

SMALL GROUP LEADER

A MINISTRY DESCRIPTION FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS

Introduction

Fundamentally the church is a fabric of relationships. Jesus gives a clear command to love each other (John 13:34, 35), with His love for us being the standard.

Throughout the New Testament there are specific suggestions about church relationships. Congregations are to care for each other and give attention to the needs of each other: (I Cor. 12:25; Phil. 2:4), forbear and forgive (Eph. 2:2, 32), defer to one another (Eph. 5:21), bear each other's burdens (Gal. 6:2), teach and admonish each other (Col. 3:16, 17), encourage and build up one another (I Thess. 5:11), confess and pray together (James 5:16), and love each other (I John 3:22, 23; 4:4, 11).

To be a Christian is to join a body whose head is Jesus Christ. It is a theological contradiction to become a Christian and then live in isolation and independence.

Since building relationships is a primary function of the church, it must provide settings and structures that give opportunities for this to happen. Experience has demonstrated that the small group is one of the best vehicles for the church to become what God intends it to be—a people sharing Christ, meeting each other's needs and reaching out in love to the world.

Duties of the Small Group Leader

There are some basic tasks for you when you take the responsibility of leading a small group:

1. *Preparations.* Before the meeting the leader should pray specifically for the people who are coming. Pray also for yourself as a person and as leader. Specific preparations must be made prior to each meeting:

Arrangements. What needs to be done to care for details such as location, seating, Bibles, temperature, food, child care, music, materials, etc.?

Relationships. How will you help people to feel cared for and caring? What will you do to help people get to know each other and build positive relationships among the members of the group?

Study topic or task. What steps will you follow to accomplish the task or go through the study? You will want to make a list of questions you will use and estimate the time each will take. What are your goals for the praying time? What will be your prayer format? Who will pray?

Time. How much time is available and how will you divide it? Block out the time into major segments and jot down the activity to be done in each segment. What is your "real" starting time? Your firm closing time? How will you open and close each segment? Are you attempting too much? Too little? Do you want to ask other people to take responsibility for some segments at this meeting?

2. *Facilitator.* During the group meeting the most important function of the leader is to ask questions. As group leader you are not the expert lecturer but the facilitator for discussion and sharing. Be sensitive to individual needs. Try to create a climate of openness and acceptance through affirmation and encouragement. You will direct the flow of discussion by making sure everyone has an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings. Try to keep the discussion on the subject. Make sure everyone in the group can see each other by arranging the chairs in a circle and removing the empty chairs. The leader helps the group members to be personal by sensitively asking questions that enable them to share openly without feeling coerced, intimidated or put on the spot. You will also need to deal with the problem of those who talk too much. Help the group focus on solutions rather than only problems. Ask questions that help people be positive and affirmative about themselves and other group members.

3. *Caring for individuals.* Outside the group meetings the leader stays in touch with group members by phone. You are the lay pastor of the people in your group. Watch for those who seem to be hurting or have questions during the meetings. A prime time to offer care and support is during the informal conversation immediately following group meetings. Try to plan your time so you can stay by, but don't let troubled people consume your time and energy. Be free to say, "You seem to be hurting a lot. How can I assist you in getting help?"
4. *Outreach.* A healthy group always "keeps an empty chair" for new people. One of the tasks of the leader is to find likely group members, invite them to try the meetings, and help the group to make them feel comfortable and safe. You should watch for visitors on Sabbaths, newcomers in the community, individuals going through lonely times in their lives and especially unchurched friends and acquaintances who seem to be opening up to spiritual things.

Resource Materials

The following resources are recommended for your ministry. You can purchase these by calling AdventSource (800-328-0525), the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955) or your local Christian bookstore.

Dynamic Small Groups: How to Make Them Happen, by W. Clarence Schilt is written by an Adventist pastor on how to begin and nurture small groups.

Nine Facets of the Effective Small-Group Leader is a video training series with Carl George. One of the best training seminars for small group leaders available.

Prayer Works, by Kurt Johnson. A deeply spiritual exploration of prayer in study guide format, perfect for small group study.

Sabbath School Leader magazine has articles from time to time about small group process. Also the Teaching Helps each week give sharing questions and relational Bible study.

Sharing Scripture, is a quarterly relational Bible study tool for use in small groups published in coordination with the Seventh-day Adventist Adult Sabbath School lesson.

Small Groups for the End-time, by Kurt Johnson. Everything you need to know about how to start and lead a small group to joyful renewal in Jesus.

Small Group Outreach, by Kurt Johnson. Find successful ideas for evangelism through small groups.

The Serendipity New Testament for Groups published by Serendipity House is an excellent source of relational Bible studies that encourage self disclosure and build fellowship in a small group.

Visit AdventSource On-Line at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest resources available for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 1-800-328-0525.

For information about additional resources and answers to your questions call the Adventist Plusline at 1-800-732-7587 or visit them on-line at www.plusline.org.