



DEVELOPING SMALL GROUPS IN COLLEGE MINISTRY

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Whether a church or a campus ministry, groups are a key component to making disciples to fulfill a ministry's strategy. In college age ministry it is imperative to reproduce disciples so that a ministry sustains and even grows from one school year to the next. Groups help create that multiplication.

It has long been known in Sunday School and small group circles that people connected in a small group are more likely to stay with the ministry, serve in the ministry, and give to support the ministry. Therefore, consider groups as a non-negotiable to the successful growing college ministry.

Groups expand your shepherding and disciple making capacity. Whether a volunteer or part time ministry leader, or even full time, you cannot touch the life of every person and be there for every need. Groups provide the ultimate shepherding and disciple making force.

STARTING GROUPS

Whether you're starting new groups for the first time in a ministry, or starting new for a new school year, you have an opportunity to start fresh and start right. But, starting right may look different from one context to the next.

Here are some questions to answer to get started.

1. What kind of campus are you reaching?

Is the campus a commuter campus? Is there more than one school in biking, walking and driving distance to your church? If students live on campus in large numbers then it would make a lot of sense to have groups meet on campus and especially in residence halls.

2. What is the purpose of your groups?

Often in college ministries the groups serve a discipleship community role. Some groups' philosophies lead groups to decide whether they will be evangelistic, discipleship, worship, missions, or ministry oriented. But let's suppose you want to multiply through your groups. It then makes sense to achieve a balance of those goals. Imagine if groups are fully functioning in a healthy manner, they really could plant a church! Jesus commissioned the church to go make disciples then starting churches out of groups could be a good thing!

You may be thinking, "I don't have the time or skill to meet all of those objectives." This is where you share responsibilities with members of the group. By doing this you prepare other group members to grow into leadership roles so when their time comes that a new group is needed, you have potential leaders.



3. Where will your groups meet?

If your church has Sunday School and has the space then you may already have answered this question. But even with Sunday School you may consider taking groups to where the students are which is on campus. Also consider that by meeting on campus and in student housing, the possibility for multiplication is limitless! When First Southern Baptist Church, Tucson AZ launched college small groups they were out of Sunday School classroom space. The church had a college and career class which was split in order to more effectively minister to both life stage groups. The career group was given the classroom. So the logical conclusion was to start college groups at any time they wanted to meet and coordinate groups in residence halls and other places around campus. Eventually they had fourteen small groups meeting. What church has fourteen open Sunday School classrooms barring a building campaign?

4. What will your groups study?

CHOOSING CURRICULUM...OR NOT

The writer of Ecclesiastes was right when he said there is nothing new under the sun! This is true when it comes to curriculum for groups. Some develop poor perceptions about curriculum or don't fully understand how a curriculum is intended to be utilized. Good curriculum is a blessing to groups from those with the gift, wisdom and skills to write it.

To get the most out of curriculum you need to have a right understanding of curriculum. Some expect the curriculum to do all of the work as if it contains some magical mystical power in and of itself. That makes as much sense as setting a football on a field and expecting the ball to run plays and win games in and of itself. So view your curriculum like a football. Just as that ball can be used to run plays and win games in any stadium around the world, so a curriculum is designed to do the same. But it's the coaches and the players who develop, train and run those plays! Group leaders need to be developed and trained to run plays with the curriculum. With this understanding you'll have a newfound appreciation for good curriculum.

One more thing about valuing curriculum. When ministries set out saying they want to create their own curriculum, they have to know what their purpose is. They also need to have a sober understanding of the time it takes to write good curriculum and honest assessment to know if their leadership has the capacity to do that. Most do not and that's where good curriculum is a wonderful tool helping ministries realize their goals in multiplying disciples.

5. Who should lead groups?

If you're starting for the first time, or new to your campus, it may be best for the mature volunteer leadership or staff to launch the first group(s). Then, in those groups train up others who will lead.

Mature student leaders. Once a ministry has spent time discipling students then there should be spiritually mature students who can lead groups. When a staff leader invests in a student who then launches a group to make disciples who in turn birth another group in the next semester or school year that's multiplication!



COMPONENTS OF GROUPS THAT MAKE DISCIPLES

- Care
- Outreach
- Worship
- Discussion/Training
- Accountability
- Prayer

HOW TO MULTIPLY GROUPS

1. Cast vision for birthing new groups.

Leadership and group members need to be trained to see the value of growing disciples in groups. They should be led to understand that healthy groups grow and birth new groups.

2. Raise up apprentice leaders.

To best position groups for multiplication consider a strategy that does not really permit groups to have “co-leaders.” A group should have a leader who identifies an apprentice leader. The group members understand the role of an apprentice leader is to train up to become a leader of a new group. *Leading Life Changing Small Groups* by Bill Donahue has an excellent chapter and additional resources on this topic.

3. Plan the fall semester during the spring!

Leaders for the next school year should be selected and training begun before the current school year ends. There must be opportunity to establish good communication channels and instill the ministry vision into the new leadership. By doing this, leaders can be called upon to return early before the semester begins in order to train and participate in new student outreach activities.

4. Keep group members motivated to live on mission.

As with anything, life is busy and group leaders and members can quickly lose focus on the mission to make disciples of the nations. Vision should be cast to group members on an ongoing basis to consider ways to engage peers in gospel conversations and invite others to the group.