.

Hoge, Dean R. and David A. Roozen, _Understanding Church Growth and Decline_, New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979.

Howard, John, _The Great Commission for Today_, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976.

Hunter, Kent, Foundations for Church Growth, New Haven, MO: Leader Publishing Company, 1983.

_____, Moving the Church Into Action, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.

_____, Your Church Has Doors, Corunna, IN: Church Growth Analysis and Learning Center, 1982.

Jensen, Ron and Jim Stevens, Dynamics of Church Growth, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981.

Johnson, David W. and Frank W. Johnson, Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills, 3d ed., Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1987.

Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1976.

Lang, Marcus, "Is Society Piping the Tune?", Affirm 11 (April 1987).

Luecke, David S., Evangelical Style and Lutheran Substance, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1988.

Luther, Martin, "The Small Catechism", Concordia Triglotta, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921.

Luther, Martin, Luther's Works, (Table Talk), Edited by Theodore Tappert. Vol. 54. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1967.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod 1986 Convention Workbook.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Convention Proceedings, 1975, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Department of Human Resources, 1988 Statistical Yearbook, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1989.

Mallison, John, Building Small Groups in the Christian Community, Australia: Renewal Publications, 1978.

Maslow, A.H., Motivational and Human Behavior, New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1970.

McGavran, Donald, Understanding Church Growth, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970.

_____, The Bridges of God, New York, NY: Friendship Press, 1955.

Metz, Donald L., The Invisible Member: A Report on Inactive Methodists. In Dean R. Hoge and David A. Roozen, eds. Understanding Church Growth and Decline, New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979.

Navigators, The, Navpress Leader's Guide, San Bernadino, CA: Navpress, 1986.

Net News, The, St. Peter Lutheran Church, Arlington Heights, IL, November 1989.

Nicoli, W. Robertson, ed., The Expositor's Greek Testament, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.

Oswald, Roy M. and Speed B. Leas, The Inviting Church: A Study in New Member Assimilation, New York, NY: The Alban Institute, 1987.

Peters, George W., A Theology of Church Growth, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.

_____, A Biblical Theology of Missions, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972.

Powell, John, Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?, Allen, TX: Argus Communications, 1969.

Rapport, Roger, "Interview: John Naisbitt", PSA Magazine, September, 1983.

Rauff, Edward A., Why People Join the Church, New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1979.

Recker, Robert, Theological Perspectives on Church Growth, edited by Harvie Conn, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1976.

Reed, Donald, Leadership Training Manual for Covenant Groups, Bakersfield, CA: St. John Lutheran Church, 1987.

Ritter, Gerhard, Luther: His Life and Work, New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1959.

Rooy, Sidney, "A Theology of Humankind", in Exploring Church Growth, edited by Wilburt R. Shenk, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983.

Schaller, Lyle, Growing Plans, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1983.

_____, The Parish Paper 11 (December, 1981).

_____, Assimilating New Members, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978.

Scott, W. Richard, Social Processes and Social Structures, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970.

Snyder, Howard, "What We're Learning About Cell Groups", The Small Group Letter 1 (March 1985).

_____, The Community of the King, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1977.

_____, The Problem of Wine Skins, Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.

Son, Young J., The Missiological Significance of Matthew 28:16-20, Potchefstroom University Press, 1983.

Swindoll, Charles, Dropping Your Guard, Waco, TX: Word Publishing Company, 1983

_____, Improving Your Serve, Waco, TX: Word Publishing Company, 1981.

_____, Strike the Original Match, Waco, TX: Word Publishing Company, 1980.

"The Formula of Concord. Thorough Declaration", Concordia Triglotta, St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921.

Tippett, Alan, Church Growth and the Word of God, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1970.

Trotman, Dawson, Born to Reproduce, Lincoln, NE: Back to the Bible Publishers, 1959.

Wagner, C. Peter, Your Church Can be Healthy, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979.

_____, Your Church Can Grow, Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1976.

Wagner, Stephen, The Care-ciple Ministry, Carrollton, TX, Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 1986.

Wood, David, A Shepherd's Guide to Caring and Keeping, ed., Charles Arn, Pasadena, CA: Church Growth, 1986, Participant Workbook.

Yeakley, Flavil, Why Churches Grow, Broken Arrow, OK: Christian Communications, 1979.