

Growth Group Manual

GROWTH THROUGH SMALL GROUP

By Pastor John Adams

When the Lord Jesus founded His church He modeled small groups. Though He taught thousands at one time, He spent much of His time with small groups. With His twelve disciples Jesus accomplished His most important and lasting ministry. His very closest friends were part of this small group. The gospels contain many accounts of Him ministering to small groups in homes (Matthew 8:14, 13:36; Luke 10:5-7, 38-42)

The world was transformed by the Church that met in the large temple assemblies to be taught by the apostles. And their prayers, fellowship, communion and support took place in small home groups. (Acts 2:46-47, 5:42, 12:12-17, 20; I Corinthians 16:19)

The Bible is full of “one another’s”, such as “Encourage one another,” “Pray for one another,” “Bear one another’s burdens.” It is difficult for a Christian to minister to others or be ministered to effectively without meeting with other believers at least weekly in a small group.

The vision of Hauser Community church is to encourage every member to become a regular participant in a Small Group. We believe it is God’s plan for you to participate in one of our small groups.

WELCOME TO OUR TEAM!

Thank you for saying “yes” to God’s calling you to encourage spiritual growth in others. We congratulate you for opening this book and responding to its challenges.

Many of us have chosen not just live out the days God gives us, but to make every day count! Have you made that same decision? We want to make a positive difference in the lives of those around us. God wants our lives to be tuned instruments of His love. When each of us are growing to be all God wants us to be, then together we are a symphony.

As a church, we are committed to do everything we can to help you be successful in your ministry for the Lord. But instead of each one of us working alone, we are in this as a team; and the end result is greater than the sum of the parts!

Catch the vision! What is God gifting you to do? As you are faithful in its completion, you will discover a ministry to outlast your own life.

How do Growth Groups mesh with the mission of Hauser Community Church?

OUR MISSION AS A CHURCH

OUR MISSION

The mission of Hauser Community Church is to know Christ and become more like Him, to help others know Christ and become more like Him, and to equip each Christian to use their God-given gifts and abilities to meet the needs of others within the church and throughout the world.

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Hauser Community Church is to WORSHIP God, bring people to Jesus and into the FELLOWSHIP of His family, train them in a lifestyle of EVANGELISM, develop them into Christ-like DISCIPLES and equip them for their MINISTRY within the church and throughout the world.

1. Worship – We work to help people enter-in to worship through the words, prayer, and careful selection of worship music for corporate celebrations. Worship should also be an integral part of each Growth Group.
2. Fellowship – We seek to help people really connect as the Family of God, supporting and encouraging each other. One of the essentials of our purpose that primarily occurs in the Growth Group setting.
3. Evangelism – We aim to share the Good News of God's love and forgiveness through Jesus Christ with every person on the south Coast so they can have a real opportunity to accept or Him. Evangelism occurs in the Growth Group as friends are invited, and from the Growth Group as participants grow toward maturity, living out their faith.
4. Discipleship – We disciple by teaching and modeling the word of God so every person who trusts in Christ will become more and more like Him. The Growth Group allows each participant to interact directly with the truth, not just hear it and do nothing. It also provides needed accountability for putting into practice what the Lord is teaching.
5. Ministry – We each have been given one or more spiritual gifts in addition to our natural abilities to use for God's glory. While many do serve in the corporate setting of the church, each person can and should serve one another in the Growth Group. This is a place where spiritual gifts are discovered and nurtured, for use in increasing areas of responsibility.

All of these purpose extend far beyond our community as we send and support missionaries across our nation and around the world

We believe if we are to fulfill our mission we must:

- 1) unite together in prayer,
- 2) live daily filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit,
- 3) exhibit unconditional love for one another, and
- 4) be united in agreement in our vision, mission and purposes.

HOW THREE TYPES OF MINISTRY FIT TOGETHER

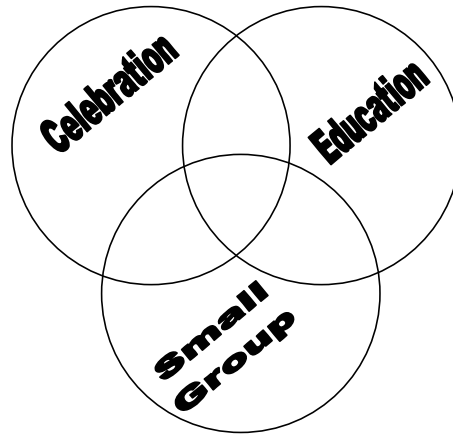
Three main ministry opportunities are provided by our church. Obviously, as illustrated, we can expect overlaps because the Bible is our only authority in each one, and we use our spiritual gifts in each of the three.

CELEBRATION

Celebration is our opportunity for corporate worship and praise. Yes, there is teaching when we are in this large group event, but it is not a giant classroom. Yes there is also fellowship, but it's very difficult to get acquainted while sitting in rows! Both ministry and evangelism also occur.

EDUCATION

Education is our opportunity for content focused training, for children and adults. Yes, there is a worship atmosphere. Yes, there is also fellowship, but this is a classroom with a teacher/student dynamic that is content-oriented. Those who teach are using their gifts in ministry.



GROWTH GROUP

Growth Group is our opportunity to experience “*koinonia*” – *the sharing of life in fellowship* that God wants for His people. It is also a primary opportunity to each put our gifts into operation as we lead, serve, and care for one another. There is also worship and praise, but this is not a replacement for corporate celebration. Yes, there is teaching, but a Growth Group is life-centered rather than lesson-centered.

Repeated in Acts and the New Testament Letters are references of large groups and small groups meeting regularly. Perhaps the best summary is in Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:20), “I have not hesitated to preach to you publicly AND to teach you house to house.”

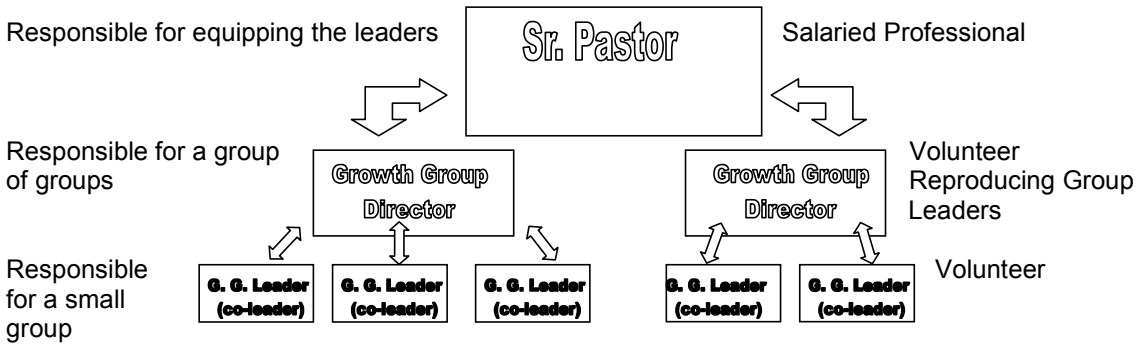
Which one is the most important? The large group (Celebration), or the small group? That’s like asking which of your two children you love the most. The answer is neither one, because they are not in competition. They accomplish different and essential purposes in different ways. We need the corporate worship event AND the small group AND the serious study. Each one serves to reinforce the other two.

This manual is a description of how we believe God wants us to fulfill his commands to minister to one another.

OUR ORGANIZATION

The organization needed for a network of Growth Groups in the life of the church is a rather simple one – even if you are called on to care for hundreds (or thousands) of people. It is the same plan Jethro gave his son-in-law, Moses, in Exodus 18:17-27. Which at it’s most basic, gave leaders responsibility for “*thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.*” Moses listened and because he followed the counsel, “*all the people went home satisfied.*” (verse 23)

The New Testament sequel of this principle is found in Ephesians 4:11-13 where the Apostle says God's people do the ministry as they are equipped by their pastors!



You should notice that each level of leadership there is someone in training; someone who is learning to do what the leader does. This provides a built-in multiplication factor.

OUR LEADERS

THE QUALITIES OF A LEADER

1. ENTHUSIASM

Your attitude is contagious, if you choose to be positive and believe God for great things than those around you will begin to as well.

2. CLEAR TESTIMONY

Being able to give a clear explanation of what Christ has done within our life. Living in keeping with instructions for godly living from Scripture.

3. DEDICATION

Dedicated to living by the Bible and being led by the Spirit. Dedicated to the mission of our Church. Dedicated to bring in people in, building people in Growth Groups and sending them out.

4. SPIRIT-LED LIFE

Not only be filled with the Holy Spirit, but daily keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:25) Effective leaders are those who are sensitive and submissive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, a consistent time of daily prayer and Scripture reading is essential.

5. TIME AND LIFE ISSUES

Group leaders should not be ones who are bogged down in their own problems. This is not to say we must have no problems; that would be impossible. But we cannot be encumbered with problems that are of a magnitude that dealing with them takes most of our time and energy. We must be free from bondage in order to serve wholly and effectively.

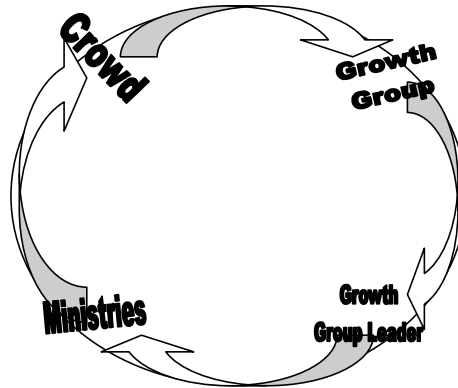
NOTICE: Academic achievement and counseling ability are not required. We can be an effective leader without being a Bible scholar or a psychiatric therapist. Those who are spiritually mature have much to offer from their own life experience with Christ.

THE CYCLE OF SUCCESS

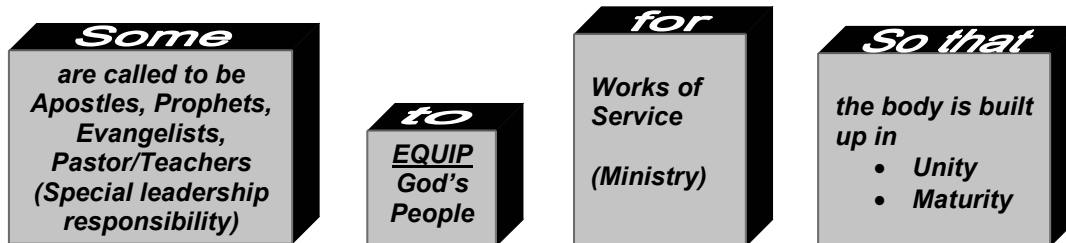
Since Growth Group ministry is the mobilization of lay leaders, one of the most often asked questions is, "Where do we find the leaders?" This is also the question when a church recognizes the need to multiply existing groups. The answer is really rather simple: "From Groups!"

Here's how it works:

1. Recruit everyone possible as a prospect for a Growth Group.
2. When they have become active in a group, they will grow and share responsibility for the health of the group. Many will reach the point of leading the group.
3. The key to growth is LEADERS – God works through people. Every person from a group who comes to a training event is already half trained because of their experiences as part of a healthy Growth Group.
4. With each new leader we are able to expand ministry which immediately puts us in contact with more people who (1) need to be invited to a group, (2) raised up in that group until (3) they are ready to take leadership responsibility and (4) multiply to more people.



EQUIPPING THE LEADERS



This diagram of Ephesians 4:11-13 is God's design for church life. The pastor's responsibility is to coach. God's people do the ministry. Just for fun, put your finger over the "equip" box, and read the passage the way many people behave as if it read. Can you see why there are people just sitting in some churches and not serving?

In the search for effective leaders, our goal is to find F.A.T. ones! Faithful, Available, and Teachable. A person with those characteristics can be greatly used by God. Without them, nothing of spiritual value can be accomplished!

MEET A GROWTH GROUP LEADER

A Growth Group Leader is a person who has answered the call from God to do the work of ministry. Growth Group Leaders come from all walks of life, all backgrounds, both men and women from all age groups: from young adult to senior adults. They share a love for God that is grounded in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and have a clear testimony of His grace in their lives. And because of their love for God, they demonstrate a deep love for people.

Growth Group Leaders schedule their time so they can be with the Lord, growing and preparing themselves for His work. As a result, they fill many roles, not only with the people in their Growth Groups but also in their daily lives. Some of those roles are: Friend, Guide, Listener, and Prayer Intercessor. Sometimes the most effective ministry is just to cry with those who cry and rejoice with those who rejoice.

In all of this, Growth Group Leaders do not rely on their own resources; they trust in the Lord to provide in those areas in which they are themselves weak. Growth Group Leaders realize that they are servants of God, and that He will never call us to do anything for which He is not willing and able to equip us.

Growth Group Leaders realize that they are part of a larger team of people who are all involved in the same kinds of ministries. They receive support from, as well as give support to, the pastoral staff, and the other Growth Group Leaders in the church.

WHAT A GROWTH GROUP LEADER DOES

1. Consistently lives the Christian lifestyle with a daily discipline of prayer as a top priority.
2. Is filled and led by the Holy spirit.
3. Shares the vision of our church. Is dependable and accountable to its leadership and is committed to accomplishing the great things God has called us to do together.
4. Is a member of Hauser Community Church, has completed Growth Group Leader training and is approved by his or her Growth Group Leader and the Growth Group Director.
5. Regularly participates in a Growth Group, either by leading a group or by assisting in the leadership of that group.
6. Attends the weekly Growth Group Leader's meeting and brings a written report of his/her personal ministry.
7. Makes himself or herself available to pray with those who ask for prayer.
8. Works faithfully and diligently each week in doing the work God has called him/her to do.
9. Is faithful in bringing the Lord His tithe and gives time to ministry.
10. Maintains a healthy family life.

HOW A GROUP LEADERSHIP TEAM SERVES

Leadership of a Growth Group happens best when a team leads instead of just one person trying to do it all. God gives ministry abilities to people in a variety of ways. No one is complete in themselves. It's kind of like God's design for a family has both a mom and a dad, each with their own strengths. Different, but complimenting each other.

All of us get side-tracked and/or down occasionally. If we are alone when that happens, our Growth Group is in real trouble (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). We need a team in place to give support and encouragement. Let's remember we're in this for the long term, and to avoid "burn-out" of leaders we work as a team.

Also, the shared responsibility of leading a group helps us develop new leaders. This is essential as we continue multiplying groups.

GROWTH GROUP LEADER

1. Make home visits or phone calls for Growth Group prospects, members and friendship card assignments.
2. Works with Host/Hostess to make people comfortable.
3. Communicates and prays with the Assistant Leader and Host/Hostess before each week's meeting.
4. Recruits and nurture an Assistant Leader(s) in the Group.
5. Initiates conversational prayer.
6. Guides the discussion of the Bible lesson.
7. Is responsible to share a report of the Growth Group meeting with the other Growth Group Leaders.

ASSISTANT GROWTH GROUP LEADER

1. Makes home visits or phone calls for prospects, members and friendship card assignments.
2. On request of the leader:
 - A. Opens the meeting (introduce guests, lead the get-acquainted activity, etc.).
 - B. Makes any announcement the group needs to know.
 - C. Leads the sharing time.
 - D. Leads the conversational prayer time.
 - E. Leads the discussion of the Bible lesson.

GROWTH GROUP HOST/HOSTESS

1. Provide or arranges a comfortable meeting place (home, restaurant, work place).
2. Arranges chairs to encourage participation in the group.
3. Has extra Bibles and pencils for those who need them.
4. Meets all guests at the door; shows them where to put jackets, helps them find a seat if necessary.
5. Has a genuine interest in each guest with a warm and ready smile.
6. Sets the atmosphere of love and acceptance for everyone – regular attenders and guests – by calling them by first name and introducing them to others.
7. Plans the refreshment schedule to involve everyone.
8. Plans for child care if need.

MEET A GROWTH GROUP DIRECTOR

Being a Growth Group Director gives a Growth Group Leader an opportunity for a deeper level of commitment and a broader scope of ministry. Being a Growth Group Director provides a natural step for a Growth Group Leader to develop their leadership and pastoral skills to do even greater things for God as they grow in ministry. Growth Group Directors provide our church with the direct oversight we need in our growing small group network.

PROFILE

1. Has a vision for Growth Group ministries and the importance of overseers.
2. Radiates enthusiasm and looks for God's best in every person.
3. Demonstrates leadership qualities in relationships with people.
4. Is a growing Christian who models Christ-likeness.
5. Has been a catalyst for spiritual growth and a reproducer of leaders and groups.
6. Is cooperative and a team player.
7. Has the time and interest to do the extra work of supervision.

JOB DESCRIPTION

1. Continues to do the things a Growth Group Leader does.
2. Supervises the ministry of not more than five Growth Group Leaders and helps them be successful. The people on their team will be a combination of those they have recruited and trained as well as Growth Group Leaders who may be assigned to them.
3. Supervises the Growth Groups led by their team members and helps keep those groups healthy.
4. Leads their own Growth Group and continues to raise up leaders from their ministry.
5. Looks for potential leaders and recruits them for the next Growth Group Leader Training event.
6. Give pastoral care to each team member and give generous amounts of encouragement along with practical guidance.
7. Initial training will take place at an annual Growth Group Leader Training event. Continual on-the-job training will be under the guidance of the pastoral staff.
8. Growth Group Directors will give a weekly ministry report (Just like their Growth Group Leaders) with a brief comment of their contact with team members.

GOD'S PRIORITIES ON RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout Scripture, we sense God's desire for us to be united with Him in a personal relationship and to each other as "family" or "body." It's Jesus and WE, not Jesus and ME. Notice the prayer model Jesus gave His disciples was a group on. OUR Father, give US, forgive US as WE forgive, lead US not into temptation. A quick look at Acts 2:42-47 gives us a window into how relational the First Century Church was.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷praising 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

In order to be a relational church, the focus must always be the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the hub of the wheel of Koinonia (fellowship), the unchanging point that connects the rest of the body. With Jesus in the center, the church then provides multiple opportunities for small groups where we can really get to know each other. Neighborhood groups, special needs groups, youth groups, children's groups, prayer groups, project or ministry groups. The larger a church becomes, the smaller it must become.

In a Growth Group the church is not just sitting and listening, it is connecting with one another. In a Growth Group knowing and loving, sharing and listening, correcting and encouraging

occurs because we ARE family. In this kind of relational climate, a person is able to really be honest with others, to share their joys and hurts, and know that others really do care.

THE BIG DEAL ABOUT GROWTH GROUPS

In order to look through a window into church life in the First Century, reread the Acts 2:42-47 paragraph above. When we identify the distinguishing characteristics of what was happening among those first Christians, we will quickly realize that all of those things happen best in a small group.

CLOSE FAMILY – This definitely would be the number one response if we surveyed active participants in our Growth Groups. We meet regularly with a group of people who love us without condemnation and we learn to love them. We forgive and are forgiven. We laugh and tell stories. We give and receive. We cry and encourage each other when the going gets tough. We believe in each other, even when we don't agree. We don't go out and break the confidence of those who trusted us in the group.

THE APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE TO DAILY LIFE – Private devotions and Bible study is vital, but application is the goal. Jesus commissioned us to “teach them to DO everything I've commanded you” (Matthew 28:20) The Growth Group helps us discover and put truth into practice holding us accountable for what we are learning. Each week when we are together we share how we are applying the truths we've discovered. The finest sermon ever delivered has one serious drawback! It is one-way, it's a monologue. In the group, we can stop and discuss and pray at any point.

GROWTH IN PERSONAL PRAYER LIFE – Effective prayer is a skill that is learned. We learn to pray better by praying! The group is like a laboratory, and what an encouragement to pray more when we hear of God's answers each week!

SPIRITUAL GROWTH – The large group corporate worship event is not a substitute for a Growth Group meeting, but the Growth Group is not enough by itself, either. Both enhance and enrich the other. Christians grow when they are active in a group, just sitting in an audience is not enough.

SHARING YOUR STORY – Everyone has hurts and dreams, struggles and victories, questions and answers. Who can we talk with about our own joys and sorrows? When we share a sorrow, it's not quite so heavy. When we share a joy, the celebration is multiplied.

ENCOURAGEMENT AND EDIFICATION – This is something we think about often, but we don't always say the affirming things we think. The Growth Group helps us stay up-to-date with our desire to say words that lift.

EFFECTIVE ONE-TO-ONE PASTORAL CARE – God never intended salaried pastors to take care of everybody. It's impossible. With a network of groups, the pastors work with the Growth Group Leaders who minister to their group. Ministry flows back the same way: Group Leader to Pastoral Staff.

UNLIMITED MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES – A Growth Group Leader can build a ministry of any size because of the multiplication factor. God blesses our faithful ministry and we multiply new leaders and groups who multiply new leaders and groups!

FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM – The good seed of the Gospel is sown in fertile soil with a climate of love. That seed is cultivated. Putting your full trust in Jesus Christ is natural when the deepest needs of your life are being met.

DISCIPLING NEW CONVERTS – The best place to develop a new Christian to maturity is in the group that loved him/her to Jesus!

CREATING MISSION PROJECTS – As needs arise, the group responds quicker (and more generously) than a committee ever will. Meals, transportation, childcare, flowers, cash, can be directed right where the group realizes there is a need among them.

DEVELOPMENT OF STRONG LEADERS – People become responsible only when they are given responsibility. People who are active in a group are learning how to lead without even realizing it because it is a shared ministry, not a one-person show.

HOW TO KEEP GROUPS HEALTHY

PRINCIPLE #1: BALANCE

A successful Growth Group has four things that will happen each time that group meets: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship and Ministry. When one who is not a Christian attends, or the group disperses for the week, Evangelism takes place as well. All five must be used and kept in balance for long term health in the life of the group. A balanced group produces healthy, well-balanced Christians.

If a group gets out of balance, some of the purposes will be neglected. For example, if the group becomes primarily a sharing event, people are cheated out of time for prayer and Bible discussion. Or, if it is allowed to be mostly a Bible study, then the group is out of balance and only students will attend.

By referring to the suggested order of a Growth Group meeting (*page 17*) you should notice that the various purposes are intermingled throughout the meeting; Sharing, singing, praying, discussing, serving, application, and praying. It flows, but with balance. Let's look at each part more closely.

SHARING YOUR STORY

There's nothing like a life-centered testimony to illustrate what is being taught. When a person shares with the group, he/she feels more part of the group. If it is a joy or a sorrow, something wonderful happens when the "family" loves a person enough to listen and encourage. Everyone of us has at least one hurt and at least one dream, and God seems very near when we share either or both!

We never outgrow our need to ask for the help of other Christians. When a leader has a need in their own life, they should ask their Growth Group for help. By being vulnerable themselves, their group discovers that this is a safe place. We are family, and we trust and defend each other.

Once in awhile, a person might want to "share" someone else's faults. At times, these come in the clever disguise of a prayer request. When this happens, the leader must lead by reminding the

group of James 5:16, *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed*, and that we don't allow people to confess anyone else's faults – only their own.

CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER

Having a conversation together with God is a quick way to build unity, first by praising God and bringing the group into God's presence. Later, by praying in response to the needs expressed in the group. In closing, then, we respond in prayer to God's truth and help each other make application of it in our lives.

The easiest way for people to learn to pray out loud in a group is to pray conversationally. This is illustrated and explained on page 20. Christians who have learned to pray "traditional prayers" will be challenged to relearn now to pray in order to free those in the group who haven't learned long, fancy prayers.

APPLICATION OF THE BIBLE

We are interested in far more than just gaining more Bible knowledge, but in how the truth is going to make a difference in our daily life. We believe we are called to be "doers of the Word, and not hearers only" (Matthew 7:24-27 and James 1:22).

We also believe the Bible contains everything necessary for our salvation and the Christian walk. The Holy Spirit is with us to illumine its truth so we can know what pleases the Lord (Ephesians 5:10) and to help us be successful in every area of our lives. To do this, the Bible is our only authority.

PRINCIPLE #2: PARTICIPATION

Even though participation is the key to the success of a group, there are some things to avoid in reaching that goal. For example, the leader does not directly ask anyone to pray or read or speak. Instead, the leader will help even the most timid person to see that they too, have something to offer – but without pressure. Avoid taking turns around a circle. That tends to be intimidating and causes tension in the group. Also, the leader is not called to be the final authority. He/She is the discussion facilitator or guide, making everyone comfortable enough to enter in at any time.

The seating arrangement of the group will make a big difference in the way people participate. The best is a circle with only one empty chair (for the person who is expected next week). Everyone can see and be seen; hear and be heard.

Beware of two dangers that creep into groups and diminish the level of participation.

Danger No. 1: The person who talks too much. Most of the time, this person is lonely and is reaching out for acceptance, but their method is actually having the opposite effect! If they persist, perhaps a statement such as these would be helpful.

- "Thank you for your comments. Now let's hear what someone else has to say."
- or "Let's continue now with our lesson."
- or "I'd like to hear from someone who hasn't had a chance to talk yet."

Eventually they will appreciate your loving way of helping them be quiet, because down inside they don't want to be rejected.

Danger No. 2: The person who wants to argue.

There are two things that will divide groups that really do love each other...doctrine and politics. Polarity of the group between "us" and "them" is guaranteed if a leader fails to lead in reinforcing this principle. We just do not allow doctrinal discussion that is divisive or argumentative.

Another thing to remember is that some people would rather introduce controversy than to give attention to what needs to happen in their own lives! Their discussion of some "pet doctrine" serves only as a smoke screen to hide their own real needs. An effective leader will prevent that kind of rabbit trail with a statement like:

- "It is not our purpose to discuss divisive doctrines here. If you have a question about that, give our pastor a call, and he'll help you with it. Let's go on now with our lesson."

PRINCIPLE #3: LOVING RESPONSE

To respond lovingly and immediately to a need expressed is a skill best learned in a Growth Group. Once it is learned, it affects all of the other relationships of life (home, work, church). The guide is given to us in I Corinthians 14:1, "*Let love be your number one aim.*" There is something very unloving about letting a person just sit there when they have just shared a deep concern from their life. Love does not respond later, but immediately. In many cases, you will need to shift the focus of the group to caring for the need expressed at that moment.

Let's apply the principle of a loving response to the meeting of a healthy group:

SHARING YOUR STORY – How do you help people learn to share love with each other?

Probably the very best way is example. The leader opens up areas of their with life "I-messages" and asks for prayer. The pattern and the promise is ours in James 5:16.

- A. Admit our faults to one another.
- B. Pray for each other.
- C. Become a healing fellowship.

Every week when we meet, we have opportunity to practice building each other up with words of affirmation, appreciation and blessing. We commit ourselves to each other to be everything we can be for God. We want to help build healthy self-esteem in each other (Romans 14:19).

CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER – During the intercessory prayer time, the temptation is to gather all the requests, and then enter into prayer as almost an afterthought. Gather requests, but build-in time to pray for each request.

Another way to lovingly respond in prayer is to place a chair in the middle of the circle. While a person sits in the "LOVE SEAT," the others gather around and gently lay their hands on them. God answers prayers of faith and love! Be careful, though, when a person lets you pray for them this way, that the group enters into prayer and not a chance to preach little bits of advice at them.

BIBLE APPLICATION – Every person in the group is encouraged to share their ideas as the verses are discussed. Every person is made to feel that their questions and thoughts are important. Generous amounts of “Thank you” and “That’s a new insight” and “That’s an interesting point” will help everyone feel like part of the group.

Remember, dialogue is what we’re after. However, the group is not a therapy session, and the leader is not a physiologist. People with deep emotional problems must be referred to competent counsel. That is love’s response.

PRINCIPLE #4: FOLLOW UP

One of the most effective ways to keep groups healthy and the meetings alive is faithful and consistent follow-up. Regular attenders are called and given words of encouragement and prayer concern. Those who are absent are reminded of the group’s love, not in the form of a guilt trip but just to let them know they were missed. New people are called in friendship and invited to visit. In fact, the follow up of the people is a large part of a Growth Group’s ministry.

This one-to-one caregiving, away from the group, is something everyone gets to do, but especially the leadership team. Shepherding, pastoring, caring for a group. It means using the telephone as an instrument of ministry.

Ideas are given on page 23 for the building of a possibility list. Everyone in a group gets to help with this because the best source of new group members are from the people the group already knows. To keep the vision of outreach before the group, we suggest an empty chair in the circle for the person who will come next week to sit. Pray for that person, and approach them. New people brought into a group will help a group to continue to be a family instead of becoming a holy club. Comfortable – yes. Exclusive – no.

Another part of follow up is the tender loving care that a difficult person needs. It is possible that a troubled person can be so disruptive in a group that people start staying away. Even though we encourage lots of sharing, we cannot allow the group to become a dumpsite! Leaders must lead, making it clear that a troubled person is loved, but “no dumping is permitted.”

Many times a hurting person becomes demanding of the group’s attention. But if this is allowed to persist, the group may well self-destruct. The leader cannot surrender his/her leadership to a problem-plagued person. If a leader needs help with a “grace builder”, the pastor stands ready to assist. He has had some experience with people like this before!

PORTRAIT OF A HEALTHY GROUP

GGL . . . GROWTH GROUP LEADER: The leader of the group and many times a leader couple.

aGGL. . . assistant Growth Group leader; perhaps a couple.

H . . . Host/ Hostess: The person(s) responsible for making everybody comfortable and welcomed.

Gb . . . Grace Builder: The person God brings to a group who continually tests the boundaries.

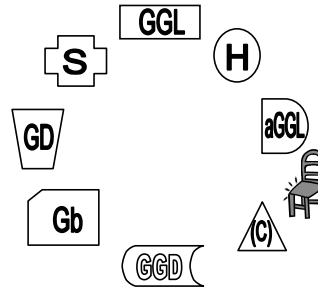
(C) . . . The person who has the responsibility to care for the children. Not every group will need to provide this.

GD . . . Growing disciple: The person who rarely ever misses a group meeting and is alive in their faith.

The **empty chair** that helps a group focus in prayer for the person who will accept an invitation and visit to group next week.

S . . . Seeker: The person who has not yet made a commitment to Christ, but is searching for God's purpose in their life.

GGD...Growth Group Director: The person who visits the group occasionally to encourage the leadership team and fellowship with the people.



HOW GROUP LEADERS LEAD

1. **Leaders follow.** It is Christ who leads us. Our part is to follow our Lord with a “Yes, Lord” attitude. Following the Lord with a submissive attitude is truly an adventure. The weeks and months and years unfold with such a variety of opportunities to bless the lives of the people we serve. But it would be wasted effort without the Lordship of Jesus and the counsel of the Holy Spirit in our lives. It is our following that qualifies us to lead. To the same degree I am following Christ, I am effective in leading others.
2. **Stay tuned-up spiritually.** Whatever it takes. The Holy Spirit will be hindered if we, as leaders, are spiritually indifferent, or burdened with our own unconfessed sins. If we are not open to the working of the Holy Spirit in our own life, we can hardly be a channel for His working in the group. **BE A SPIRIT-FILLED CHRISTIAN.**

Some of our Growth Group Leaders have decided to “tune up.” That means to set the alarm 30 minutes earlier on the day their Growth Group meets to spend that time in prayer. Others fast the noon meal on that day in order to be spiritually prepared for the responsibility of leading their group. Whatever it costs, let's make the needed adjustments to be a tuned instrument of God's love.

3. **Lead in Love.** Lovingly caring for those in our Growth Group is not something we do, it is a way of life. Love, acceptance and forgiveness are given to everyone around us. Our greatest need is to love and be loved. However, some people are easier to love than others. There are those who are so easy to be with, their attitudes are positive, and they always seem to bless us with encouraging words. And then there are a few “grace builders” in each of our lives. Do they need love? Absolutely! Even if our love to them is not returned, as a child of God whose life has been blessed, we chose to bless, to heal, to lift, and to love in Jesus’ Name.

4. **Be a learning leader.** Don’t even try to have all the answers. We do not expect our leaders to know all the answers, we expect them to be learners. The best leaders are good learners. It’s okay to say “I don’t know” often. If the question raised is worthy of further study and discussion, write it down for everyone and perhaps ask the question at the next Growth Group Leader’s meeting. Also, when a leader doesn’t have a quick answer (or even when he/she does) it gets people thinking to simply say, “does someone have an answer for us?”

5. **Relax.** A relaxed spirit in the group will create a climate in which sharing, praying and discussion will grow rapidly.
 - A. We seek an honesty and openness that is not afraid to discuss or consider other points of view. Trust the Holy Spirit to be our teacher.
 - B. It is a tremendous asset when a leader accepts himself/herself as a person of worth, and then can reach out to others and make them comfortable in who they are.
 - C. A good leader learns to be shock-proof; not judgmental or harsh or overly opinionated – nor overly reactivate when an individual says something that “goes against the grain.”
 - D. If we create a loving atmosphere, the Holy Spirit will do His work. That’s a promise!

6. **Laugh a lot.** A good sense of humor is a valuable asset for a leader. We don’t take ourselves too seriously. This does not mean that a leader is a good joke teller, but he/she has a healthy and positive view of life, a freedom in their spirit that allows laughter to flow. According to Proverbs 17:22, laughter:
 - releases tension
 - relaxes our bodies
 - rests our spirits
 - renews our hearts
 - reorients our life perspective

7. **Ask for help.** When a leader is having personal problems or needs help with their group, they should quickly go to their Growth Group Director or to their pastor for help. It’s not weakness, it is a strength. At our church, we accept each other where we are and work hard to help each other to be overcomers, successful in life and ministry. God has given us to each other and has put us together in such a way that we can help each other with the blind spots. Trying to be independent and pretending that we don’t need the others in Christ’s Body has never been a mark of a strong Christian leader. Being a Growth Group Leader is not a solo flight. It is being a team member who has a coach ready to help us be successful.

**SUGGESTED ORDER FOR A
SUCCESSFUL GROWTH GROUP MEETING**

FELLOWSHIP with those who come early. Refreshments available.

Welcome words

Introduction of Guests
Get Acquainted activity

Worship

Thanksgiving prayer
Singing (optional)
Praise reports
Appreciation for each other

Intercessory Prayer

A need expressed
Several lead in prayer
Thank you, Lord
(Sequence repeated as time permits)

Discussion of Bible Lesson

Seek full participation
Seek practical application

Closing Prayer

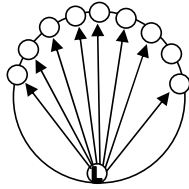
Personal commitment of the Biblical truth discussed

FELLOWSHIP with those who want to stay.

Note: In order to be attractive for first-time visitors (churched or unchurched) and to avoid losing leaders because of "burn-out," evening groups need to be kept to one hour and daytime groups to ninety minutes. There is fellowship before and after the meeting, but everyone knows we start on time and stop on time!

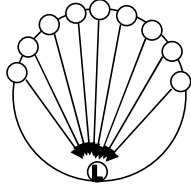
SUCCESSFUL GROUP DYNAMICS

NOT THIS:



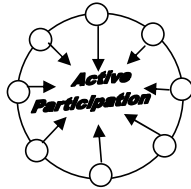
. . . . The leader doing all the talking and the people all the listening.

NOR THIS:



. . . . Each of the group members responding only to the leader in answering the questions.

BUT THIS:



. . . . Group members interacting with each other, the leader guiding the discussion.

SUGGESTED GET ACQUAINTED QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS DEALING WITH THE PAST:

1. Tell about the greatest birthday present you ever received.
2. Share one of the happiest days of your life.
3. What is the best advice you ever received?
4. What can you identify as a "turning point" in your life?
5. Share a time when your feelings were hurt.
6. Share a time when you believe you were led by God.
7. If you could change anything about yourself, what are two things you would NOT change?
8. Name one book (other than the Bible) that has had significant influence on your life. Why?

QUESTIONS DEALING WITH THE PRESENT:

1. What do you do that helps you connect with God?
2. How would you describe yourself to someone who does not know you?
3. Describe a typical day of your life.
4. If you had to move, and could only take three things with you, what would you take?
5. Give three words to describe how you feel right now.
6. Name one model marriage. What is it you most admire about their marriage?
7. What, if anything, appeals to you about being rich?
8. If you were a mouse, what would be the most daring thing you would try to do while the cat was away?

QUESTIONS DEALING WITH THE FUTURE:

1. Describe your ideal house and how you would furnish it.
2. What would you do if someone willed you a million dollars?
3. What is something you think God wants you to do?
4. For what spiritual goal are you reaching? Why?
5. If you could do anything you want this time next year, what would it be?
6. What epitaph do you want on your tombstone?
7. If, for some reason, you were forced to leave North America, where would you go?
8. What do you look forward to most about growing old?
9. In a difficult time, name three people you would like to have praying for you?

GUIDE TO WORSHIP IN A GROUP

TRUE WORSHIP

True worship is the adoring response of all that the believer is – mind, emotions, will and body – to all that God is and says and does. The motive for worship is love; the power for worship is the indwelling Spirit of God. Whenever we build an altar, as is the case whenever we meet for Growth Group, we must ask the Holy Spirit to light the fire.

We believe that one of the primary ways to worship God is through a specified worship time within the Growth Group meeting. This may include many different ways of worship, including prayer, testimonies and music. The best way to teach worship is to practice it. Let it evolve out of the simpleness of those gifts that are evident within your Growth Group.

PLAN THE WORSHIP TIME

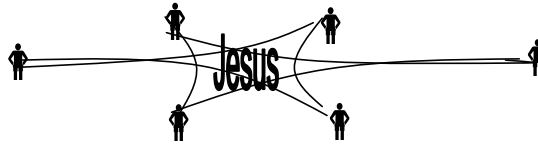
By carefully planning a time of praise involving singing, prayer and sharing, we all become changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, the One we adore through our worship. Here are some suggestions:

1. Start small. Ask if any plays an instrument to accompany the singing (guitar, keyboard or CD!).
2. Select two or three familiar choruses and learn a new one occasionally. Remember, we worship with untrained voices as well as the few trained ones.
3. Allow time for the Holy Spirit to minister. Avoid rushing through quiet times between songs, testimonies, and prayer.
4. Even though the worship time is planned beforehand, gently let the Holy Spirit interrupt the plan and give freedom and spontaneity.

THE GOAL

Coming together from the busyness of life, from the responsibilities of the day, our worship time helps us concentrate. Worship helps us put the cares of life “outside” and sit at the feet of our Lord like Mary did (Luke 10:39). Our goal in worship is to bring every person into the very presence of our Living Lord.

GUIDE TO CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER



Matthew 18:19-20 – “I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.”

Conversational prayer is an informal way of talking to God in the same way we talk to each other. God desires our fellowship and we begin by simply acknowledging His presence in the group, based on the Scripture above. The objective is not to impress the others around you; just be honest with God. Be less concerned with the form of the prayer and the words than with talking God. He knows our hearts anyway!

A few helpful guidelines:

- 1. Spend more of your time praying than sharing requests.** While sharing a request or an answer to prayer is an important part of fellowship, actually praying for those needs is vital. To that end, allow some time for each one who wishes to share a request to do so. Each group member should record the request or praise report. Then go to prayer. (With especially urgent requests, you may choose to stop and ask several to pray for that need before proceeding.)
- 2. Agree together.** Prayer shouldn't be a disjointed time, but a time when we can join in meaningful prayer in which we agree together concerning the requests at hand. From our hearts, we want to be praying along with the person who is praying aloud. He/She will then in turn be praying along with us as we pray.
- 3. Pray briefly.** By each person praying two, three or four sentences as a time, more people can pray and be prayed for than if a few people pray longer. Also, first-time pray-ers are intimidated by long, fancy prayers and will not speak to the Lord out loud in a group because they can't pray like a “professional.”
- 4. Pray spontaneously, not in sequence.** Don't pray around the circle, but let each person pray for that which interests them. For example, if six subjects are prayed over in the conversational prayer time, a person may have a vital interest in only three of them.

Praying spontaneously does not mean praying thoughtlessly. Pray from your heart to God about the topic or need at hand. Take time to let the Holy Spirit guide your thoughts.

An additional tool you may wish to use are *“I'm praying for ____”* slips. These slips allow a person to record a request, and have that request distributed to one other person in the group who will pray for that request each day that week.

As you begin:

Leaders usually need to give some direction when they call a group of people to prayer. Then the group may need a few silent moments to quiet their hearts and collect their thoughts. Normally the focus of prayer starts with the worship and adoration of God. Praise and thanksgiving are always appropriate, but it's also an excellent way to get started.

We suggest that you pray before the discussion, so as not to “squeeze out” this important time. The leader can call the group to consider personal requests. The challenge is to avoid sharing each request at great length and running out of time to pray. The leader may need to jump in (if necessary) with a “Let’s pray for _____.” Or a “Who will lead us in this prayer?”

If another request is given before the group gets to pray, the leader needs to hold the new request until the first one is brought to the Lord. Then introduce the next topic.

As listed on page 17, the prayer time at the close of a meeting is a brief one. The direction of that prayer time is personal commitment to apply the Biblical truth to life.

HOW TO MULTIPLY A GROUP

While we are excited about the growth God has given us, we know He has more in store for us than we’ve already experienced. Much like a body grows by the multiplication of cells rather than by those cells becoming large, so growth happens with multiplication rather than expansion. In order to minister to needs, our groups will need to multiply. We facilitate multiplication by communicating the vision and by raising up new leaders.

HOW TO HELP THE PROCESS

- **Share responsibility** with others in the group, such as: leading the prayer time, leading parts of the lesson, welcoming guests, planning a special event, and checking-in with regular attendees and those who may attend. Those who serve will receive immediate affirmation from the group, and are being trained through participation.
- If more than ten people are in attendance, break into smaller groups for prayer. More people can pray and be prayed for.
- Include praying for those who will be sent out from the group to start a new group in each week’s prayer agenda. This is another way of communicating vision. It helps people begin to hear what the Holy Spirit may be saying to them.
- When a group is ready to multiply, it is a little like a child leaving home as an adult. There are mixed emotions. But as a group, this is a crucial milestone! Praise the Lord! The goal will always be: ***Bring them in, build them up and send them out.***

CHILDREN AND LIFE GROUPS

QUESTION: What about the children? Do you have children meeting with adults during their weekly Growth Group meetings? Or do they have separate meetings?

Here are some options that groups have used. We've listed the ones we think are most ideal first. The best option is the one that works for that particular group.

CHILDCARE OPTIONS

1. The children have their own Growth Group that meets separate from the adults in another room or a house next door. A Growth Group Leader leads them to accomplish the same three things the adults need: Worship, Fellowship, Discipleship, and possibly also Evangelism and Ministry. The children look forward to their group as much as the adults do to theirs.
2. Same as #1 except with a rotation of adults to lead the group, using the materials our Children's Pastor provides.
3. The children may be with the adults in the early part of the meeting and then go to their own group during the adult lesson. They will either do a lesson/activity or receive child care.
4. Plan the group as a family event occasionally with the children present. This needs to be more activity oriented rather than only discussion with questions and answers. There are some good Family Night materials available.
5. Arrange for someone to be paid to do child care (either in another part of the house or at a neighbor's), and everyone in the group contributes to the cost.
6. Announce to their people that they will need to make their own arrangements for child care during the Growth Group meetings.
7. Schedule the Growth Group at the same time as a regular children's activity at church. The major draw-back is that it prevents anyone in that group from serving in children's ministry at that time.

QUESTIONS TO ASK FOR LOCATING POTENTIAL GROUP MEMBERS

(The person needs to answer ALL questions with a "yes" to join)

1. Are you interested in helping start a Growth Group?
2. Will you commit one hour each week to help make this group successful?
3. Do you know three other people who could join with you in the future?

NOTE: You and your three guests, plus each of their three guests would produce a Growth Group of 13 people already.

POSSIBILITY LIST

Most of the people who will become part of your group are people you already have some relationship with. Who in your existing relationships isn't already in a Growth Group?

Family (immediate or extended)

Friends (neighbors, kids, sports, school)

Fellowship (from church)

Fun (gym, hobbies, hang-outs)

Factory (work, professional areas)

Other

Small Group Tools

Comment: Need to insert sample Communication Card

THE COMMUNICATION CARD

Sample

Everyone who attends our Sunday services is asked to communicate with us on a Communication Card. Information for the card that is needed in the office is recorded. The card is then assigned to a Growth Group Leader for follow-up if there is a need expressed.

A first time visitor will receive a welcome to our church and an invitation to a Growth Group in their area, or according to their interest. A sample phone contact is listed below.

Dear _____

Please contact this person(s) and:

- Welcome as a recent visitor at our church.
- Call as prospect for your small group.
- Follow-up with them on prayer request.
- Make hospital or home visit.
- _____

Indicate on back of card or on attached note a short summary of your contact with this person.

The assignment for follow-up on the Communication Card is made by the pastoral staff and a brief report of the contact is written on the back of this card, which is stapled to the

Communication Card. This brief report makes it possible for us to effectively connect a guest with a Growth Group where they best fit, or that meets a particular area of need.

The Communication Card in the hands of a Growth Group Leader is a very important link in the on-going tender loving care of our people.

HELPFUL HINTS BEFORE MAKING THE CONTACT

1. **Pray for yourself** . . . for a cleansed heart and mind . . . to be an instrument of love . . . filled with the Holy Spirit . . . for wisdom about when to listen and when/what to speak.
2. **Pray for the person** . . . that God's Will would be done in their life – spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically . . . that they will sense God's love through the call.
3. **Pray after the contact** . . . that the person will have a desire to know the Lord better . . . that they will seek the help of the church body in the days ahead.
 - Be genuine . . . caring about him/her as a very special person. Smile as you talk to them either on the phone or in person.
 - Be prepared . . . invest some quality time, but be considerate of their time schedule.
 - Be available. . . someone they can contact in the future if the Lord so leads.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL CONVERSATION

“Keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” II Timothy 4:5

We want our Growth Group Leaders to do the work of an evangelist . . . this means that you will need to learn to be alert for spiritual interest. When you sense spiritual interest, sensitively share as much of the gospel as the person is ready to hear. These principles will help you be a more effective witness:

- Earn the right to be heard.
- Develop a relationship by listening.
- Move from the general to the specific.

INTEREST RAISING QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion, what is the greatest spiritual need in our world today?
2. Do you think much about spiritual things?
3. In your opinion, what would a person have to do to become a Christian?
4. What would you do to become a Christian?
5. Would you like to hear how you can get to know God personally?

OUR ACCOUNTABILITY

GROWTH GROUP LEADER COMMITMENT

1. Today, _____, 20____,
I, _____, before my Lord Jesus, commit myself to
serve Him and our church by being a Growth Group Leader, as together we fulfill our
mission to the world.

Address: _____

Phone: _____ (Mobile) _____ (email) _____

2. As a Growth Group Leader at Hauser Community Church, I commit myself to:
- The support of Growth Group continuity through the development and training of trainees
 - Spend quality time in prayer daily
 - Spend time in the Word daily
 - Be a Biblical giver of both tithes and offerings
 - Be faithful and loyal to the church and to its leadership
 - Allow the Holy Spirit to control my life
 - Attend weekly Growth Group Leader meetings
 - Give a brief report of my ministry weekly.

GROWTH GROUP DIRECTOR COMMITMENT

1. Today, _____, 20____, and for the next twelve months,

I, _____, before my Lord Jesus commit myself to serve Him and our church by being a Growth Group Director, as together we fulfill our mission to the world.

Address: _____

Phone: _____ (Mobile) _____ (email) _____

2. As Growth Group Director at Hauser Community Church, I commit myself to:

- The support of Growth Group continuity through the development and training of Growth Group Leaders
- Spend quality time in prayer daily
- Spend time in the Word daily
- Be a Biblical giver of both tithes and offerings
- Be faithful and loyal to the church and to its leadership
- Allow the Holy Spirit to control my life
- Attend weekly Growth Group Director Preparation meetings
- Give a brief report of my ministry weekly.

3. As a Growth Group Director, I will give of myself to help the following Growth Group Leaders be successful in their ministry and supervise the groups they lead.

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