

A Christian A Small Group is

...an intentional,
face-to-face gathering
of 3-12 people
on a regular time schedule
with a common purpose
of discovering and growing in the possibilities
of the abundant life in Christ.

-Roberta Hestenes-

intentional:

face-to-face:

3-12 people:

regular time schedule:

common purpose:

discovering the possibilities:

growing in the possibilities:

abundant life in Christ:

Small Group Life

Acts 2:42-47 provides us a picture of the first century Church:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

In the Church described above what evidence do you see for the following characteristics of group life?

NURTURE:

WORSHIP:

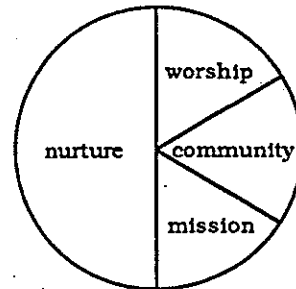
COMMUNITY:

MISSION:

When small groups of Christians gather, we reflect on a smaller scale the same characteristics -- nurture, worship, community and mission -- of the Church. Depending on the purpose of the small group, however, one or two of these characteristics may provide the focus of the group's life together. For example:*

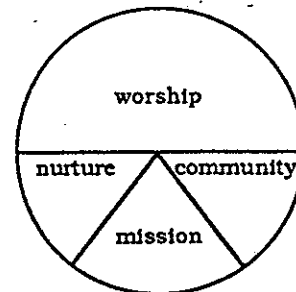
Some groups focus on **NURTURE** like:

- Sunday school classes
- Bible study groups
- Book discussion groups
- New member (new believer) classes
- Confirmation classes



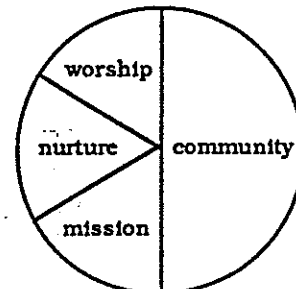
Some groups focus on **WORSHIP** like:

- Choirs and other musical groups
- Prayer groups
- Charismatic fellowships
- Renewal groups



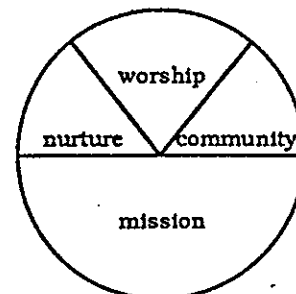
Some groups focus on **COMMUNITY** like:

- Support groups
- Men's fellowships
- Women's fellowships
- Young couples' groups
- Youth groups
- Care groups



Some groups focus on **MISSION** like:

- Gospel teams
- Evangelistic groups
- Social action committees
- Missions committees
- Visitation groups
- Board of elders or deacons
- Renewal teams
- Neighborhood Bible studies
- Service groups

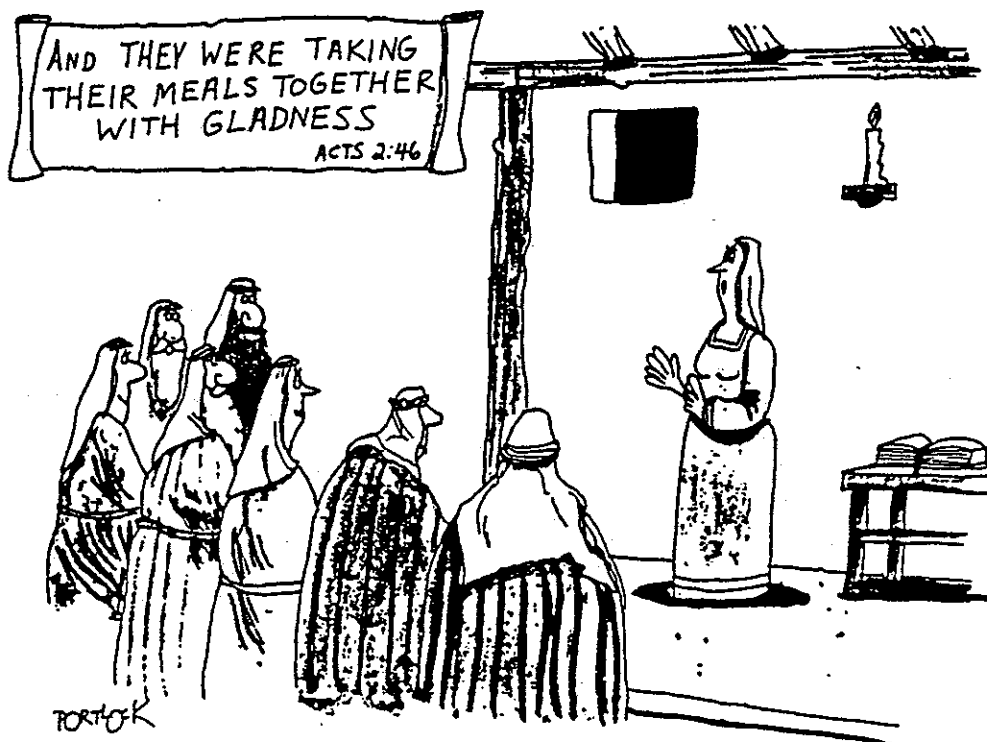
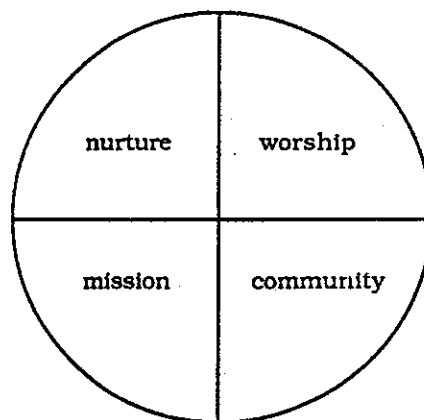


*Adapted from, Good Things Come In Small Groups by Ron Nicholas et.al., p. 28-29, ©1985, IVCF, used by permission of IVP, P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL. 60515

A Fifth Alternative

The purpose of a small group determines its focus. Most include at least a small element of nurture, worship, community and mission while focusing on one or two. Some groups, though, seek to provide a balance between all four characteristics.

Maintaining this delicate balance within a group takes careful planning and oversight but can lead to a rich experience as group members discover the joy of life as a well-rounded Christian community -- an experience akin to the one described in Acts 2:40-47.



"O.K., we've decided that everyone whose last name begins with alpha to gamma will bring a main dish . . ."

Ground Rules For Small Groups

THE LEADER is a *facilitator* of discussion, guiding the group through questions rather than statements. He or she is responsible to prepare for, initiate and oversee the group process.

EACH GROUP MEMBER "owns the group" and is thus responsible as a *contributor* of comments and questions. Talkative members should learn to defer to others while quiet members speak out. Listening and learning from each other are to be encouraged.

GROUP FOCUS is controlled by its purpose. A Bible study group allows the *passage of Scripture under study* to govern its discussion rather than cross-references or commentaries. Tangents are to be avoided or at least "tabled" until after the group meeting is over.

PERSONAL GROWTH in group members' *relationship with Christ* is the ultimate goal of group life. Consequently members should see their group as more than just a Bible study, but as a Christian community where consistency, self-disclosure, empathy and accountability are important characteristics.



"At the count of three, I want everyone to face the person next to him and get rid of your hostilities and be happy human beings."

Eight Don'ts of Small Group Leadership

1. *Don't answer your own question.* Otherwise your group will begin to look to you as "the teacher" rather than "the facilitator." If necessary repeat or rephrase an unclear question.
2. *Don't be afraid of silence.* Silence means either:
 - People are thinking (this is true 90% of the time)
 - People are confused and need the question restated
 - People are asleep -- not a real healthy sign
3. *Don't be content with just one answer.* For every written question feel free to ask two or three follow-up questions like: "What does someone else think?" This allows a number of people to respond.
4. *Don't expect group members to respond to you with each answer.* They will be tempted to do this especially when the group is new. Instead, though, you want to see them talking to each other so you don't have to "broker" the entire discussion.
5. *Don't reject an answer as wrong.* Respond to questionable answers by asking: "How did you come to that conclusion?" or: "Does anyone have another way of looking at it?" Try to be affirming whenever possible.
6. *Don't be afraid of controversy.* Of course, your group won't profit that raises more heat than light. But differences of opinion can be a stimulus for learning.
7. *Don't allow the group to get in a rut.* As long as you stay in line with the passage the more creative you can be the merrier.
8. *Don't allow the group to end late.* If the discussion proves very fruitful, officially end the group on time with the opportunity for those who choose to stay and discuss the issue in more depth.

OK, here are your group members.

What do you do?!?

- A. *Sally Silent* - Never or rarely speaks
- B. *Mark Monopoly* -- Dominates the discussion
Andy Argue -- Often disagrees with something or everything
Randy Response -- Quick answers, insensitive
- C. *Tammy Tangent* -- Often brings up issues unrelated to passage
- D. *Virginia Vague* -- Gives general and superficial answers
- E. *Mary Maybe* -- Here one week, gone the next
- F. *Frank Fringe* -- Potentially interested in coming to the group
- G. *Others ??*

