The State of the Small-Group Movement

What the pioneers have to say inspiring stories of success get the support you need women in the movement
Isn’t it fantastic when we experience authenticity, transformation, and deeper relationships as a result of small groups?

But that’s not always our experience. Small groups are hard work. Leading a small-group ministry is even harder. I get it. As a former small-group director, I’ve been there. Casting vision, recruiting leaders, launching new groups—it’s never-ending.

Worst of all, it’s easy to feel lonely in leadership. Who can we turn to for community? Where should we go for advice for our toughest ministry problems?

Despite these challenges, small groups are worth it. They really are. Even those days when we feel like everything is a mess, our leaders are underdeveloped, our groups are losing steam, and too many people are unconnected, God is in our midst. He is capable of doing so much in and through groups—even in the seeming chaos.

At SmallGroups.com, we’re rooting for you. We know it’s a hard job, and we want to help you do it more effectively and efficiently. From keeping you informed about ministry trends to providing expert advice and proven tips for solving your biggest issues, we have everything you need for thriving small-group ministry.

No matter what model you use, you’ll recognize our contributors: Ben Reed, Carolyn Taketa, Rick Howerton, Bill Donahue, Scott Boren, Pat Sikora, Steve Gladen, Michael Mack, and many more. They share their wisdom from years in ministry so you can make informed decisions for your context.

This booklet provides a sample of the kinds of resources we provide: from reporting on the small-group movement (page 2) to tips on being a healthy leader (page 15) and how to find the right model for small groups in your context (page 8). Plus, we love to publish stories of people doing unique things through small groups, like Aaron Cho at Quest Church in Seattle (page 12). We hope it will help you grow in your leadership whether you read it on your own or with other leaders in your ministry.

Community can be hard, but we want you to know that we’re here to help. We’ll keep you focused on the possibilities and provide proven advice to take your ministry to the next level. Community invites us to grow, challenges us to think differently, and connects us with others on the journey. We’ll show you how to bring that kind of community to your small groups.

Amy Jackson
Managing Editor of SmallGroups.com
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[SmallGroups.com](http://www.smallgroups.com)
Lyman Coleman and I were sitting in his living room, enjoying glasses of iced tea and chatting about the history of the small-group movement. I asked the Serendipity founder and small-group pioneer where he thinks the movement is today. I was shocked by his answer. "Small groups' means nothing anymore," he said matter-of-factly. It's not that he's bitter. It's not that he's given up on small-group community. It's just that over the years he has seen the term take on meanings that are miles from what Coleman and his cohorts intended when they first invested in the small-group movement decades ago.

We are wise to learn from our past as a small-group movement. "Those who cannot remember the past," said George Santayana, "are condemned to repeat it." This is far from a new concept. The psalm writer Asaph determined to teach the "hidden lessons from our past. . . . We will not hide these truths from our children; we will tell the next generation" (Psalm 78:2–4). I believe the pioneers of the small-group movement can teach quite a bit to small-group adherents today. So let's bring some of the lessons from our past out of hiding.

The Emergence of the Movement

To start from the beginning would take us all the way back to creation or at least as far back as Jesus’ small group, but you've probably already read and heard about all that. (If not, I'd recommend reading Biblical Foundations for Small-Group Ministry and Community 101.) So let's start in the last century, as the contemporary small-group movement developed.

According to Frank Lincoln Fowler III, the first use of the term "small-group movement" goes back to the 1920s and 1930s, when Calvary Episcopal Church in New York City "utilized several principles central to the eventual proliferation of the small group movement in the church." The next several decades, however, showed little growth of groups in the church. Instead, there was a strong development outside the church in organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous and parachurch groups such as the Navigators.

"In the early days," Coleman says, "the small-group movement was primarily an underground movement. The established church didn't want anything to do with it. Also, small groups were often an alternative 'watering hole' for those who had become disenchanted with the established church or had been turned away from the church because they didn't have their lives together." Coleman recounts easily and passionately how the idea of small groups was tested in parachurch ministries and other places in the 1940s and 50s, and how it developed through the antiestablishmentarianism of the 1960s at national training labs, Faith at Work conferences, and retreat centers.

An early experiment in small-group community in the local church took place when Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C., began in 1946. Elizabeth O'Connor, a member of this pioneering church, chronicled the church's beginnings in her book, Call to Commitment.

In this book and other writings from those involved early on, it's obvious that this movement was not about forms, structures, or numbers; it was about a
paradigm shift in how the church viewed itself. It was revolutionary in nature—an attempt to restore the dynamic community in the New Testament church. These pioneers wanted to demolish the "edifice complex," transform the insider mentality of many churches, and get away from a purely knowledge-based form of the Christian life. Two major themes in these early days of small groups emerged: (1) commitment (to Christ and one another) and (2) the giving away of one's life, which involved a strong sense of calling and personal surrender.

"This is important for a church to understand," writes O'Connor, "for when it starts to become the church it will constantly be adventuring out into places where there are no tried and tested ways." O'Connor characterized the church of the early- to mid-1960s as an institution in which the pioneering spirit had become foreign. The church that is true to its mission, she said, "will be experimenting, pioneering, blazing new paths, seeking how to speak the reconciling Word of God to its own age. It cannot do this if it is held captive by the structures of another day or is slave to its own structures."

Ralph Neighbour, founder of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, and a strong proponent of the cell-church model, was planting churches in New York at the time and decided to go down to Washington, D.C., to check out Church of the Saviour.

**In the early days, the small-group movement was primarily an underground movement.**

"I saw the people of God operating a coffeehouse where everyone was a minister," he said in an interview I conducted with him. "I began to understand that my theology didn't fit the traditional church. I believed in the priesthood of all believers not just as a token phrase but as the lifestyle of a true believer. I got so frustrated that I said, 'I will not give the rest of my life to this nonsense!'"

Neighbour says this experience launched him on a personal journey that finally broke him out of the entire lifestyle of organized religion. He found a few other men who were similarly convicted, met with them for a while, and eventually moved to Houston to plant an experimental church consisting of small groups. Though he didn't know what to call it at the time, it's come to be known as the cell church model.

**Small groups were an attempt to restore the dynamic community seen in the New Testament church.**

**The Mavericks of the Movement**

Coleman portrays himself as a maverick in the Christian-education world of the 1960s, yet during this time, his influence in the church was growing. Ralph Neighbour said he and the other pioneers of the time were "a little rat pack of guys who had a vision and found each other, shared thoughts, and did not worry about copyrights."

Like Coleman, Neighbour bristles at the use of the term, "small groups," which he calls "a tepid term that theologically has absolutely no teeth." The issue these pioneers have with the term "small groups" is not really the terminology itself, but what they believe small groups have come to represent.

To better understand their perspective, we must understand where these men started. Coleman, for instance, worked with the Billy Graham Crusade in the late 1950s. Along the way, he met Sam Shoemaker, founder of A. A. Coleman says Shoemaker claimed everyone in his community for God. He reached out to prostitutes, drunks, high-society folks, and the down-and-outers.

To understand Neighbour's frustrations with the typical program-based American church, church leaders, and today's small-group movement, you must appreciate his heart and passion that still drives him today at 85 years old. He believes that groups are "Christ's basic bodies," made up of people who see themselves as ministers empowered by the Holy Spirit, and they exist to reap the harvest.

Both of these men are still driven today to see the small-group movement return to its original outward orientation—its missional priority. When either talks about what some churches are doing in this direction, he moves to the edge of his chair and...
talks with passion. While their physical voices may be starting to weaken, their voice in the small-group movement is strong and clear.

**Groups are made up of ministers empowered by the Holy Spirit, and they exist to reap the harvest.**

Their concern about small groups and the small-group movement turning inward rather than remaining missional in nature has been a real concern for more than 50 years. In 1967, Donald James, director of the Pittsburg Experiment after the retirement of founder Sam Shoemaker, said, "The biggest danger of the small-group movement is that as individual members begin to get 'changed,' they sometimes tend to form pious cliques that meet only to mirror their own goodness, and under the guise of study withdraw from the world rather than seek to be used by God to become his lights in the darkened situations of our communities."

Church of the Saviour experienced a similar pattern as far back as 1958. They found that, over time, in their initial fellowship groups something happened that was "like the going out of a light." Many people were experiencing a new awakening to Christ, O'Connor says, "but although we maintained strong programs of study and prayer, no group did anything significant in the way of service." O'Connor confesses, "We had ceased to be the Christian Church when we were no longer seeking to give our lives away." So over a period of six weeks, the church transitioned to mission groups. These groups had three functions: to nurture its own members, to serve, and to evangelize. O'Connor clarifies that the structure—whatever it was at the time—was irrelevant. The values and goals of the group were much more important than the structure.

The concerns of those early pioneers started to eventuate in the 1980s and 1990s. Coleman says the church-growth movement at that time hijacked the small-group movement. Thus, small groups took on a new purpose: to close the back door. The idea of small groups being merely an assimilation strategy for the church aggravates Coleman. Neighbour shares the feeling, writing: "If small groups become just another church-growth program that fails to help people experience the presence and power of Christ, they will not effectively train followers of Jesus to become disciples that can make disciples."

Some are beginning to question whether the resources provided to make leading groups easier has made them less effective in their true purposes. Brad Himes, who oversees small groups at Broadway Christian Church in Mattoon, Illinois, says, "It seems that at some point in the late 90s things changed. The VHS/DVD curriculum became popular and small groups began looking like a cookie-cutter ministry where most churches adopted it because that was what other churches had been doing." Himes's church decided to go back to the roots of the small-group movement:

We have been blessed at our church with a husband and wife who were trained by Richard Peace from Serendipity back in the 80s. We have incorporated a modified Serendipity study method for our groups where the leaders are trained to prepare and write the curriculum for each week. We no longer rely on DVD curriculum in these new groups; instead the leaders go through an extensive training program and the groups open up the Bible each week, read God's Word, and the leader facilitates discussion through the passage.

**Train your leaders to use the Bible effectively with SmallGroups.com:**

- **Theological Discussions for Everyone**
  Get everyone involved in meaningful, fruitful discussions.

- **Exegesis and Hermeneutics for Small Groups**
  Practical information and tips to faithfully interpret Scripture together
The Stages of Movements
In my discussions with Ralph Neighbour, he passed on insights that he has learned from others about movements. One of those people is Bill Beckham, who has worked closely with Neighbour over the years. It's important to understand movements in order to evaluate where the small-group movement has been and where it is today. Movements typically develop over time in three (or up to about eight, depending on which sociologist you read) levels.

Level 1: Emergence. This is where the movement begins, of course, with pioneers who are often creative geniuses who have a radical passion. They are, as Neighbour shared with me, on-fire, desperate rascals willing to attack the status quo. In the small-group movement, this stage lasted in some form from the 1920s through the 1970s.

Level 2: Coalescence/Synthesis. At this stage, leaders (or managers, as they often are) seek to organize all the chaos of the founders. Neighbour told me that at this stage the tendency is to freeze the fire of the founders. I believe this is also the time when the goals of the founders are apt to change. In “The Stages of Social Movements,” Boundless.com reports, “One of the difficulties in studying social movements is that movement success is often ill-defined because the goals of a movement can change.” This seems to be particularly true of the small-group movement.

Lyman Coleman shared with me how the organizers of the church-growth movement changed the purpose of small groups from reaching the hurting people outside the doors of the church to being a means for closing the back door of the church. In other words, the main audience moved from outsiders to insiders. With that in mind, it appears that the small-group movement went through this stage in the 1980s and 1990s.

Level 3: Bureaucratism. At this stage, systems are set in place that help the movement fit into conventional lifestyles and rituals. This takes place by the establishment of certain rules and procedures within the established culture.

Of course, this new bureaucratic system is often the antithesis of what those radical pioneers fought so hard for. The movement can now settle into status quo. Some point to 1991 for the beginning of this stage, when Prepare Your Church for the Future by Carl George was published. It was in this era that a large number of books and magazine articles were published. Everyone wanted to define what small groups were and were not. By 1996, when I founded SmallGroups.com, the small-group movement was becoming mainstream.

After Level 3, movements may go in a number of directions before declining.

So where are we as a movement today? And, more importantly, what does that mean for the future of the movement? Neighbour doesn't mince words. He says we're at Level 3: Bureaucratism, and he calls this stage "cold steel nonsense." Coleman would agree. He talks of how the movement has become more about forms, structures, and numbers than simply reaching the broken people in our world.

Yet these pioneers certainly have not given up on Christ-centered, authentic community. They may not like the bureaucracy that the small-group movement has become, but they have hope for what God can do through it in the future. They stand not only as witnesses to the past but also as cheerleaders encouraging us to throw off everything that hinders and to keep running with perseverance. Moreover, they stand as beacons, pointing us to Jesus, the real pioneer and perfecter of every spiritual movement.
Learning from the Past
So what can small-group ministry leaders learn from the history of the small-group movement? What have these pioneers taught us that can help make the movement stronger today? What should we pass to the next generation of group leaders?

Perhaps the best thing we can do as ministry leaders is step away from our responsibilities for a short while to examine our hearts, our strategies, and our structures. Get away for a day or a weekend and consider why you’re doing small-group ministry and what constitutes a win in your context. In other words, think in terms of biblical vision, mission, and purpose. Gather a team—staff or volunteer or both—and prayerfully discuss these big-picture questions.

As you consider the purposes of your small-group ministry, compare them to what the small-group pioneers had in mind. Is your ministry carrying on their hard work? Is your ministry too focused on those already part of the church? Have you lost a sense of all that small groups can do for the kingdom? We can learn quite a bit from these small-group pioneers. In fact, they may be playing the role of prophet for us today. Ultimately, they point us to the real expert on community life: the One who created it.

The pioneers stand not only as witnesses to the past but also as cheerleaders encouraging us to throw off everything that hinders and to keep running with perseverance.

—Michael C. Mack is founder of and an advisor for SmallGroups.com, author of 14 small-group books and discussion guides, and small-group ministry consultant; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.
The Right Way to Do Small Groups
*What I’ve learned from years of small group consulting*

Alan Danielson

Somewhere along the line, small-group pastors formed camps. There's the "Host Model" camp and the "Sunday School" camp. Others are in the "Neighborhood" or "House Church" or "Cell" camps. Small-group pastors proudly proclaim where they reside and who they follow. In our search for the best model for small-group ministry, we've drawn lines in the sand and decided which model is the right way to do small groups.

Instead of rallying around the common goal of life transformation, these camps have divided us. Rather than celebrate the discipleship that's happening through small groups, we're busy pointing out the differences in our ministries.

**Some Models Don’t Work**

Clearly, though, some models work and others don't. Any small-group pastor can tell you that. It's the reason I've been a small-group consultant since 2006. When I meet with church leaders, I've noticed a similar set of questions:

- What curriculum do you suggest?
- When and how should I split groups?
- What new small-group strategies do you see that are working well?
- How should I find, recruit, and train leaders?

But these are the wrong questions.

The questions small-group pastors should start with are far less intuitive, but far more fundamental. Before asking procedural and strategic questions, small-group ministry leaders must have a clear understanding of their church's small-group fundamentals. They need to know:

- God’s calling for their church’s small groups
- the current and past models and the history of groups at the church (the DNA of small groups at their church)
- the preferred small-group model and methods of the senior pastor (his or her small group DNA)
- the expectations and hopes of the senior pastor for small groups
- what defines success in their church’s small group ministry

This is the key to finding the right small-group model—at least the right one for your context.

**Instead of rallying around the common goal of life transformation, these camps have divided us.**

**Understand Your Context**

I can tell right away whether small-group pastors know their group ministry fundamentals by the questions they ask. If they ask broad procedural questions first, they don’t yet know the small-group pulse of their church. They ask broad questions because they're hoping to throw a bunch of ideas against a wall and see what sticks. This is messy, and it seldom leads to success.
On the other hand, small-group pastors who know their church’s small-group fundamentals approach me seeking much more specific information. They already have the tools to identify strategies or models that could work, and they have an idea of which models definitely won’t work. This is because they know the heartbeat and DNA of their unique context.

In order to understand your church’s small-group fundamentals, you need to answer the following questions.

- What is God’s desire for our small-group ministry?
- What does a successful small-group ministry at our church look like in 1 year, 5 years, and 10 years?
- What is our senior pastor’s level of commitment to groups on a scale of 1–10?
- What do I think will work in our cultural context?
- What do I think won’t work in our cultural context?
- Does our church need or want a small-group ministry that grows quickly with less control or one that grows steadily with more control?
- Is our church more open to a group ministry with well-defined and controlled outcomes or one with more freedom but less predictability?
- Does my senior pastor understand these questions and the implications of them?
- Is my senior pastor willing to give the necessary time and attention to helping me answer these questions?

There are no right answers to these questions, and you’re the only person who can answer them.

You may think it’s strange that a consultant would offer questions that he can’t answer. But I’ve learned that the best service I provide ministry clients is not the answers I give, but the questions I pose.

Give plenty of time and attention to answering these questions. Dedicate some serious time to thoroughly answering them in the near future. If you don’t answer these questions and understand the answers, your small-group ministry will flounder. You’ll experiment with different strategies and models, but you’ll have little success.

**When Small Groups Aren’t Working**

And that’s why some small-group models seem to work—and others don’t. Too often, small-group ministry leaders looking for a shortcut to successful small groups, and they simply copy and paste another church’s model for ministry. The problem is that they don’t take into account their own church’s unique fundamentals.

I talk to these ministry leaders all the time. They’re frustrated because small-group ministry just doesn’t seem to be working at their church. They tell me about all the great models and strategies they’ve tried from other churches, but nothing has worked. They assume, like many church leaders, that the problem is rooted in a model, system, or strategy. But the problem is actually a fundamental problem. The reason groups aren’t working in their church is because their approach to small groups doesn’t match the heartbeat of the church’s senior decision-makers.

For example, Community Christian Church, a multisite church in and around Chicago, has a great system for apprenticing leaders and creating groups that multiply. I had an opportunity to ask COMMUNITY’s Lead Pastor, Dave Ferguson, why this model works so well at their church and yet doesn’t seem to work in many other churches. His answer: “Because this church started as a small group in a dorm room with me and an apprentice leader.” His answer had nothing to do with the model. Instead, it had everything to do with their church’s small-group fundamentals. Their model works because it reflects the core nature of the church.
During the years I led the small-group ministries at LifeChurch.tv, I learned that two things were very important to my senior pastor, Craig Groeschel: friendships and further exploration of the weekend message.

Let’s celebrate the diverse and creative ways that disciples are being made through small groups.

At the time, the church was running over 20,000 in weekly attendance. Craig was the founding pastor of the church, so the church shared his heartbeat. As a result, we built our small-group ministry at LifeChurch.tv to revolve around getting as many people as possible into small groups where they could discover new spiritual friendships and use discussion materials that helped them explore and apply the weekend’s teaching. Why? Because those things aligned with our church and our pastor in a fundamental way.

When you look at successful small-group ministries across the country, you’ll find that each of them is unique. They have similarities, but each church’s model has been custom built to fit their church’s fundamentals. One of the greatest temptations of small-group ministry leaders is simply to take another church’s model for small-group ministry and insert it into their own context. It’s imperative to resist this temptation and instead spend time listening to your church’s leadership team and discovering your fundamentals for small groups.

Small groups can and will work in your context, but only if you truly understand your context. If you honestly answer my questions above, you’ll have immediate insight into every small-group strategy that you encounter. You’ll know in an instant if a model will fit your church.

So why do some small-group models work in your church and others don’t? The simple answer is that every church is different. And that’s okay. Let’s celebrate that different churches are doing different things that reach different people.

There are tons of different approaches and models for small-group ministry, and as a consultant I’ve noticed something funny: small-group pastors can be somewhat “clannish” regarding their preferred models. Whether you find yourself in the “Missional” or “Sermon-Based” or “Free Market” camp—or something else entirely—we can get more than a little opinionated about the "right" way to do ministry. But the people who created these models never intended to create what are essentially small-group denominations. They were simply trying to make disciples in a way that fit their context.

What’s God’s calling for your church’s small groups?

At the end of the day, it doesn’t matter which model or approach your church uses—as long as you’re making disciples in a way that is true to the fundamentals of your church. Every model has its problems and its advantages. No model is perfect. Regardless of the model (or models!) your church winds up using, let’s not forget that we’re all on the same team with the shared goal of making disciples. Rather than be divided by our methods, let’s celebrate the diverse and creative ways that disciples are being made through small groups—around the country, and around the world.

—Alan Danielson is the Senior Pastor of New Life Bible Church in Norman, Oklahoma, and a small-group consultant; copyright 2015 by Christianity Today.
Discipling the Next Generation

Christian Campus House at Eastern Illinois University is finding that when they make a big ask, they get big commitment from millennials. Their annual process of finding new group leaders takes 6 weeks and involves an interview.

“It's essential that we have quality, committed student leaders,” says Danah Himes. During several weekly meetings, leaders are trained in inductive Bible study, mentored by a staff member, make decisions for the ministry, and disciple other students one-on-one. That’s all in addition to leading weekly group meetings. This big commitment is producing disciples in a big way: many students move on to vocational ministry.

Let’s Celebrate All God Is Doing in Groups!

Small groups come in all shapes and sizes. At SmallGroups.com, we love to share stories of what God is doing in and through community—no matter the context. From missional communities to high commitment models, and from multiethnic groups to church plants, let’s celebrate the discipleship that’s happening through intentional community.

A Small Group Church
The District Church in Washington, D.C. was planted in April 2010 by simply starting a small group. Today they have over 65% of their church in groups where they focus on three practices: worship, community, and justice.

“We want to be a church that's here for the city,” says Amy Graham. Through their commitment to community, they're meeting the needs of D.C.’s unique demographics. The District Church is multiethnic and 86% are 40 or younger. Plus, 67% are single!

Multi-Site Pioneer
Community Christian Church, a multi-site church in and around Chicago, has always had small groups in their DNA.

Because groups are the primary discipleship path, leaders are chosen and apprenticed carefully. As they're developed as whole people through coaching relationships, they are discipled into people who then disciple others.

The process produces committed leaders who often rise through the ranks of leadership, some even becoming campus pastors.

Evangelism Focus
In 2007, The Austin Stone, a thriving multi-site church, started transitioning their small groups to become missional communities. Their groups are the primary place the church evangelizes. Today they have 330 missional communities with over 60% connected.

“About half of our baptisms happen in the context of missional community. Our leaders and participants are leading people to Christ, baptizing them, inviting them into the communal life of discipleship, and teaching them what it looks like to make and multiply disciples. That is massively encouraging to me.” —Todd Engstrom, Executive Pastor of Campus and Communities

Don’t Miss Our Models Page!
Learn what others are doing and discover the model that’s right for your context.

SmallGroups.com/Build/Models

Multicultural fellowship requires flexibility. We offer three small-group models: a relational Acts 2 fellowship model, an intentional discipleship small-group model, and a missional small-group model.

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“It's essential that we have quality, committed student leaders,” says Danah Himes. During several weekly meetings, leaders are trained in inductive Bible study, mentored by a staff member, make decisions for the ministry, and disciple other students one-on-one. That’s all in addition to leading weekly group meetings. This big commitment is producing disciples in a big way: many students move on to vocational ministry.

My small group shows me what it looks like to live on mission. One guy spends time playing Uno with a woman who is handicapped. Another, a high school teacher, has a heart for helping her students. I’ve learned from them that God doesn't always use us in grand stories of change, but what's important is our choice every day to listen for how God wants us to touch the lives of those around us. —Scott Nelson, Forge America
**Multiethnic Small Groups and Racial Reconciliation**

How one church’s quest for reconciliation is reflected in their groups

Interview by Amy Jackson

**Quest Church** is a multiethnic church in Seattle. The church began in 2001 when Eugene Cho started a small group with a vision to plant a specifically urban church that would intentionally be diverse. From the beginning, Quest has been focused on the gospel, social justice, and reconciliation. The church has approximately equal numbers of Caucasian and Asian attendees, plus a large number of African American and Latino people who call Quest home.

But Quest goes beyond simply being multiethnic—they want to be a reconciled church that helps others bring about racial reconciliation. And that largely happens through small groups. I spoke on the phone with Aaron Cho, assistant pastor of community life and formation at Quest, to learn how their small groups operate in a multiethnic church focused on reconciliation.

Tell me a little about your small-group ministry.

It's not easy to do multiethnic and multicultural ministry. It's more than representation. It's messy. For Quest, it's not just Caucasian and Pan-Asian differences. Within our Asian demographic, there's Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. And with that there are people who are first generation, second generation, third generation, and even fourth generation. It's so diverse and complex. There can also be a language barrier.

One of the ways that we make our space inviting is to structure by inclusion. So we are very intentional about singing songs in Spanish, Korean, and other languages. We can't do everything, but we make an effort so that when you come through our doors, you might hear your mother tongue, your worship tongue, the way that you freely communicate with the living God.

We're not trying to fool people to make them believe we're all bilingual or trilingual. But we're communicating that if English isn't your first language and it's a stretch to speak English, we're going to stretch ourselves to speak a different language that may not be easy for us—that may not be our first language. We want to say, "Hey, we're with you, so why don't we try a song in Korean?"

I'm Korean-American and English is my first language, but I grew up in a Korean church. There are some Korean songs that are kind of nostalgic. If that's true for me, I can't even imagine how much more that would speak to somebody else, to feel like "I am welcome here. I'm embraced. My culture is embraced."

Another thing we do to structure by inclusion is build a staff team that reflects our multicultural, multiethnic church. And again, not for representation. It's valuing story, perspective, and voice. If we're asking the congregation to come together, we have to reflect that on our leadership team.

Same with our small-group ministry. If we want to be multiethnic in our expression of small groups and our community groups, it needs to be reflected in our leadership. In a lot of ways, my job is a little easier because Quest is a multiethnic church, so the leaders are naturally multiethnic. But I also have to be mindful: Do I have a diversity of leaders? Are men and women both represented as...
leaders, as equals? Do I have leaders partnering across ethnicities?

**Do you intentionally partner leaders and hosts who have different backgrounds?**

Yes. A lot of times the process for leadership just simply works; folks step up and say, "I'd love to lead a community group with so-and-so." But there are folks who come to me and say, "I'd love to lead a small group, but I don't have a co-facilitator or a host to work alongside." And that's where my job becomes "human Tetris." First I match up leaders based on neighborhood and availability. Then I ask, **What kind of partnering would reflect our church?** So I pair people intergenerationally, someone Caucasian with someone Korean, and more to reflect our church.

**How have you brought the conversation of reconciliation to your small groups?**

Our community groups have been that place where we foster that deeper sense of connection, community, and trust. We preach reconciliation, talk about it, and challenge our congregation. But at the heart of it, reconciliation has to get down to the level of relationship. People can walk out on Sundays encouraged and convicted and challenged, but it can just end there. So we really encourage folks to carry on those conversations in their small groups.

Two years ago we started having one-word themes for our church—something we are constantly weaving into our sermons and conversations throughout our year. Two years ago our theme was reconciliation, so we were intentional about making that the point every Sunday. But we wanted to have more than one talk on reconciliation. We wanted to really dive into reconciliation and ask, "How do you see reconciliation with God, with self, with family, with your neighborhood, with other ethnic groups, and with our church?"

In years past, we've allowed our groups freedom to choose a study or book to go through. But when we had the theme of reconciliation, I felt that whatever we heard on Sunday, we needed to talk about it in community and process it with others. It was so important because we needed to go deeper on this idea of reconciliation. We wanted to say, "You know what you heard on Sunday? We're not letting you off the hook." It was just beautiful to see the conversations, to see confession, to see repentance, to see prayer requests—to just see groups journeying through this together, through the mess. I don't know how all the conversations went. I'm sure some nights weren't life changing. But it's constantly on the radar. We want people to process and talk through and journey with others.

**Quest has always been focused on the gospel, social justice, and reconciliation.**

This past year our theme was discipleship, but we still talked about reconciliation a lot. We feel like true discipleship—and what it means to be a follower of Christ—is engaging and not shying away from the conversation of reconciliation. We took some time to look at the disciples and one of the sermons was about Matthew. I never really considered that tax collectors were hated—nobody liked Matthew. So Jesus strategically chose people that were unreconciled. Jesus was very intentional about choosing disciples that may not have been best friends—and they probably despised each other. That story made us ask, **What does it look like to be a church that's unreconciled and to move and journey toward reconciliation?** That's tough. It's not easy to navigate that.

**It's great that your groups are talking about reconciliation and understanding the importance. How do you help them really get to know one another and experience reconciliation?**

One of the things that we do early on in our small groups is share our stories and really listen. Knowing that our small groups are multiethnic and diverse, storytelling is so important. I stress this to our leaders all the time: Take the time to listen to each other's stories, the unique stories that each person has, and find the intersections with the gospel. We all have this shared story of being met by Christ.

And I'm not talking about those icebreakers where everyone goes around and shares their name, occupation, and favorite thing about fall. Instead, we give group members the floor for 15–20 minutes to just share their story. And naturally, what's going
to happen is we begin to see a mosaic of beautiful stories becoming a tapestry. It makes us say, "Wow. This is what it means to be a multiethnic church."

Because this storytelling is so important, I tell leaders that it’s more important to spend the time listening to each other’s stories early on than it is to discuss the study. We have to set a good foundation where we feel valued, known, and heard. It’s from that place of trust and authenticity that we can move into engaging Scripture and prayer. I’ve been part of too many small groups where, to be honest, we studied Scripture, but I didn’t know anybody—even six months in. You end up engaging Scripture as a project. It’s on the table, and everybody’s giving their opinions, but they keep what the text says at arm’s length. They’re not given the space to say, “The Scripture speaks to my story in this way.” We need to listen to each other’s stories first and then engage Scripture. And that’s been really fruitful for us.

**We preach about reconciliation, but it has to get down to the level of relationship.**

We’re learning some of this stuff by fumbling and slipping and messing up. Painfully, we’ve heard stories of people who didn’t feel heard. It’s no knock to our leaders. They’re doing a great job, but we’re all learning how to value our unique stories and listening to how God has shaped and formed us on this journey.

I can imagine that some discussions get heated as you talk about reconciliation in small groups. How do you train leaders to handle that?

We are so blessed to have a great relationship with Seattle Pacific University, which is less than a mile away, and the John Perkins Center at SPU. It’s a ministry that’s part of the university that’s inspired by Dr. Perkins and his ministry of reconciliation. Partnering is so important. Quest is not a place where we would ever say we get this stuff right all the time. We don’t know always know what to do, but we know people who do. That’s the good part: we know people who do, and we trust them and we have relationship. So we partner with the John Perkins Center and say, "We have something that we can learn from you guys. Come teach us, teach our church, teach our leaders so that we can pour into this conversation."

A few weeks ago, we held a three-hour training at the John Perkins Center on racial reconciliation. We pushed it to the church as a whole, and we specifically targeted small-group leaders. We felt like if leaders could get this training, if they could get this awareness of how to do racial reconciliation, the approach and the posture and the attitude, it would really help.

It’s a dicey conversation. It’s hard, and sometimes people freeze up because they don’t know how to lead these conversations. It was just so powerful to do the training, to learn how to engage in this conversation of race in America. A lot of it was how we can listen to each other’s stories and how to take a posture of true humility—to learn not to be quick to defend our racial biases, but to sit and pause and listen.

I’m constantly learning and changing and trying to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. As a small-group pastor, it’s easy to get trapped in this temptation of finding the perfect book or resource. And I think books and resources definitely have a place, but at the end of the day, there’s not a one-size-fits-all method, and there’s no one particular book that’s going to give you all the answers. I love resources, and I glean so much insight from them, but there’s something to be said of just relying on the Holy Spirit of how God will move in our community.

It’s not easy to do multiethnic and multicultural ministry. What does it look like to be reconciled? What does it look like to strive for deeper relationships and connections with others? Quest is not this place where everybody comes together and we all agree on everything and we’re all happy. It’s more like painful journeying together and choosing to go deeper on the issues that we all face and struggle with. But we’re committed to being united and being a church that is reconciled and reflects the passage in Revelation where all people, tribes, tongues, nations will come together.

—Amy Jackson is managing editor of SmallGroups.com; copyright 2015 by Christianity Today. This article is excerpted from the training tool *Multiethnic Small Groups.*
Who’s On Your Personal Board of Directors?

Find the right people to help you serve effectively in your sweet spot.

Carolyn Taketa

Ever since business guru Jim Collins spoke years ago about building a personal board of directors, this concept has been popular among leaders in various work environments, including the church. Although we want to make a general habit of humbly learning from everyone, it’s good to be intentional about the handful of people you choose to most directly influence your actions and your character.

An organization’s typical board of directors consists of a group of specialized advisors with diverse perspectives, expertise, and pertinent experiences, all acting in the best interest of the company. Given the many demands, priorities, and opportunities we juggle in our professional and personal lives, having a trusted group of advisors can be quite helpful. Perhaps developing a board of directors is the 21st century application of the exhortation in Proverbs 19:20 (NLT): “Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life.”

Do you have a group of trusted guides who speak into your life and influence you toward Christ? Who are the people you find yourself turning to in times of difficulty, discouragement, or decision-making? What do you look for in an advisor or confidante? Hopefully, you choose people of integrity, wisdom, and maturity who help you stay emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy. These should be people who consistently motivate you to become the person God has created you to be.

Build Your Board

So whom should you consider for your personal board? That depends on a number of factors, including your personality, stage of life, ministry role, and personal needs. Your board will likely include a spouse, close family, and/or friends, but you should also consider the following types of people:

**Mentor**

This is someone who is more experienced and accomplished in your ministry field—someone whom you respect and would like to emulate. Or it can be someone who works in a completely unrelated area, but demonstrates life wisdom and character you admire. In general, this person is ahead of you in some capacity and can show you the ropes. This mentor relationship is not dependent on proximity, frequent communication, or even a close relational connection.

Some mentors might include a godly parent, a church leader, an influential coach, a trusted friend, or even a Christian writer. For example, one of my mentors is a nationally renowned pastor whom I follow regularly through podcasts, books, and articles because his perspectives on Scripture, life, and spiritual formation resonate with me and consistently inspire me to become more like Jesus.

**Do you have a group of trusted guides who speak into your life and influence you toward Christ?**
Sponsor
This is someone who is in a senior level in your organization or ministry field. He or she is not only ahead of you, but has the power and desire to open doors for you. This person cares about your development and is vested in your success. He or she is willing to use his or her influence and expertise to help you grow and move forward. I have a sponsor who believes I am far more capable than I think I am. He provides opportunities, thrusts me into leadership situations, and offers ministry experiences that stretch me. He provides a big picture ministry perspective along with wise counsel on navigating leadership situations and the broader church world.

Spiritual Director or Spiritual Companion
This is someone who helps you pay attention to your soul along the journey of faith. They know you well and can help you connect the dots between what is happening in your life and what God is doing in you. This person is crucial in helping you stay centered in your identity as a beloved child of God. Regular times of reflection and conversation with a spiritual companion help me slow down and become more aware of God’s presence and activity in my life. This equips me not to be reactive or driven by unhealthy desires. Instead, I learn to make decisions aligned with God’s ongoing work in me.

Choose people of integrity, wisdom, and maturity who help you stay healthy.

Ministry Colleagues
These people share your passion for small-group ministry and understand its joys and challenges. They help you get fresh ideas, think through strategies, provide resources, become a sounding board, and energize your spirit because they “get it.” You can find these people in your ministry team, in other churches, at conferences, or through social media. For example, the open Facebook group for the Small Group Network is a terrific source for sharing information and building friendships among people in small-group ministry.

Truth-Telling Encourager
Because churches are filled with sinful people like us, ministry is messy. Having a friend who speaks truth in a grace-filled way is a huge asset. Much like “iron sharpening iron,” this person asks insightful questions, helps us process whatever is happening, and provides clarity in murky situations. It’s easy to be blinded by our egos and defense mechanisms. Truth-tellers hold up a mirror to reveal our strengths and flaws. More importantly, they speak truth in an encouraging and gentle way. These people see you clearly, cheer you on, and put wind back in your sails.

Prayer Warrior
Though we may have our families and small groups praying for us, I find it comforting to have someone to whom I can always turn for prayer—someone with the gift of intercessory prayer. Several years ago, God blessed me with the gift of a prayer warrior at our church. I barely knew her, but this elder’s wife approached me and told me that my new responsibilities on the executive team would require more prayer support. She was absolutely right. She made a commitment to pray for me every day. I am so humbled and thankful for her faithful prayers.

Life Skill Experts
This is a catch-all category for experts who help you manage various areas of your life. It could be a financial planner, therapist, medical professional, life coach, dietitian, or personal trainer. You might consult this person before moving forward with a plan or ask for help with your goals. This person can assist you in particular areas so you can be more effective overall.

Like organizations with a board of directors, a healthy leader needs a personal board of trusted advisors with different functions and perspectives. A personal board of directors is not created in one day, but rather developed over time. Though it might be challenging to find the time or energy to intentionally invest in these relationships, it’s well worth it. Look around and see whom God has already put into your life to fulfill some of these roles. They will help you become a more effective leader, and, more importantly, encourage you to be the person God has created you to be.

—Carolyn Taketa is the Executive Director of Small Groups at Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, California, and an editorial advisor for SmallGroups.com; copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.
Do you know about IF: Table? 
**You should.**

When Jennie Allen first felt God prompting her to empower a generation of women, she never envisioned that tens of thousands would tune in to what she and her team at IF: Gathering were up to. Besides hosting an annual conference for women that's live-streamed, the IF team facilitates IF: Table, an effort that involves 20,000 women in monthly small-group gatherings.

The guidelines are simple: 2 hours, 4 questions, 6 women. The IF team provides the monthly questions, and hosts are encouraged to invite any group of women: women they know or don't know, believers or non-believers, diverse women, and women from other church backgrounds.

Though simple, these small groups go deep with real questions and authentic community, and women are experiencing exciting life change.

Read more on SmallGroups.com.

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**Women in the Small-Group Movement**

One of the things SmallGroups.com loves about small groups is that they’re for everyone—men and women alike. To honor the contributions of women in the small-group movement, we make a point to tell their stories—stories that matter to all of us. For instance, did you know that women were essential to the start of the modern small-group movement? In fact, women have been involved in group ministry since Pentecost. And they’re still doing exciting, innovative things today to disciple people in community.

The worldwide small-group movement was **birthed** in South Korea in the mid-1960s. David Cho, the founding pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, had become utterly exhausted and was confined to bed rest for two years. When his male elders refused to help, he asked his women deaconesses to open home groups and apply his sermons, thus launching the modern day cell group explosion. The female-led small groups grew to 19,000 groups, in comparison to 6,000 male-led groups.

—Joel Comiskey

**When discipleship opportunities are few, women rise up to meet the need.**

That’s what Tara-Leigh Cobble did when she created **D-Groups**, intense 6-week groups that include Scripture memorization, confession, Bible discussion, and prayer. Though the commitment requirement is high, women are flocking to Cobble’s model. In 6 years, one group has grown to over 50 across the world.

Read her full story at SmallGroups.com.

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**3 Tips for Developing More Women Small-Group Pastors**

1) **Clarify the issue in your own community.** Is it simple oversight, lack of female talent, or some other reason? Acknowledge and name the issue.

2) **Identify and support strong female leaders.** Consider the women who are serving in your church, and actively develop their skills.

3) **Create avenues to leadership.** Many women aren’t leading simply because they’re not sure how to move into leadership roles in their context. Make sure the path is clear.

—Halee Gray Scott, PhD, author and social researcher

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