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ABSTRACT

**DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A SMALL GROUP PROGRAM
TO FOSTER NUMERIC GROWTH AT THE
FRESNO SPANISH SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH**

by

Antonio Huerta

Adviser: Ricardo Norton

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A SMALL GROUP PROGRAM TO FOSTER NUMERIC GROWTH AT THE FRESNO SPANISH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Antonio Huerta

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Ricardo Norton, DMin

Date completed: March 2011

Problem

The Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church has a 65 year history in the city of Fresno. From the year of 1995 until the year of 2005 when I became the pastor for this church, I realized that the numeric growth rate in this congregation had dropped significantly. I soon became aware of the urgent need for a comprehensive analysis that would enable the Fresno Spanish Church to regain its growth momentum.

Method

The solution and the vision to solve the problem was the development and the implementation of a small group program that would help train, equip, and mobilize church members for ministry. The research began with the study of the literature on

church growth and on how to turn around declining churches. A small group program was developed and implemented with a well trained team composed of dedicated church members. The recruiting and equipping of the team leaders took six months and once equipped and organized, the program was launched for a period of one year.

Results

The small group program to foster numeric growth at the Fresno Spanish Church was implemented in the year of 2007. The results were outstanding. The program impacted the life of the church and the congregation experienced much success. The morale among members improved and the church experienced numerical growth. On the year the small group program was implemented, the church experienced a 300 percent growth in membership. In addition to numeric growth, different outreach ministries were established and new leaders were developed to assist in the various community church programs.

Conclusion

The small group program implemented in the Fresno Spanish Church to foster numeric growth, I believe, can be replicated in other churches with similar challenges, especially in those churches where its leaders have a desire to positively impact their communities with the gospel of Christ.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A SMALL GROUP PROGRAM
TO FOSTER NUMERIC GROWTH AT THE
FRESNO SPANISH SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Project Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Antonio Huerta

March 2011

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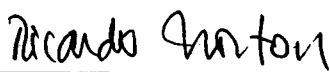
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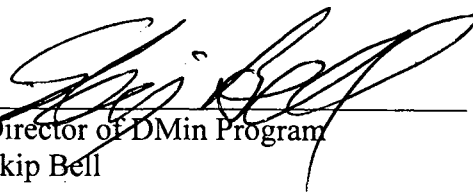
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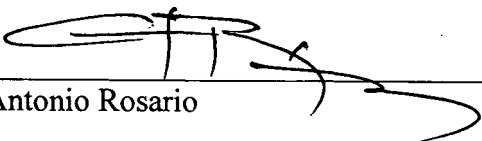
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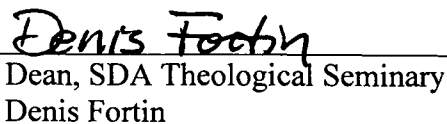
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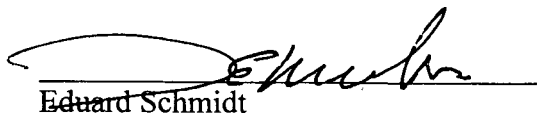
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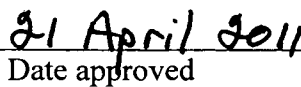
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the past eighteen years, I have ministered in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I have been a pastor of a number of small churches, and currently I am pastoring a relatively large congregation, the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has about six hundred members attending each Sabbath. It is a very dynamic congregation, which enjoys a large sanctuary and many classrooms for our children.

When I came to pastor this church, I realized that there was a lot of potential for growth. I noticed that although there were many programs and activities that the church promoted, there was very little emphasis in training and equipping the laity to do ministry. There was a lack of interest in reaching out to the lost and winning them for the kingdom of God. It seemed to me that the church had lost its vision, God's vision of winning every lost soul for the kingdom of God. Hence the title of this dissertation project

“Development and implementation of a Small Group Program to Foster Numeric Growth at the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

I believe and agree with David Cox that “there is almost unlimited potential for the growth of the church in Christ-centered, Spirit-led, well organized, and intentional

small group ministry.”¹ I believe that small groups are a divinely ordained means by which we can achieve the goal of sharing the Gospel with the world.

Statement of the Problem

The Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church is located in a predominantly Spanish Speaking community, and this church has a 65 year history in the city of Fresno. From the year of 1995 until the year of 2005 when I became the pastor for this church, I realized that the numeric growth rate in this congregation had dropped significantly. I soon became aware of the urgent need for a comprehensive analysis that would enable the Fresno Spanish Church to regain its growth momentum. Pastoral observation suggests that a contributing factor is the lack of emphasis on relational forms of evangelism.

Statement of the Task

The purpose of this project is to develop, implement and evaluate a small group program in the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church. This program will enhance the development of new leaders who will learn small group strategies to foster numeric growth in the church.

Justification for the Dissertation

A number of reasons ought to be mentioned in this section to justify the purpose of this dissertation. First of all we find throughout the Word of God that it is in God’s

¹David Cox, “Think Big Think Small Groups” (Alma Park, England: Stanborough, 1998), 10.

plan for His church to grow numerically (Matt 28:18-20). Also we find that the Lord Jesus founded the Christian Church with a small group model of twelve disciples. This and many other biblical examples of small group models clearly suggest that small groups are a divinely ordained means to winning the lost for the kingdom of God. In the process of writing this dissertation, it was also found that small groups—as the basis for church growth—has been used successfully throughout North America. A couple of examples are the Jubilee Christian Center and the Saddleback Community Church in California.

Description of the Dissertation Process

This dissertation followed a process of four steps. The first step consisted on providing a biblical, theological, and historical rationale for small group ministry in the church. Included in this section is a discussion of the biblical and theological foundations for small group ministry in the church and the basic principles for creating a small group ministry. Current Literature on small groups and on training leaders for small groups has been reviewed.

The second step was to surround myself with a core group of leaders who would help me to carry out the vision I had for the church. These leaders went through a six month leadership training seminar and were trained and equipped to reproduce themselves in others.

The third step sets forth a small group model that was developed as a strategy to promote numeric growth at the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church. This section has included specific methods and ways to achieve those goals.

The final step explains the implementation and evaluation of the small group

model. The evaluation greatly helped to measure the numeric growth of the church.

Expectations for This Dissertation

One of the expectations of this program is that it will produce numeric growth in the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church. This project will help church members understand the God given mission of winning the lost for His kingdom, and create in them the desire to open their homes for the establishment of new small groups. I believe this project will help many pastors to implement the church growth principles described in this document and will bring the growth each pastor wants to see in his/her church

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

The Fresno Spanish Church's rate of growth has declined during the latter part of the 1990's and the first five years of the twenty first century. The purpose of this project is to explore the effectiveness of small groups in revitalizing the Fresno Spanish Church. Cox argues that "there is almost unlimited potential for the growth of the church in Christ-centered, Spirit-led, well organized, and intentional small group ministry."¹ The core of Cox's argument is that the most important goal the church should pursue is winning people to Christ, and small groups provide an ideal environment to implement this vision. In a small group believers gather together for Bible study to care for one another, pray, worship, have fellowship, evangelize, and meet the participant's various other spiritual and physical needs. The small group's main goal is for people to minister to others in agape (unconditional) love through the Word of God and by the Spirit of God.

An important step for effective small group ministry is equipping believers with a proper understanding of a small group. The intent of this chapter is to provide a theological foundation for small groups.

¹Cox, 10.

Community and Small Groups

God desires that His people experience community and also that they experience community with their Creator. Bonhoeffer declared: “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. . . . Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ.”²

God’s desire for the first small group, composed of Adam and Eve, was that the two would become one flesh (Gen 2:24). God also desires to experience community with people. It was His desire for community that led to creation and compelled Him to send His Son Jesus Christ to reconcile humanity to Himself. He declares that wherever two or three people are gathered together in His name, there He is in their midst (Matt 18:20). A small group that meets because of their common faith in Christ has His promise that they have formed a place for His presence and will experience community with Him. Small groups are a part of God’s redemptive plan.

God Exists as a Small Group

God exists as a small group in the form of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity is a foundational concept not explicitly taught in the Bible, but rather a conclusion that is derived from sincere study of the Scriptures. A small group is made up of at least three individual persons coming together to share their lives in common in

²Deitrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, tran. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 21.

order to experience intimacy and interconnectedness. God has revealed Himself to us as three separate Persons who also have a common, intimate, and interconnected life. Christians who are part of a small group are imitating at least one aspect of the very nature of God.

God created humanity in His image and likeness, male and female He created them (Gen 1:26-27). His statement, "Let us make man in our image," implies a triune God who communicates and has dialogue with other members of the Godhead. Since God exists in community as a triune being, He created humankind to also live in community. He calls for them to communicate and dialogue with each other. The call for people to gather in groups is an expression of being created in His image and likeness. This call to community is birthed out of the very purpose and nature of God. When Christians gather in a small group, they are demonstrating the communal nature of God. Christian community is rooted in the very character and nature of a God who seeks community.

The fact that God made humans male and female in His image has implications for Christian small group gatherings. While there are good reasons for some churches to organize around men's groups and women's groups, there are also good reasons for organizing heterogeneous small groups. Both kind of groups will help the participant understand more completely God's character and nature.

Small Groups in the Old Testament

The Old Testament does not articulate a specific theology of small group community; however, it gives us much to reflect on regarding small group ministry,

which may lead us to the conclusion that God created us for one another and He plans for us to live together in community.

The First Small Group

The very first small group in human history is found in the Garden of Eden, consisting of Adam, Eve, and God (Gen 2-3). This small group seemed to experience excellent communication and intimacy. There were also certain responsibilities (“The Lord . . . put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it,” 2:15) and guidelines (“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat,” vv. 16-17). The previous verses suggest that human small groups do not look just within themselves to find meaning for their being together, but that ultimately they find their purpose only in a God who guides them into meaningful activity and service.

However, as with small groups today, things did not continue to go smoothly forever in that first small group. Because of their disobedience, sin entered the picture and resulted in broken relationships. Their intimacy was destroyed. Realizing that they were naked, they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (3:8).

God sought out Adam and Eve when they were hiding from Him in fear and reestablished His relationship with them. They bore the consequences of their sin and were evicted from the garden (v. 23), but He made garments of skin to cover them (v. 20). Just so, a small group needs a wise leader who is aware of humanity’s inclination to sin and fear of intimacy, yet beckons members back into fellowship and sharing life together.

Life Together as Covenant

One thing that binds small group members together is a covenant relationship. One of the earliest covenant relationships in the Old Testament was between God and Abraham, where God said, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless. I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly. . . . And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you,” (Gen 17:1-2, 7 NKJ). God established a covenant relationship not only with Abraham, but also with his descendants. A covenant implies a group.

A covenant brings two or more persons together in a binding agreement to do or not to do certain things. A gathering of people together as a small group implies a covenant in that they are gathered for a reason, being bound by something in common. This is true whether the covenant or agreement has been expressed in writing, or whether it is just implied. A covenant gives concrete reality to a small group’s purpose, so the more clearly articulated it is, the stronger a group will be.

God’s calling and covenant with Abraham gave him and his descendants a clear sense of purpose. A Christian small group will have a more definite sense of purpose and will be much healthier if it has the sense of being called into being by God and of having a covenant relationship with Him.

Joseph—An Ideal Leader

In the Old Testament the extended family was the basic unit of society. It functioned as a small group, whether in a healthy or unhealthy way. Since the context of early Judaism was within a patriarchal society, the leadership style tended to be autocratic. Jacob’s family is a prime example of a small group that was a dysfunctional

family system. It began with his competition with Esau (even in the womb) and deception of his father Isaac; enlarged with the jealousy between his wives, Leah and Rachel, and their maidservants, Zilpah and Bilhah; and continued with Joseph's mistreatment and being sold into slavery by his brothers.

Joseph was a young man with tremendous leadership potential and a dream, but his brothers rejected his leadership and his dreams. Though hurt by their rejection, Joseph remained true to his vision and his God. In spite of tremendous setbacks, he became the second most powerful man in Egypt, and God used him to save his brothers and family from famine. Through all of his trials, Joseph kept a wholesome attitude toward his brothers, never becoming vengeful even when he was ruler over them. Joseph's faithful leadership helped to lead his family out of their dysfunctionality into wholeness. He modeled an effective leadership style for small group leaders today.

The godly small group leader exudes little tyrannical power or authoritarian control, but rather models nurturing mutual leadership and empowers others for ministry. Leaders who are secure in their position and relationships can see sharing leadership as an act of life. A good leader calls a small group to honor every member and to affirm each person's gifting so that all grow into their role as priest to God.

Effective small group leadership is modeled after the very nature of God, who created Adam and Eve and shared dominion with them, giving them responsibility for oversight of creation. Just as God's leadership style was empowerment sharing leadership with others, so the effective small group leader does well to emulate this style.

Organizational Structures

Moses led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into the wilderness, with the hope of going to the Promised Land. Along the way, however, he had to learn a new leadership style and create a more effective organizational structure. Exodus 8 describes how this came to a point of crisis. Moses had grown up in Pharaoh's house and had adopted a leadership style which made those under him dependent upon his power and authority. This is why he sat from morning until evening judging the people, while they all stood around waiting on him (Ex 18:13). Jethro, his father-in-law, chided Moses for taking on a task that was too heavy and told him to create a decentralized structure of accountability with leaders over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.

To properly care for such a massive group of people, not only was it essential for Moses to be the right kind of leader but also for him to empower several tiers of leadership involving hundreds of other leaders so that the whole community could be nurtured and given oversight. Jethro was God's instrument to help Moses create a structure of ministry and a leadership development strategy based upon the character of God, rather than upon the character of Pharaoh. Moses thus initiated a plan whereby leaders were taught to be dependent upon God and interdependent on one another. He created multiple layers of leadership overseeing multiple circles of community. The result was that the Israelites began to function as a collective of small groups, with each group taking responsibility for itself before God.

Community in the New Testament

It is important that every Christian believer grasp the true biblical understanding of community. Though no Hebrew or Greek word directly translates as *community*, its

general concept is inherently biblical. Two key Greek words mentioned in relation to community are *ekklesia* and *koinonia*, which are primarily shaped by the Apostle Paul. These two Greek words help define the underlying, pervasive concept of community as evident in the Bible. In this section these words will be examined in terms of their relation to small groups.

Word Study on *Ekklesia*

According to the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* the word *ekklesia* was used to summon the army to assemble. It is derived from *kaleo*, which means “to call.” In the Septuagint, *ekklesia* is often used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal*. The meaning of *qahal* is “the assembly of the people for worship.”³ The word *ekklesia* has a number of different meanings in the New Testament for example in 1 Cor 11:18 *ekklesia* is known to be “a church meeting” or gathering of Christians. In Matt 18:17 and Acts 5:11 *ekklesia* refers to “the totality of Christians living in one place.” Romans 16:15 uses *ekklesia* for “house churches.” In Matt 16:18, and Eph 1:22, *ekklesia* is used in reference to the universal body of believers. Coenen states, “the phrase *ekklesia*, appears only twice in the four Gospels (Matt. 16:18, 18:17).”⁴ Coenen also suggest that the lack of usage of *ekklesia* in the Gospels is probably due to the early Christians’ understanding of *ekklesia* to mean, “the eschatological assembly of the true

³L. Coenen, “Church, Synagogue,” *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (1975), 1:291-295.

⁴Coenen, “Church, Synagogue,” 1:295.

people of God.”⁵ In the Book of Acts, and throughout the Pauline epistles, *ekklesia* signifies a gathered community or fellowship of Christians, and not a building or a place.

Word Study on *Koinonia*

Another word for community, *koinonia*, is used nineteen times in the New Testament and has a wide semantic range, and is therefore being translated in various ways. As an abstract noun, *koinonia* means “to share, to participate in, to partner with, to have communion, to fellowship, to be connected with.”⁶

Koinonia is absent from the Gospels, while twelve of the nineteen occurrences of *koinonia* are observed in the Pauline Epistles (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 1:9; 10:16; 2 Cor 6:14; 8:4; 9:13; Gal 2:9; Eph 3:9; Phil 1:5; 2:1; 3:10), four times in 1 John (1:3, 6, 7), once in Acts 2:42, and once in Heb 13:16. *Koinonia*, therefore, is a typically Pauline term along with *ekklesia*. The different meanings of each word are related to the concept of community. The relationships among Christians in the community of believers exist as a common sharing in a personal relationship with Christ. Accordingly, *koinonia* with Christ implies participation in the suffering of Christ (Rom 6:6; Phil 3:10; Col 2:12-13) and in the glory of Christ’s resurrection and ascension (Rom 6:8; Eph 2:5-6), as well as in His humble character (1 Cor 10:16). Baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper are the main expressions of *koinonia* with Christ. *Koinonia* with Christ, therefore, is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 12:13), the Gospel (Phil 1:5), and faith (Phil 1:6).

⁵Coenen, “Church, Synagogue,” 1:302.

⁶L. Coenen, “*koinonia*,” *The International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (1975), 1:639.

The basic principle in the diverse images of the church that are mentioned by Paul, such as people of God, house of God, and body of Christ, is *koinonia*. Paul insists that the central aim of the church is the building up of one another into the likeness of God, in Christ. The church, therefore, is the product of *koinonia* and the place where *koinonia* is practiced.

The Apostle John also mentions *koinonia* in 1 John. *Koinonia* in 1 John 1:3, 6, 7 refers to fellowship, in faith, between the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ. It is based on the apostolic preaching of the historical Jesus and recognition that the blood of Jesus cleanses all from sins. The characteristics of *koinonia*, according to John, are walking in the light through confession of our sins (1:9), obedience to his Word (2:5), and brotherly love (2:10).

Examples of Community in the New Testament

One of the first actions taken by Jesus was creating a community of twelve disciples, who were to become Jesus' constant companions during most of His earthly ministry. The twelve received intensive training through the model of Jesus' daily life.

The Book of Acts

The early church experienced a new understanding of community through the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost. Early Christians persistently and diligently "devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42) Fellowship requires a commitment to one another, which is as firm as one's commitment to Christ. Early Christians shared their abundance and with care showed compassion towards the needy individuals within their community.

Pauline Epistles

The concept of community is the most detailed, most developed, and most profound in Pauline thought out of all the NT writings. The Pauline community focused primarily on a quality fellowship with God as well as with one another. Two important metaphors describing community are the family and the human body. Family means relationship, which to Paul is the keystone of Christian community. Paul also compares the human body with the body of Christ, which is the community of Christ's disciples. The analogy comparing the body to the community highlights the number and variety of individual parts within the systems, yet they all work together as one organism interdependent on one another.

Small Group Models

The New Testament includes two typical models of small groups. The first model consists of Jesus and His chosen twelve disciples. Jesus saw this small group not only as a key to His plan of sharing the Gospel with others, but also as an important support group for Himself. Jesus modeled a devotional, loving, open, and honest lifestyle. The second small group is the house church mentioned in the Book of Acts and Paul's letters. Its function is further described in Acts 2:42-47:

1. Teaching: learning the Gospel and applying it to their lives (v. 42)
2. Fellowship: "having in common" such as the breaking of the bread together (vv. 42, 46)
3. Worship: "corporate fellowship of believers in worship" including the Lords' Supper and praising God (vv. 42, 47)
4. Prayer: the thrust of church growth in private as well as public setting (v. 42)

5. Ministry: distributing proceeds, as any had need (v. 45)

6. Evangelism: the Lord increased to their number those who were being saved (v. 47).⁷

Ralph Martin summarizes these elements into five activities: *charisma* (worship to God); *kerygma* (preaching); *didache* (teaching); *koinonia* (spiritual fellowship); and *diakonia* (service).⁸

The group of Jesus, He and His twelve disciples, carried the same six basic elements of small group as described in the Jerusalem Church's home group. The dynamics of Jesus' group, of course, were quite different in comparison to those of the house church. Jesus' group had one leader and twelve members for three years. The disciples were more like trainees rather than active participants. Their places of learning were not limited to houses or synagogues: Jesus taught them in all locations available to Him, such as in fields, on a mountain, at a lakeside, in a boat, or even at a tomb. All the while, the disciples were in the process of learning who Jesus was and what He did. They had been trained intentionally by Jesus as potential leaders who would soon take over His ministry.

The Book of Acts describes the active ministry of house churches. Believers in the Jerusalem Church scattered into small gatherings in houses for prayer, fellowship, or nurturing. Many house church leaders must have been trained for ministry. House

⁷*NIV Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1648

⁸Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 27.

churches also became a powerful evangelistic tool, meeting the people's needs. These groups multiplied from house to house.

Jesus and the Twelve Disciples as a Model for Small Groups

This section investigates Jesus and His twelve disciples, based on the six elements shown in Acts 2:42-47. Christians try to imitate Jesus Christ in every aspect of His life and ministry. Jesus formed and led this small group of disciples: He chose them, trained them during His earthly ministry, and commissioned them prior to His ascension to God.

Speaking about the training of the twelve, Ellen G White said,

The disciples were to go forth as Christ's witnesses, to declare to the world what they had seen and heard of Him. Their office was the most important to which human beings had ever been called, second only to that of Christ Himself. They were to be workers together with God for the saving of men. As in the Old Testament the twelve patriarchs stood as representatives of Israel, so the twelve apostles stand as representatives of the gospel church.⁹

Jesus was the perfect role model for a small group leader. From the Gospels, one can explore His life and ministry, and draw from this some biblical principles for small group ministry: how to start a group; how to train group members; and how to send them out as missionaries.

Group Formation: Calling Disciples

One goal of Jesus' mission was calling people in to the kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15). In order to fulfill this goal, His main priority was creating disciples through

⁹Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1949), 19.

small groups. Cox says “although Jesus had many disciples, He invested much of His time and energy in developing His own small group of twelve. He taught them to be completely dependent on Him and on each another.”¹⁰ Cox’s main point is that Jesus chose and trained twelve men as a pilot group, because the small group is an ideal environment for learning and practicing.

Inviting friends to a small group—whether they are believers or not—provides a good opportunity for evangelism because relationships help newcomers stay engaged in the group. Those who experience God personally are more able to successfully recruit others. Chapter one of John’s Gospel describes Jesus’ first encounter with His disciples. Jesus invited two of John the Baptist’s disciples to follow Him and then spent the day with them during which he taught them something about Himself. The Apostle John actually remembered the specific time that he met Jesus, which was about the tenth hour, because this encounter marked a special time in his life. Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, (John 1:41) and Philip invited Nathaniel (v. 46).

The synoptic Gospels describe three aspects of Jesus calling of His disciples. His first act was to call four men to become “fishers of men” (Matt 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5: 1-11). From the beginning, Jesus, as a leader, demonstrated clear goals for His group. Although they did not know how to become fishers of men, the disciples knew why they had been called. Immediately, the four left their occupations and families to follow Jesus. When Jesus called His other disciples, they were toiling at their workplaces (Mark 1:16, 19; 2:14), but they all followed Him as well. From these instances, two

¹⁰Cox, 15.

essential qualities can be learned about group formation: clear goal setting and commitment.

Jesus chose the twelve apostles from among the many disciples who followed Him (Luke 6:12-13). His group was very unique compared to the rabbinical students of the time. Richard Peace describes the main differences between Jesus' group and other disciple groups: "For one thing, Rabbis did not seek out disciples. . . . For another thing, rabbis were not, in general, itinerant. They had schools. They remained in one place."¹¹ In the process of becoming disciples, they should "be with him" and ultimately "be sent out" to proclaim the Gospel (Mark 3:14). Robert Meye explains the meaning of "being with Jesus" in three ways: "(1) those who see the works of Jesus; (2) hear the words of Jesus; and (3) disciples that are prime witnesses to Jesus' ministry to the multitudes."¹² In other words, two primary reasons for small groups are building relationships for growth and accountability, and accomplishing the mission of God.

Luke uses three terms related to Jesus' group members in 6:13 of his gospel: "He called His disciples to Himself, and from them He chose twelve, whom He also named apostles."

As in John 6:66, and 8:31 *disciples* are also used in a wider sense to represent those who abide in the word of Jesus. In most cases, the terms *disciples* and *the twelve* are used interchangeably. The term *apostles* is used in the sense that the twelve disciples were later sent forth by Jesus for a special mission in His name.

¹¹Richard V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 164.

¹²Robert P. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 102.

Group Training: Leadership Development

This section investigates actions and ministries of Jesus and His twelve disciples based on the six elements as describe in Acts 2:42-47.

Teaching

Jesus wanted to teach His disciples new biblical perspectives during His ministry. Lohfink maintains that Jesus “relativized” the concept of “clan, parents, children and land,” thinking that “the reign of God is arriving.”¹³ During the confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus challenged the Jews’ traditional understanding of fasting (Matt 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-22; Luke 5:33-39). Moreover, Jesus redefined the concept of true kindred (Matt 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; John 15:14). Jesus is not saying that earthly family ties are not important, but rather that doing the will of God is most important. A genuine small group, consisting of followers of Jesus, becomes the spiritual family.

Discipleship

Jesus gave valuable lessons on discipleship in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:29) and in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49). Meye also states that “the didactic leadership of Jesus is climaxed by a parabolic manifestation. The disciples have learned who Jesus is, and have become the chosen witnessed of his gospel.”¹⁴ Many would-be disciples who wanted to follow Jesus without paying the price eventually fell

¹³Gerhart Lohfink, *Jesus and Community: The Social Dimension of Christian Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 41.

¹⁴Meye, 85.

away from Jesus. Jesus stressed to his disciples the important priorities in life (Matt 8:18-22). Right after Peter's confession, Jesus gave a clear statement about His passion, to the disciples, revealing that he must go to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and be raised again from death three days later (Matt 16:24-28; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mark 8:34-9:1; 9:30-32; 10:32-34; Luke 9:23-27, 43b-45; 18:31-34). Then, Jesus added three commands related to true discipleship; self-denial, cross-bearing, and consistently following Jesus daily (Matt 16:24-28; Mark 8:34-9:1; Luke 9:23-27). Some women gave a good example of discipleship during Jesus' earthly ministry. They accompanied Jesus, along with the twelve disciples, and helped Jesus with their resources (Luke 8:1-3). Such commitment is a virtue to be pursued by all group members. A Christian small group should be a gathering of true disciples who want to pay the price of bearing the cross of Jesus Christ.

Servant Leadership

Discipleship training is also leadership training. Lohfink states, "Every call of God into community is a call to bring the members of the community into leadership."¹⁵ Christians need to study the method and content of Jesus' leadership, and train small group leaders to follow His example. Observations on the final stage of discipleship training within the Gospels shows that mature leaders are not made easily. The disciples even argued with one another regarding who was the greatest among them (Luke 9:46). When ten of the disciples heard that the mother of James and John had made a request for her sons to be given the highest places in the kingdom, they became indignant (Matt 20:20-28; Mark 10:35-45). In response, Jesus taught them about servanthood, explaining

¹⁵Lohfink, 47.

that, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45 NIV). Jesus kept teaching His followers that pride and self-seeking of any sort had no place in the life to which He called them. Jesus also taught about the rightful attitudes of all servants of the Messiah, including humility, reconciliation, and forgiveness (Matt 18:1-35; Mark 9:33-50; Luke 9:46-50). These attitudes cannot be practiced alone, but are more effectively cultivated in group settings. During the final week of Jesus’ life, He showed the greatest act of humility when he washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:5), in effect, taking the place of a servant. His intention was to awaken His disciples, who struggled with self-centeredness, seeking only for themselves, to unselfish service for his kingdom. It is essential that group members, especially leaders, follow Jesus’ example of service to others.

Proper Use of Talents

Spiritual leaders should always use their talents for the group’s well being, according to the will of God. Using the parable of the talents, Jesus taught two main lessons (Matt 25:14-30; Mark 13:34; Luke 19:11-27): God gave various talents to every individual, each according to his/her abilities, and everyone is accountable to God for the way his/her talents are applied. The small group is the appropriate place to discover, develop, and use the gifts of group members for ministerial purposes.

Fellowship

Jesus’ disciples tried to stop a man who drove out demons in the name of Jesus because he was not among them (Luke 9:49). James and John asked Jesus to seek revenge upon the Samaritan villagers because they refused to receive Jesus (Luke 9:45),

behavior which reflects an unloving attitude to others outside the group. Lack of love comes when one lacks a personal relationship with God—for love starts with God. In response to a question presented by an expert in the law on how to inherit eternal life, Jesus answered with the law found in Lev 19:18: love the Lord, your God, and love your neighbor accordingly—the main essence concerning love.

Worship

Worship should express one's thanksgiving and joy to God. Whenever and wherever believers gather, they should enjoy their gathering, love others, pray earnestly, and praise together. While having the Passover meal with His disciples, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper for remembering His body and blood (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20). When Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives, He sang a hymn with His disciples (Matt 26:30). Thus the small group is a place for the remembrance of who Christ is, what He did for us, and for the celebration of Him.

Prayer

Jesus was a man of prayer. He not only taught His disciples how to pray, but also demonstrated His teaching by praying Himself. Jesus prayed at His own baptism (Luke 3:21). In spite of His busy schedule, Jesus arose very early to go to a solitary place and pray each morning (Mark 1:35). When the crowd tried to crown Jesus with kingship for feeding them, He hastily made His disciples get into a boat to avoid such appraisal. From there, He scaled a mountain to intercede for His disciples (Mark 6:46-47). Before calling His twelve apostles, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer (Luke 6:12). Jesus was praying in private when He asked His disciples about their confessions of faith (Luke 9:18). The

authority and power during His ministry came not from His being the son of God, but from His disciplined prayer life, under the Holy Spirit's guidance. When the nine disciples failed to heal a boy from an evil spirit, Jesus pointed out their lack of faith and prayer (Luke 11: 5-13). Though Jesus asked three disciples to remain awake in the garden of Gethsemane during the night of his capture (Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46; John 18:1), they could not overcome the weakness of the flesh. The result was the scattering of the disciples after Jesus' arrest and the betrayal by Peter.

Ministry

Jesus' first ministry tour in Galilee consisted of teaching in the synagogues, preaching the Good News of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matt 4:23; Mark 1:39; Luke 4:44). His demonstration showed that leaders should be sensitive to the needs of group members. His disciples found Him praying at a solitary place very early in the morning. Jesus showed the resolution to fulfill His mission: to preach the Gospel (Mark 1:38). Leaders should be faithful to the mission, which God has assigned to them. Following the footsteps of Jesus, leaders must not only have pastoral hearts, but also must not distract group members from their desired path.

After calling His disciples, Jesus began to preach in front of a great crowd, and also went about curing the multitudes. He had compassion on the people gathered around Him, and demonstrated His power to meet their needs. Jesus sent out the twelve to preach the Gospel and to heal (Luke 9:2). For this purpose, Jesus gave them the power to cure diseases and hold authority over all demons, and His disciples had ample opportunity to practice all they had learned.

The Gospels contain two stories recalling the miraculous feeding of the multitudes: one for the Jews (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:32-44; Luke 9:10b-17; John 6:1-15) and the other for the Gentiles (Matt 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-10). When Jesus performed such miraculous feeding of the people, who gathered around Him, the role of His disciples were to organize the multitudes' seating arrangement, to distribute food to them, and then to pick up the leftovers. The small group is a place to practice ministerial skills depending on gifts, desires, and experiences of the group members.

In the process of knowing Jesus in a small group setting and learning the ministry, the disciples' faith grew. During a boating voyage, the disciples frantically awoke Jesus while fearing for their lives due to a storm, but He simply calmed the wind and waves by rebuking them. Afterwards, Jesus again pointed to the disciples' lack of faith (Matt 8:23-27; Mark 4:37-41; Luke 8:22-25). Jesus later declared a woman with a longstanding hemorrhage to be healed, due to her faith in touching the hem of His garment so as to access His divine healing power (Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56). He also asked Jairus to have faith in spite of the terrible situation, his daughter had died (Matt 9:18-26; Mark 5:21-43; Luke 8:40-56). Acts 12 display a growth in faith, King Herod (Agrippa I) arrested Peter and ordered him to be killed in order to please the Jews after the Passover. The very night before His scheduled execution, Peter, bound by two chains and sleeping between two soldiers (Acts 12:6a), did not show any signs of fear after being filled with the Holy Spirit. The small group is a great place to deepen faith in any life setting.

Evangelism

The sinful Samaritan woman recovered her value as a human being loved by God after her encounter with Jesus, despite the fact that her heritage was enough for the Jewish Jesus to despise her. She ran into the village to witness concerning the Messiah, which she had just found. Jesus revealed that leading people to salvation was true nourishment for Him (John 4:34). He trained His disciples as faithful harvesters and promised them a reward for their labor. Jesus also requested that His disciples pray that God would provide the needed workers, because the harvest is great and laborers are few (Matt 9:35-38). Even today, Jesus is inviting people to follow Him, to learn from Him and to serve Him. The small group should be a place of rest for participants and of recovery for the wounded. Group members should remember their calling as harvesters for eternal life.

In Matt 9:9-17, Jesus suggests four pictorial images of what His disciples' ministry should accomplish to bring spiritual health, joy, wholeness, and fullness to sick sinners, using the imagery of a physician (v. 12), a bridegroom (v. 15), a cloth (v. 16), and wineskins (v. 17). The small group should be a place for joy of salvation and recovery from brokenness in life. When Jesus mentions parables about the restoration of the lost sheep, the lost drachma, and the lost son, He uses the term *rejoice* in each case (Luke 15:1-32); thus, stressing the joy for salvation of lost souls. The small group should be a place for celebrating the return of souls. Ultimately, Jesus demonstrated His pastorship of the Israelites by laying down His life. A leader should make every effort to direct group members into an interest in saving souls.

Richard Peace argues that small groups may be the most suited “means to reach the post-Christian generation for Christ.”¹⁶ What he is suggesting is that the small group should be in the front-lines of outreach, evangelism, and recruitment. Group members should take actions in visiting an unbeliever’s house and share the Gospel, help poor families, and visit and comfort sick people. They can invite friends or relatives, who are not believers, into a small group and share a meal together. They can provide practical help when needed. The group can also create a comfortable atmosphere in which members can confront important issues in life. Sincere care, giving concern, and fellowship can lead non-believers into an interest in the Christian life, and ultimately result in their receiving Jesus as Lord. Through their involvement in small groups, they are nurtured and can also participate in ministry.

Jesus called His twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. When Jesus sent out His disciples for missions, He gave them instructions (Matt 10:6-42) and His power for ministry (Mark 6:7-13). The twelve disciples preached the message of repentance, cast out demons, and healed the sick; their acts mirrored exactly what Jesus had shown and instructed them. After the twelve disciples returned from their mission trip in Galilee, Jesus received their reports and gave them aftercare (Mark 6:30). After the seventy returned, Jesus checked their work, pointed out any problems, and then exhorted, praised, and rejoiced (Luke 10:17-20) with them.

¹⁶Richard V. Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program for Reaching Out with the Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 12.

Before His ascension, Jesus delegated His small group to go and make disciples of all nations, promising to be with them at all times through the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:16-20). Russell Burrill asserts that “With these words Jesus established His church. It was not to be a babysitting operation. It was to be a mission agency. The reason for the existence of the church was to go forth and make disciples among all people groups. This message comes to us in the authority of the risen Lord.”¹⁷ All believers need to go out and proclaim the gospel earnestly by calling laborers for the harvest.

House Church as an Expression of Small Groups

There are different biblical examples of small group activity in the Bible. These small groups were formed to promote fellowship and to have communion daily. They worshipped together regularly at the temple each day. Let’s look at some biblical examples.

Church in the Post-Resurrection Era

When group members are filled with the Holy Spirit, they become powerful witnesses of Jesus Christ. Before His ascension, the resurrected Jesus gave His disciples a command to stay in Jerusalem until receiving the Holy Spirit as the gift promised by God. He clearly said that His apostles would be His witnesses by the Holy Spirit’s power (Acts 1:8). A group of 120, including the eleven disciples and Jesus’ physical family, joined together constantly in prayer (Acts 1:13-14). On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit baptized the people gathered in the upper room. They heard the sound of a strong

¹⁷Burrill Russell, *Waking the Dead: Returning Plateaued and Declining Churches to Vibrancy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 22.

wind, saw tongues of fire, and then spoke in various tongues (Acts 2:2-4). After receiving the infilling of His Holy Spirit, Peter delivered a powerful evangelistic message to the amazed crowd. He said that the Spirit's coming is a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy from Joel 2:28-32, particularly the phrases "That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." When Peter called on them to repent of sins and believe in Jesus Christ, three thousand people accepted the invitation. Such a large-scale rally as this was an everyday phenomenon. After the day of Pentecost, the number of disciples steadily increased (Acts 2:47; 6:7).

The early church, as a whole, gathered at the temple while small groups of people gathered in homes for day-to-day fellowship. These new disciples needed guidance, not only in the Word of God, but also in material and financial concerns. These small groups met in private homes where worship, praise, sharing of needs, prayer, fellowship, and teaching flourished through their leaders' guidance (Acts 2:46-47). The twelve disciples were deeply involved in prayer as well as the ministry of the Word, meeting the early church's spiritual needs (Acts 6:1-7). They found it necessary to appoint lay leaders to nurture, love, protect, and lead the new flock.

Another excellent example of small group activity is found in Acts 13. Luke introduces the church in Antioch as a new mission center because persecuted believers in Antioch spread the Gospel not only to Jews but also to Gentiles. The church had two distinct features, compared to the Jerusalem church: multiple leaderships and clear missionary mindedness. After five church leaders prayed and fasted, under the Holy Spirit's guidance they sent Barnabas and Paul as missionaries. The lesson from this experience is that diversity within the unity of Jesus Christ is a healthy contribution to the functioning and effectiveness of small groups. The laying on of hands is a wonderfully

supportive gesture on the part of fellow group members. As individual believers are sent out on missions into the world, it is meaningful to feel the prayerful touch of supporters, who will continue to pray for their effectiveness in ministry.

Historical Background of the House Church

The early church established the pattern of the *church-in-the-home* concept. In order to study the house church's nature and activities, one must understand the social, cultural, and religious background of the first-century Greco-Roman world. Neal McBride stresses the Jewish influence to explain why the house church became the early church's basic ministry unit: "The early church reflected a strong Jewish, Old Testament flavor, including its emphasis on groups. The individual family unit was the center of Jewish religious and social institution, and this practice was carried through into the New Testament era."¹⁸

Robert Banks describes the Greco-Roman world's social setting, mentioning two traditional types of communities of the time: "*politeia*, the public life of the city or nation state to which people belonged; and *oikonomia*, the household order into which they were born or to which they were attached."¹⁹

Those traditional communities, however, changed gradually during the Roman Empire's expansion. As a new trend in social organization, Banks points out the emergence of numerous small voluntary clubs or associations, whose group members' age "mostly averaged around 30 to 35," and whose interests were "to find their personal

¹⁸Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1990), 18.

¹⁹Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 6.

point of reference and to experience a level of community.”²⁰ Likewise, Christian gatherings at homes must also be greatly influenced by “the spontaneous association of individuals in society, and a parallel development to the religious fellowship.”²¹

The early church held both home fellowships and church worship for its corporate body of believers. Teaching sessions were held at the temple, and as people became saved, they joined with other believers in regular attendance at the apostles’ teaching sessions and at the communion services and prayer meetings (Acts 2:42). They worshipped together regularly at the temple each day, met in small groups in homes for communion, and shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness, praising God (Acts 2:46-47).

Banks describes the development of the semantic range (meanings) of the term synagogue: the gathering itself; the community which met together; and finally the building itself.²² Likewise, an understanding of the term *ekklesia* seems oriented to the physical church building rather than to the church as a body of believers. Also, because all believers are priests before God (1 Pet 2:9), no hierarchy exists in the priesthood of believers, and all members have a function in the body of Christ. Christ is the head and distributes gifts as He wills (1 Cor 12:11). Church buildings and large congregations cannot provide this personal, deeply intimate relationship with one another. Church buildings are made for teaching and worship, while homes provide the heart of the Gospel: fellowship and sharing support with servanthood training.

²⁰Banks, 8.

²¹Ibid., 14.

²²Ibid.

House Church References in the New Testament

In the New Testament we find a number of references of small group activity. They taught the Gospel from house to house, and as a result, those who received salvation were added to their number daily. The following are biblical references of house churches in the New Testament.

The Book of Acts

Early church members broke bread from house to house (Acts 2:46) and continued to teach and proclaim the gospel that Jesus is Christ (5:42). From house to house, Paul dragged off men and women and put them in prison (8:3). Many people gathered at the house of Mary for intercessory prayer (12:12). When Lydia was baptized with her household, she invited Paul's group to her home (16:15). The jailer also rejoiced when he accepted Christ along with his household (16:34). Persecution occurred at Jason's house (17:1-6). Paul ministered at the house of Justus and Crispus (18:4-8), and taught the Gospel from house to house (20:20). Paul stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist (21:8-15).

Pauline Epistles

In his letters, Paul sent greetings from fellow believers to the church that met at Priscilla and Aquila's house (Rom 16:5a; 1Cor16:19). He gave greetings to the church in Nympha's house (Col 4:15). He also sent a welcome letter to the church that met in Philemon's house (Phil 1:2). With regards to meeting in the homes Ellen G. White said:

“Invite your neighbors to your home, and read with them from the precious Bible and from books that explain its truths. Invite them to unite with you in song and prayer.”²³

Robert and Julia Banks imply that “the Church in the home was the basic form of early Christian community life.”²⁴ They further mention three distinctive features of early Christian church life: its family nature; its full-orbed character; and its participatory style. From Acts 2:42-47, one can derive the house church’s function: those who gathered at homes were devoted to “the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer” (v. 42 NIV) they became united through continuous fellowship (vv. 43-46); and they praised God and enjoyed the favor of all the people (v. 47). As a result, the Lord added to their number daily, those who received salvation.

The Nature of Small Groups

The nature of small groups in the church should be very specific in its mission. Goals must be set and a small group should provide an ideal place where love through fellowship is practiced.

The Goal: Making Disciples

Matthew 28:18-20, known as the Great Commission, explains the purpose behind the church. Since the Great Commission was given just before Jesus’ ascension, one should treat it as a mandate to be obeyed by every Christian. According to the Greek text, the only true imperative in verses 19 and 20 is to “make disciples.” Jesus suggests three

²³Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington D.C.: Pacific Press, 1925), 122.

²⁴Banks, 39.

aspects of making disciples: going, baptizing, and teaching. First, one should go to those who do not know Christ; those who have fellowship only with believers do not faithfully follow Jesus' command. Second, one should baptize them: Christ should be introduced to unbelievers in order to evoke a personal testimony of their faith. Third, one should teach them obedience: new converts should not simply be taught knowledge, but also how to become disciples of Jesus in their lives. Also, new disciples should be taught to lead others to Christ, because making disciples with the ability to reproduce is the goal of ministry. All believers should be involved in the ministry of making disciples until the *parousia* (appearing). Jesus promised to be with all Christians at all times. Group members inviting friends and neighbors to home meetings accomplishes personal evangelism. The focus is for fellowship of believers to express a living faith as each individual demonstrates love, respect, encouragement, and forgiveness through open mutual sharing, prayer, and benevolence. Through this type of ministry, a small group makes disciples true persons in Christ.

The Attitude: Love

When one of the Pharisees asked for the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus reply was based on Deut 6:5 (Matt 22:34-40): love the Lord our God wholeheartedly and love your neighbor as yourself. Following the significance of the Ten Commandments, one needs to develop a relationship with God as well as with their neighbors. Love is the essence of Jesus' teaching concerning all relationships. Fellowship through the Spirit achieves unity, reconciliation, peace, and joy in the body of Christ. In a group, fellowship of love should be emphasized, because love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8), and

makes it possible to regard others as better than ourselves (Phil 2:4). A small group provides an ideal place where love, through fellowship, is practiced.

Primacy of Lay Ministry

Apostles delegated their authority to lay leaders to carry out the house-to-house ministry. Believers' needs were taken care of in homes, not in the Temple. Paul gave clear instructions for pastors and laypeople, respectively, in Eph 4:11-16. Pastors are to equip laypeople for the work of ministry, and to build up the body of Christ. In other words, pastors should help individuals find their spiritual gifts, train them, and then provide opportunities for ministry. All of God's people, as active witnesses, share the Gospel to reach the world. When this role-sharing is done effectively, the church properly fulfills her mission. In Eph 4:16, Paul intends that everyone should participate in church ministry, and all believers should act as a living organism, joined and knit together. According to the grace and gifts given by God to all believers, every Christian should be involved in the ministry as a member of the body of Christ.

Christian Character of Members of Small Groups

Something occurs when Christians get together to build one another up. The desire to help and serve one another is manifested in the life of the believer. The church then, becomes a group of people who love and care for one another. The Christian character of each small group member is demonstrated through the following character traits.

Jesus as a Model of Servant Leadership

Jesus always taught leadership through His own examples. Jesus came as the *servant-king*. He relinquished His right to rule in order to serve those He came for, to reach them with the love and life of God. He led the disciples by first serving them. The best model for group leaders should always be to follow Jesus himself who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28 NIV).

Jesus continually repeated His teachings to emphasize servant hood and humility. Servant hood to God is to be expressed through the serving of one’s neighbor, which is the only route to humility. Humility unlocks the powers of heaven, which then propels one into the cardinal graces of love, holiness, and caring. One can only truly understand humility really through the perfect example offered by Christ. According to Jesus, the humble shall be rewarded (Matt 23:11). Humility provides freedom from self-seeking and fills individuals with a loving hearts, as perfect peace is found by resting in Christ (Matt 11:29-30). Paul said, “Now I am glad to boast how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ’ power instead of showing off my own power and abilities” (2 Cor 12:9 NIV). This humble attitude almost seems unattainable for modern Christians, but it is Christ’s only plan of true happiness.

One Another in the New Testament

A certain chemistry occurs as Christians get together to build one another up. This edification cannot be accomplished if one is isolated from other Christians. A sense of the great need for the loving fellowship of a small group ministry should be in the church. The New Testament shows how to accomplish this living, biblical interaction on a practical basis. The use of the reciprocal pronoun *one another* is particularly frequent.

All these one another passages portray ways of helping each other and supporting each other. Cox said “Jesus taught his disciples to ‘love one another’ as He had loved them. He even went so far as to say that it was their love for each other that would convince everyone else that they were true disciples—and if Jesus said It, it must be true.”²⁵ Every part of the body of Christ needs the other parts (1 Cor 12:21, 26). The church should be a group of people who love and care for one another. This is what Jesus prayed for when He was yet on earth.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23 NIV)

Small Group Functions

Sharing in small groups provides the environment for a life-changing experience. Small groups are on the front-line of fellowship, outreach, and evangelism. Let’s look at some of the functional benefits of small groups.

Small Groups as a Place for Learning

The goal of small group ministry is to meet the needs of participants, to share and have fellowship, to learn to love one another, to worship, and to know and apply God’s Word to our lives. In the book, *Pastoral Ministry*, Ellen G. White advised pastors to “Let little companies meet together to study the Scriptures. You will lose nothing by this, but will gain much. Angels of God will be in your gathering, and as you feed upon the

²⁵Cox, 29.

Bread of Life, you will receive spiritual sinew and muscle. You will be feeding, as it were, upon the leaves of the tree of life.”²⁶ Biblical studies should be kept central to the group’s purpose because God’s Word creates faith in the hearer’s heart. During His ministry, Jesus invited people to share in a small group setting in order to reveal truth to them, and as a result change their lives. Sharing in small groups provides the environment for a life-changing experience because the Bible is being personalized and people are sharing how it applies to them directly, which naturally flows into supportive ministering to each other, as well as prayer.

Small Groups as a Place for Evangelism

Small house fellowships provided the building blocks of the New Testament church. New believers met together in their homes to break bread together and to use the opportunity to encourage each other to live out faith in obedience. During Ellen White’s visit to Australia, a major Christian revival took place in Melbourne, at the height of which two thousand small groups were meeting in homes all over the city and she subsequently wrote: “The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort has been presented to me by One who cannot err.”²⁷ Small groups are on the front-line of outreach, evangelism, and recruitment. Group members visit an unbeliever’s house and share the Gospel, help poor families, and visit and comfort sick people. They can also invite non-believing friends or relatives into a small group. The group provides a comfortable atmosphere where members can confront various important life issues.

²⁶Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Washington D.C.: Pacific Press, 1995), 274.

²⁷Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1827-1915), 7:21-22.

Receiving sincere care and genuine concern and participating in fellowship lead nonbelievers to have an interest in a Christian lifestyle, and ultimately those invited nonbelievers can receive Jesus as their Lord. Through involvement in small groups, new believers are nurtured, and can also participate in ministry as members of the body in Christ.

Small Groups as a Place for Training

A pastor alone cannot deal properly with all the needs and problems that the congregation has: giving comfort with prayer and God's Word, solving problems, and encouraging church members. Active small group ministry not only reduces the pastor's burden, but also establishes intimate relationship among group members. Small groups can be an effective place for the nurture and training of lay people because they are invaluable resources for ministry. Furthermore, once they are trained properly, they can effectively contribute to the ministry in various ways.

In training leaders, it is important not only to encourage group leaders, but also to check on their progress, to receive reports from them, and prayerfully to give them direction and exhortation. In order for a leader to become the right person, equipped with the right knowledge and skills, he/she needs a personal relationship with Jesus as well as with members within his/her own community and to be shaped through accountability and the support of the community. Directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating are leadership styles that Jesus employed with the Twelve along the training process. Jesus also trained His disciples by giving them opportunities to prepare their own ministries. Through His deliberately planned process, they learned how to live as Jesus' disciples and to prepare others to hear the Gospel. If groups truly discover God within their

community, then the small group might consider reflecting back upon its collective life together and sharing how God has been discovered through its experiences.

Small Groups as a Place for Ministry

Disciples are to catch men for the coming kingdom by preaching the Gospel and working in Jesus' name. The call to discipleship also includes a call to service: the church should minister to those in spiritual, physical, and emotional need. Bringing people in need to Christ and having them healed in Christ holistically is the priority of ministry at all times.

Ministry best occurs through relationships. Ephesians 4:32 presents vital tips for a healthy church. When believers have hearts of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness, people's healing occurs in the church. Others' mistakes and weaknesses should be embraced as opportunities. Paul, however, does not stop his exhortation in saying, "putting away falsehood," but continues to say "let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors." Paul proceeds from the negative command *do not* to the positive exhortation *do*. For healing to occur, positive aspects should be emphasized. The Church should provide an environment where everyone can expose his/her own problems or agony without hesitation. True healing happens through God's perfect love, which is often expressed via others.

Small Groups as a Place for Community

Small groups are an ideal place for building communities, which support thriving relationships among group members. When group members are reflecting back upon their

life together and share how God has been working in and through their lives, then will they experience the benefit of small groups as a place for community.

Every church member should feel it his special duty to labor for those living in his neighborhood. As you visit your friends and neighbors show an interest in their spiritual as well as in their temporal welfare. Present Christ as a sin-pardoning Savior. Invite your neighbors to your home, and read with them from the precious Bible and from books that explain its truths.²⁸

Jesus applied the metaphor of *family* to the small group experience to help people think of their faith affiliations in terms of community.

Small Groups as a Place for the Holy Spirit

Jesus was a man of the Holy Spirit. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 4:1). Afterwards Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit (v. 14) and was able to launch His own ministry. For Jesus' disciples, the training they received during His three and a half years of ministry was not enough. Before His ascension, Jesus commanded the disciples to be filled with the Holy Spirit rather than depending on their own human power (Luke 24:48-49; Acts 1:5). When the promised Holy Spirit came upon the 120 gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost, they began to boldly testify and carry the Gospel to all peoples. Therefore, a leader's role is "to facilitate the Holy Spirit's ministry in the members' lives through planning and guiding the group activities."²⁹ When the Holy Spirit becomes the thrust of a small group, its ministry will be richer and bear much more fruit.

²⁸Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1952), 190.

²⁹McBride, 22.

Small Groups as a Place for Discovery and Use of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual Gifts are the supernatural equipping of God's people for service and worship. In 1 Cor 1:7, the Apostle Paul exhorts all believers to "come short in no gift, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (NIV). In Rom 12:3-8, Paul describes the relationship to other believers as different members of one body; he uses the body metaphor to depict an organic relationship between a body and its members. Each believer is a part of the body of Christ and as members of one body in Christ each individual has different functions and gifts. The metaphor also represents the variety of gifts and their interrelationship. Since all are members of the body in Christ and God gives all gifts, no one has anything to boast of by comparing one's own gifts with gifts of other members. All gifts should be utilized for the body's edification and all believers should remain humble and practice peacefully living with one another. Recognition and encouragement comes from the body, which, as a result, is being built up. Small groups provide an environment where spiritual gifts are discovered, developed, and used for various ministries. Love is the only means of manifesting these gifts with any value at all (1 Cor 12:31).

Small Groups as a Place for Prayer

Prayer is communicating with God. All children of God are invited to approach the throne of grace with confidence. Jesus demonstrated His prayer life to His disciples during His life and ministry. The Jerusalem Church was born with the intensive prayer of 120 believers, who waited to be baptized by the Holy Spirit. Prayer was one of the main activities of church members when they gathered in homes (Acts 2:42). House church

members, for example, prayed for the imprisoned Peter's release (Acts 12:12), thus Paul insists on continual prayer (1 Thess 5:17). James stressed the need of prayer for the sick person (Jam 5:15-16). In the book *Evangelism* by Ellen G. White, she promotes prayer through small groups. She said, "Let the Los Angeles church have special seasons of prayer daily for the work that is being done. The Blessing of the Lord will come to the church members who thus participate in the work, gathering in small groups daily to pray for its success."³⁰ Spiritual disciplines, like prayer, can be practiced more efficiently in a group rather than on an individual basis, because group members can encourage spiritual disciplines accordingly, holding others accountable for their proper practice.

Small Groups as a Place for Reconciliation

True reconciliation can take place through the recovery of three relationships: with God, with others, and with ourselves. *Seeking the lost* is a common biblical picture for soul winning. In Luke 15, Jesus presents pictures of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—all of whom needed to be found and brought back to their place of belonging. The recovery of a broken relationship with others is necessary.

Correspondingly, anyone who bears the brunt of a brother's sin should talk to him privately and seek to settle the matter with love. Winning the saved is just as important as winning the lost. Helping an erring brother requires an attitude of love, for "love shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8 NIV). Love not only helps the offender to face his sins and deal with them, but love also assures the offender that those sins, once forgiven, are remembered no more. Recovering relationship with oneself necessitates constant

³⁰Ellen G. White, *Education* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1949), 111.

examination of one's personal life to unearth any sin committed against others. In dealing with personal differences, all Christians need to be examples of humility and honesty by acknowledging one's mistakes first, and then resolving the issue as quietly and quickly as possible. A small group is an ideal place to restore such believers. To be a caring community, a small group needs three ingredients: "humility, honesty, and self-examination."³¹ Reconciliation and partnership can be practiced through forgiveness and humility, after which time God responds to prayer.

Uniqueness of Christian Small Groups

Compared with secular small groups, the Christian small group possesses many unique factors. A hallmark of the small group, which builds Christian community, is Bible study. The goal is for the group to study together the inspiring truths of one particular passage with an emphasis on regular devotion for its discipline. The study material should be directly applicable to daily living and draw upon participants' personal insights and experiences. Prayer is another vital element of small groups that helps in the process of building the Christian community. Prayer is a discipline to be learned; Jesus was asked by His disciples to "teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). A goal for good, interrelated group prayers is a balance of participation. Leadership is a critical element of the healthy small group, and, likewise, shared leadership is of great importance as well. Each member needs to eventually assume some function of the group's leadership, with Christian small groups being mutually interdependent and supporting. The small group plays a unique role in three vital areas of need in a person's individual and corporate life:

³¹Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Books on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 90-91.

(1) aiding spiritual growth; (2) developing cooperative interdependence; and (3) mobilizing for ministry. Spiritual growth arises through relationships with others. Developing cooperative interdependence is a basic need of human beings, all of whom are created for community. Within a small group, an individual can begin to fulfill the needs of mutual interaction with others. Mobilizing for ministry within the small group context is another means of meeting personal needs.

Summary

In this chapter, the concepts of *ekklesia* and *koinonia*, along with community were considered because they are the key words behind biblical small group. Then two typical models of small group in the New Testament were examined. The group consisting of Jesus and his twelve disciples represents the ultimate model for small group. There are three major group activities: calling, training, and commissioning of disciples. The house churches portrayed in Acts and in the Pauline letters are expressions of small groups. Historical background dealing with the first-century biblical church was studied to help understand the house church, and the nature of small groups was investigated so that it may be applied for further insight in observing small groups within the Fresno Spanish Church.

CHAPTER 3

PROFILE OF THE FRESNO SPANISH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Demographics of the Fresno Community

Let's begin this chapter by analyzing the community of the City of Fresno through demographics. It is a well-known fact that by utilizing statistics and demographics, one can begin to have a good idea of who lives in the community. In similar fashion, if the church were to develop a strategy for evangelism, it would do well to invest in analyzing the community that surrounds it. The process of obtaining information, as it relates to the community, is not as difficult as one may think. A good first step would be to contact the local Chamber of Commerce. After meeting with the Vice President for Membership, they will direct you to key people and institutions that would provide all the needed information at no charge. In addition to the materials obtained, I discovered how eager they were to share with me information about important events that drew hundreds of thousands of people per event. All this information gave me insights into the community's different interests in citywide events.

Following this interview, I made my way to the City Community Development Agency and met with the Business Development Manager. This interview proved to be extremely beneficial. As I explained my project, the business manager collected the statistics and demographics I needed. We also had time to discuss the city of Fresno.

Once I had the data available for study, I could then begin to think about how to reach the community. Also, I could begin to think about a process for developing a small group ministry in my church. Interviewing key public officials is important for a number of reasons. First, it gives one a chance to introduce oneself. I may need some of these individuals in the future. Second, these individuals know how to do networking in the community. In other words, they can get things moving. Third, they know where to get necessary information. Interviewing local leaders is one crucial step in developing a strategy for evangelism in the local church.

The statistics and demographic information on the city of Fresno has been taken from the 2009 Fresno County Directory and Visitors Guide. The North side of Fresno is nationally recognized for having great school districts, excellent police and fire service, and low crime rates. Education and scholastic standards are above state and national levels. The west side of Fresno, where the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church is located, is considered to be the unsafe side of town. The population is largely Hispanics and African Americans. The west side of Fresno has one of the highest crime incidence rates in the state of California.

In this community assessment, the area of consideration encompasses a three-mile perimeter around the church. The population of Fresno is currently at about four hundred ninety thousand people. The population by race stands at 54 percent Hispanic/Latino, 29 percent Caucasian, 8 percent Asian, and 5 percent African American, with the remaining 4 percent falling under different categories. Marital status showed 51 percent of the target area married as opposed to those who are single or previously married. The highest percentage category lies between age's forty to forty-nine years old.

This is predominantly a low-income community: currently, 64 percent of the population has occupations that are categorized as construction or farming, while a few are managerial and professional. The average person has ten years of education. Typically both spouses are working, and the average home income is between \$25,000 and \$35,000.

A careful analysis of these statistics reveals some compelling information. In a three-mile perimeter surrounding the church property, there is a sizeable population around ninety thousand, with 73 percent being Hispanics. I believe this is a significant insight because the church I serve is made up of Hispanics. So the church represents the ethnicity of the community. The median age of this community has its highest number between twenty-five to fifty-four years of age. The average family in this community lives in an apartment and the average home owner in this community owns a home valued at around \$120,000.

Direct contact with people in the community will be necessary to help us discover how to peak interests, so that the gospel may be presented through small group ministry. This community contact will be accomplished through a survey. The survey has two functions. First, it helps to assess the spiritual tone of the people and their current spiritual experience. Second, it allows us to connect with them concerning a felt need in their life. Members of the local church should provide literature of information on upcoming events that these individuals may participate in. The community Religious Survey included the following supplies: clipboard and pen, survey forms, and brochures for various events sponsored by the church in homes or at the church site (please see Appendix A for direction on conducting the survey).

The importance of personal contact cannot be emphasized enough. I believe this is the crucial beginning point for an effective evangelistic strategy, and it is a method that will be effective in reaching this community. Psalm 126:6 says, "He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." We will not know how to develop an effective strategy for evangelism in our community and meet its needs unless we go to our neighbors and get to know them.

Prayer under these circumstances is essential. We can pray for souls, but we must go where the people are and work for their souls. Could Peter and Andrew have caught fish at home just by thinking about it? Could Jesus have affected salvation if He had stayed in heaven? The answer, of course, is no. This religious questionnaire and the statistical demographics will determine what kind of small groups the church needs to develop.

Demographics of the Fresno Spanish Church

The Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church is currently located at 3033 E. Olive Ave in the city of Fresno. The church is surrounded with houses and apartments, and most families who live in the vicinity are Hispanics.

The Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church began in the year 1939. The existing church at that time was known as the Fresno English Seventh-day Adventist Church, from which new Hispanic families decided to start a new Spanish speaking congregation. At that time there were only a handful of Hispanic families, who rented a meeting hall in the city of Fresno. The English Seventh-day Adventist church financially supported the efforts made by this new Spanish group. They held evangelistic efforts and

had small groups, and with many of community services provided by its members they were able to witness and encourage community families to join in and eventually become members of this new congregation. Two years later this small Spanish congregation had about forty members. The church was growing, and in 1941 the Central California Conference acknowledged this group with a company status. One year later the new Fresno Spanish Church was established with a membership of seventy-five. The Central California Conference assigned Pastor Carlos S. Nicolas to be the official pastor for this congregation. The church continued to grow from a congregation of forty members to what is now a congregation with a membership of 1,345. Many pastors have come and gone but the spirit of evangelism in the church is one which has produced great numerical growth. Members of the Fresno Spanish church today would describe their church as a warm, friendly, and caring place. The church provides its members with need-based services, such as free breakfast and lunch every Sabbath. This ministry has helped us reach many and win them for the kingdom of God. We also provide the community with two worship services, both Spanish and English. The church services are mainly in Spanish but since we have a few church members who are third generation Hispanics and their language of preference is English we provide our members and our community with weekly worship programs in English.

As you visit the Fresno Spanish Church you will find out that we have relatively young families averaging two to five children. With time you will also find out that about 75 percent of church members are from or family originating from Mexico; about 20 percent, Central America and the other 5 percent have differing nationalities or family background. Church families take pride in having strong family values; they show great

interest in family oriented programs and activities. For this reason we have year round sports programs for our children and a strong Pathfinder and Adventurer clubs. We have coordinated social and spiritual youth programs. The church has a variety of programs that are making an impact on the community. The church conducts an ongoing Bible class, where we share with the members and visitors the fundamental beliefs of our church. The Fresno Spanish Church is committed to serving the community and meeting some of their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and education regarding free services the city of Fresno offers to low income families. All these programs have helped us sustain a steady growth in the church but I strongly believe more can be accomplish if we implement a small group ministry program in the church.

The Fresno Spanish Church has aggressive public evangelistic meetings, and, for the most part, wins people for Christ and baptizes them. However, we do not have a training program that sends each member forth. I believe one of the major reasons this exists is because many have embraced the fallacy and have the attitude that “it is up to the paid professionals to do ministry.” In addition, there seems to be a growing number of people who have a dualistic view of their relationship with God. For them, their relationship with God and their secular work are separate. So a number of individuals within my congregation relate with God through church activities, but nowhere else. Unless there is a shift in purpose and direction, biblical giftedness will become more and more obscure. Alan Nelson and Gene Appel give a description that corresponds with what is happening in the Fresno Seventh-day Adventist Church:

Ultimately, deep change, whether at the personal or the organizational level, is a spiritual process. Loss of alignment occurs when, for whatever reason, we begin to pursue the wrong end. As time passes, something inside starts to wither. We lose our vitality and begin to work from sheer discipline. Our energy is not naturally

replenished, and we experience no joy in what we do. We are experiencing slow death.¹

I don't necessarily see the Fresno Spanish Church experiencing slow death but I do see the church in the near future doing far better than what it is doing right now. Much needs to be done in the area of training and equipping our members to do ministry. I see the willingness for change and improvement in my church. The envisioned strategy is going to create such an atmosphere that the members will want to get involved in the winning of souls for the kingdom of God.

What is the solution? The solution is to communicate a clear vision for ministry through the implementation of a small group program. In fact George Barna made an amazing observation when he said, "fewer than 4 percent of all senior pastors can communicate a clear vision for their ministry."² What happens if Christians do not discover and implement God's vision? "At best, we will simply maintain the status quo. At worst, our church or our society will deteriorate to the point of death."³ New methodologies are not to be shunned or ridiculed in light of an ever-changing world.

This project is about bringing change to the Fresno Spanish Church. Our world is in a stage of constant change. Harris Lee states it well: "To live is to change; to live well is to change often not merely for the sake of change, but for the sake of mission. Because of our rapidly changing world, to forgo change is not a live option. At times the only

¹Alan Nelson and Gene Appel, *How to Change Your Church Without Killing It* (Nashville: 2000), 22.

²George Barna, *Today's Pastors: A Revealing Look at What Pastors Are Saying about Themselves, Their Peers and the Pressures They Face* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1993), 118.

³Bennis Warren and Burt Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Change* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 228.

options are to change or die.”⁴ This is the challenge laid before the church I love and serve. The Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church is not entirely devoid of meaningful ministry, as we will discover in the next section.

Numeric Growth in the Fresno Spanish Church

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always had a strong emphasis on mission even from its earlier stages of growth. The church has the largest private school system in the world. This, along with a large worldwide hospital system, has been the vehicle to share the gospel worldwide. Large amounts of funding and resources are provided to maintain and establish new networks in non-evangelized areas of the world. The Adventist Disaster and Relief Agency (ADRA) is as extensive in scope as the Red Cross. How does this relate to our local work?

In Fresno County alone we have two Seventh-day Adventist Academies, and enjoy the presence of three major Seventh-day Adventist Hospitals. Through our educational and health institutions, the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist churches get to be introduced and easily known.

The Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists provided this project with some information concerning the Fresno Spanish Church and the numeric growth it had in the last ten years. The church has had an average of forty to fifty baptisms each year. As I looked at these important numbers, it is obvious that a small minority of the membership is actually involved.

⁴Harris W. Lee, *Effective Church Leadership: A Practical Sourcebook* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), 31.

The Central California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, provided an eleven year New Member Report for the Fresno Spanish Church as follows:

Table 1

Fresno Spanish Church New Member Report for 1999-2009

1999-2004		2005-2009	
Year	Baptisms	Year	Baptisms
1999	50	2005	31
2000	40	2006	50
2001	56	2007	164
2002	32	2008	54
2003	55	2009	49
2004	4		

This report clearly demonstrates how involved the church has been in winning the lost for the kingdom of God. As table 1 shows, in the year of 2007 when the program was implemented, the church planted a new congregation and had an explosive growth with 164 baptisms, a rate of 300 percent compared to the 2004 report.

Numeric Growth Strategies in the Fresno Spanish Church

The congregation of the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church presently represents a diverse group of families and individuals: people from a variety of educational backgrounds and life experiences. We have farm workers, construction workers, a few business owners, stay-at-home mothers, children, college students, retirees, and etc. Based on the vast diversity, the formation of small groups should be created to minister to the needs and concerns of each church member. The future programming must be intentionally focused on the needs and interests of each particular

group. The needs are many. They vary from those wanting to explore their faith to those who are going through life transitions, crisis, and loss. This is where an expansive small group ministry, which includes a multi-faceted variety of offerings, can be extremely beneficial in a church community such as Fresno Spanish. Bible study, support groups, service groups, and fellowship groups will play a major role in the future numeric growth of the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church.

At the present time there is a very positive working relationship between the pastors and the leaders who serve on the various boards and committees. Teamwork would well describe the relationship between clergy and congregation. The church members trust the integrity of their pastors and the pastors trust the ability and dedication of church leaders to accomplish the various responsibilities entrusted to them. Leadership training must now be provided to support and encourage these and many new leaders in their ministry at the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Why should a small group ministry be established in the Fresno Spanish church? Because small group ministry is one vital way that people's needs may be met through fellowship, prayer, and caring for others in a loving, committed Christian environment. Through our small group ministry, we will seek to build church members who will grow spiritually in their faith. Small groups will help fulfill the ultimate purpose of our loving God. In small groups, people will experience being the "body of Christ," each member working with the other members to create harmony and function healthfully. Together participants will experience the love of Christ in and through one another. For Christ calls us to a new commandment—to love one another. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all persons will know that you are my disciples, if you love one

another” (John 13:34-35). Small group members will come to live in the joyous reality of the people of God. The formation of small group ministry will take us beyond the casual relationships we have at the fellowship hour on Saturday mornings.

Summary

Analyzing the community of the city of Fresno through demographics helped me get a good idea of who lives in the community and how to develop a small group ministry that would reach out to them. The community contact was accomplished through a survey which helped us assess the spiritual tone of the people and their spiritual experience. My hopes and expectations are that as a small group ministry is implemented in the life of the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, the following will be accomplished: (1) closer caring relationships will be discovered and nurtured in small groups; (2) individuals will experience a unique environment which fosters spiritual and numerical growth; (3) genuine Christian community will be achieved; and (4) those who participate will be empowered to live their life in a Christ-like way. I envision small group ministry at Fresno Spanish serving as an intentional means to bring people closer to the love of God in Jesus Christ. As people share their faith journeys and their personal needs and concerns, they will find themselves celebrating together the joy of Christian fellowship. They will experience the joy of sharing the good news of salvation with those who don't know the Lord—what a great opportunity this will be. Just as Jesus called the twelve Disciples into community to care and share in Christ-like love, he calls us yet today. Small group leadership training must now be provided to educate and equip the laity to do ministry.

CHAPTER 4

A SMALL GROUP PROGRAM FOR THE FRESNO SPANISH CHURCH

Description of the Model

This chapter defines and establishes a small group model for the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church. A general description of the model along with the specifics about this model is given. Included, also, will be the qualifications and skills necessary to be a small group leader. Let's look at some of the elements that were needed to establish the foundations for a Small Group Ministry.

Train Small Group Ministry Team

To establish a small group model we saw the need to train and develop a Small Group Ministry Team. The Small Group Ministry Team was initially trained by me as their pastoral advisor. The team also attended various small group leadership training events sponsored by our local Conference. The Small Group Ministry Team received specific training in small group ministry principles and management skills to equip the members to coordinate the Small Group Ministry at the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist church. The team then worked on establishing a Christian small group ministry as an integral mechanism for caring, learning, working, and being together at Fresno

Spanish Church. The team played several key roles in the development and the life of the Small Group Ministry at Fresno Spanish Church.

First of all, members of the Small Group Ministry Team served as visionaries in the development of our church's Small Group Ministry. As visionaries, the team members needed to gather enough information to gain an understanding of the forces that will shape the design of the church's Small Group Ministry. Once the information was gathered and studied, the team created a vision statement for Small Group Ministries at Fresno Spanish Church.

The team members became the interpreters of the congregation's interests and needs in developing and launching specific small groups. The team members were the communicators to the congregation regarding the Small Group Ministry of the church. As communicators, the Small Group Ministry Team kept the congregation abreast on the development of the Small Group Ministry and any changes or additions of specific small groups.

The team members also became recruiters for potential small group leaders. As Recruiters, the Small Group Ministry Team members continually worked on finding persons with a desire to learn and to lead a specific small group. They listened to the needs expressed within the congregation. And from those needs, they encouraged others to consider taking the leadership role of a particular group.

The team members also served as the trainers for small group leaders. As trainers, the Small Group Ministry Team planned and lead bi-annual Small Group Leadership Training Seminars. These required group planning, study, and reflection. On occasion,

the Small Group Ministry Team sponsored special training events that were open to all persons interested in small group leadership.

The team members became the facilitators, helping small group leaders and networking leaders and participants into appropriate groups. As facilitators, the Small Group Ministry Team members worked with small group leaders in helping them to develop their leadership talents and abilities. They also helped small group leaders when question or conflicts arose.

The basic qualifications to become part of the Small Group Ministry Team, included the following: the ability to explain the Small Group Ministry vision; the ability to work well with others; and the ability to encourage the small group leaders who need encouraging, to confront the small group leaders who need to be confronted, and to guide the small group leaders who need guidance. A member of the Small Group Ministry Team knew when someone in a group needed referral. They had acquired listening skills, a thorough knowledge of group dynamics, and owned a positive, encouraging attitude.

Responsibilities for members of the Small Group Ministry Team were to champion or support our small groups and to monitor the health of the groups through personal interaction with small group leaders. A team player reported to the small group pastor; periodically visit the small groups; encouraged and guided the small group leaders in their own growth; and helped train small group leaders to find their co-leaders. They continued to develop their small group ministry skills.

The Small Group Ministry Team assisted small group leaders as they begin new groups. Members of the team served as co-leaders when the need arises. They also met with the small group leaders during any future training opportunities. The Small Group

Ministry Team supervised the choice of content and application of group materials along with the pastor(s). The team also became responsible for helping small group leaders deal with persons who are difficult or have issues and helped to decide when to refer such people to support groups or other resources. The team members periodically submitted reports on the progress of each small group leader being supervised to the small group pastor. Additionally, they kept the small group pastor abreast of strengths and problems in the group as they monitor group participation in ministry projects and outreach efforts. In summary, the Small Group Ministry Team became a small group of people equipped to discover and recruit, to nurture and encourage, and to apprentice and support the small group leaders in their ministry.

Operational Model Principles

In order to have an effective and ongoing small group ministry it was important to establish basic principles for healthy functioning. The following five basic principles helped to build a sound foundation that became an integral part of small group ministry at the Fresno Spanish Church.

Small group ministry was to (1) provide an environment for building and developing relationships, (2) provide the opportunity to minister to each other, (3) provide a nurturing, caring community, (4) promote spiritual growth and development, and (5) encourage life transformation

There are also five theological principles that also needed to be recognized as an integral part of small group ministry. They revolved around the One who has called us into ministry through Jesus Christ.

1. God orients the small group. The small group is God-centered, person-related, rather than individual-centered and God-related. The group is oriented by God and has its place within the greater cosmos, which God is continually creating, redeeming, and sanctifying.

2. God reveals God's true self in love and mercy through Jesus Christ in the community of small groups. In an increasingly pluralistic environment, people are finding many gods and many perceptions of God in small groups. Often these are not a perception of God consistent with the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ. When the god revealed in the person of Jesus Christ orients the group, the members are able to perceive God as love and mercy.

3. God calls us to support and affirm one another in love. God's call is for us to include others in our lives and enjoy a sense of belonging. As a distinct community, we hold one another accountable for the actions we do as individuals and as a community.

4. God gives gifts to all the members of our groups through our relationships with one another. God gives us the gift of relationships in small groups, which provides us with strategies and synergies. The gift of small group relationships makes difficult tasks, such as decision-making and problem-solving, much easier. The combined energies, intelligence, experience, and faith of the members of a small group make learning, remembering, risk taking, and experimenting much easier. These relationships are God's gift to us so that we may have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10).

5. God transforms us in community, into the mind of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit in small group community. God transforms us in community so we know who and whose we are.

In the small group setting, we are nurtured and fed by God through one another to grow in Christ's likeness. The group offers an environment to grow spiritually and to equip us to reach our family, friends, and coworkers. The small group then becomes a community of fellowship, centered on the experience we share as Christians. But for this to happen, it was required that the leader and group members be accountable to one another and committed to the group in regards to time and participation. Group members must be willing to share personal gifts and talents, and be open to developing a greater prayer life. Within the small group, members were encouraged to grow new small group leaders, as they became familiar with small group principles and procedures. Small group members were also encouraged to invite neighbors, co-workers, friends, or relatives to a place, other than church, where they can experience the love of Jesus Christ in a community of Christian fellowship.

One of the most important things to remember within the small group was that it required confidentiality. Confidentiality is of utmost importance because, not only is it our professional responsibility, it is what establishes the foundation for trust building. Once trust was developed, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are more readily shared. Communication then became more honest. To break a confidence is extremely damaging to any relationship. The person who has shared his/her feelings or problems in confidence with you will no longer trust you. Your relationship will suffer greatly. Furthermore, you may create the fear that no one can be trusted.

In a small group setting, many private and intimate thoughts and feelings will be shared. When trust is prevailing, growth can take place. If that trust is broken, growth

will be stopped. The group will become unhealthy. Breaking such trust is destructive. It is very difficult—if not impossible—to regain trust once it is broken.

Maintaining confidentiality is part of our Christian responsibility. The New Testament takes special care to instruct us, as Christians, about our responsibility in this matter. In the Epistle of James, we find the famous admonition to watch carefully how we use our tongue. James describes the tongue as a small but dangerous part of the body. James 3:8 reads: “No human being can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” These are very stern words, but yet remind us of the fact that just as we show love and respect for others, so also we need to demonstrate this love by avoiding saying anything to others which might damage the well-being of other group members.

Therefore, we asked the question, “What is confidential in a small group?” The answer is *all* communication within the group or transactions between group members; all observations and impressions regarding any group member; and all information concerning any member must remain confidential!

Such a rule is part of the ethical codes of all helping professions and needs to be strictly adhered to within the small group setting. Only with the permission of the group member can you share with someone else the confidential information about that person. The rule is strict because it is extremely important to preserve the special trust that develops in any small group.

As a small group leader, this applies even to the records and notes that you make. You must be sure that these are neither shown to anyone nor left in a place where other people might stumble onto them. It's best to avoid recording anything that's sensitive.

This holds true for all small groups. But it is even more crucial in small groups focused on support. Yet, as with every rule, there are exceptions.

There were only two such exceptions where confidentiality does not apply. They were as follows. The first, when a group member is manifesting suicidal behavior. This is demonstrated by expressed threats or actual attempts to physically harm or kill oneself. The second, when a group member is manifesting homicidal behavior, or when a group member is physically or sexually abusing another person. Homicidal behavior is demonstrated by expressed threats or attempts to kill another person or physically harm them. Examples of abuse would be child abuse or spousal abuse.

Again, these were the only two exceptions to the basic rule of confidentiality. In cases regarding the two exceptions, not only are you permitted to divulge confidentiality but you are required by law to notify the proper authorities. In cases of suicidal behavior there were three steps that we followed

1. Someone must stay with the person. The person should not be left alone for one second.

2. Encourage the person to contact a helping resource such as a hospital emergency room, a counselor, the police, a crisis service agency, a friend or family member, or another resource applicable to the situation. Repeat what you said to them. Tell them that you will contact the helping resource, anyway, because you care. It is hoped that the person will then be willing to do so.

3. You must contact the appropriate resource immediately, to get them the professional help they need.

In case of homicidal behavior, you need to follow a similar approach as outlined for suicidal persons. But since homicidal persons are usually dangerous, not only to themselves, but to others as well, including possibly yourself, you may not be able to follow exactly the same procedure.

If you are in danger, remove yourself immediately and contact the appropriate authority immediately without seeking the person's consent. It is the most caring way to handle such a situation. You are keeping that person from committing a destructive act.

At the first meeting of every small group, the members included confidentiality rules in their written group covenant (See Appendix B). Access the interests and needs for small group ministry from the congregation

First of all, each leader defined the type of small group he/she chooses to organized and lead. One must ask oneself, Will it be a task oriented group, a fellowship oriented group, a support group, or a study oriented group? The job of recruitment of small group members most often falls on the shoulders of the leader of each group. As a small group leader, you are encouraged to think of people that you know who might be interested in your group and ask those people also to think of others that they know who might be interested in participating in the group. Phone calls and word-of-mouth are the most effective ways of recruiting members for a specific small group. A notice in the church bulletin may interest a few but most people have the need to be personally invited to a group. Be as specific as possible when you describe your small group. Planning ahead became vital to the success of this program.

If you want to gather groups together to share issues about life after your children have left home, it would be productive to see what resources are available on the topic.

The Adventist Book Center may carry discussion materials on the subject. The local library would also be a good resource. Your pastors might also know of or have material that you could use. Outline there are series of lead topics you may want to present for group discussion. Talk with others who might be interested in such a group and listen to their input. Plant seeds of enthusiasm about your upcoming group. Then plan a time for the group to meet and place for it to be held. It is now the time to call each prospective member.

When calling prospective group members, have the details written down to be sure that all points are covered. As you talk with people, you may offer some different time options and then choose one that will be most convenient for the majority. It is also important as you talk with people to be sure they are willing to commit to the time parameters that the group requires. Once that decision has been made, then the assigned group leader must gather members together at an appointed time and place.

Before the first meeting, make sure the facilities for the meeting are ready. Provide all group participants with directions to the meeting location. Design an agenda for the meeting. Think about how prayer will be used, when, and by whom. Review the material to be used. Be sure necessary items are planned for such as nametags, covenant samples, and pencils.

At the first meeting, the small group leader usually provided tea or soft drinks and needed supplies. If the meeting was held in the home of another group member, they usually provided the refreshments. This needed to be set up prior to the meeting time. It was important for the leader to give full attention to the members once they arrived. The first meeting was crucial to the group's future. It sets the stage for the health and the life

of the group. This meeting was an introductory and get-acquainted meeting. They made sure to start the meeting on time (even if someone is late). It was important that everyone honored the group's opening and closing time.

The room needed to be inviting. Chairs needed to be arranged preferably in a circle for maximum group participation. Room temperature and lighting were important considerations. Distractions needed to be eliminated. This was the group's time!

Once the small group was underway, it was good to delegate certain responsibilities to other group members. This was done by taking time at the close of each meeting to assign helpers for the next meeting or specific persons were delegated when the group began. They carried out the needed chores for the life of the group.

Recruit Potential Small Group Leaders

First and foremost, we had to understand that small group leaders needed not be highly skilled in group dynamics or great in biblical knowledge. What became essential for any leadership role in the church was a life touched and renewed by Jesus Christ. Then ordinary abilities became extra-ordinary. We must remember that God chooses the right Christian leaders. Our task is to discern on whom God has placed His hand.

We need only to be reminded of the model that Jesus established for us. He called ordinary people like you and me to be his disciples. He called them to live in the Truth, knowing that others would come to believe and follow. This is the key for Christian leadership credibility and integrity. Our ultimate model is Jesus Christ. Our credibility and effectiveness as leaders stem, not from having *arrived* spiritually, but from a willingness to admit we have not yet arrive, but are still in the process of becoming, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We, the pastors, who were in close contact with congregation members, became crucial to recruit small group leaders. There are characteristics that we looked for in potential small group leaders. The pastor looked for persons who were committed to Jesus Christ as Lord, to the local church ministry, to the nurture of healthy human relationships, to personal and corporate spiritual growth, to Scripture as the primary resource for Christian life, to practice forgiveness and the healing of broken relationships, to working through group conflicts, to develop and share group leadership roles, to the mission and ministry of Christ, and to practice the discipline of personal and group prayer.

As people bring their special interests to the pastor, the pastor in turn inquired and encouraged those same persons to prayerfully discern if it is God's intent for them to lead a specific small group. But it is not the pastors alone who can recruit small group leaders. The existing small group leaders needed to keep a constant eye out for potential group leaders in their groups. The person who has had a positive small group experience is often one who is ready and capable (with some added small group training) to lead a new small group.

These persons were encouraged in this direction. Pastors planted leadership seeds in groups from the onset. Pastors helped group members to see the vision of growing Christian small groups. This is the ministry to which Jesus has called us. "Go and make disciples." Spread the Good News!

Dan Williams says,

We do not need strong leaders' so much as sensible, sensitive and servant leaders. As we know, small group leaders come in various sizes and shapes. Not all have the same physical, mental or spiritual makeup. But there are some common qualities or

characteristics that make an effective small group leader. There are things to look for in persons when considering someone for leadership in small group ministry.¹

Small group leaders were firmly rooted in basic Christian principles. They had to be in right relationship with God, self, those in authority, and others. They must be committed to the Word of God, the mission and philosophy of the church, and a life of discipleship.

A small group leader was first and foremost a person who demonstrated his or her love for God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The leader had a personal desire to be an instrument of the Lord in working with others to help them develop a real and vital faith in God and to build strong disciples able to think for themselves. An effective leader had to be willing to devote time daily to meditation, prayer for the group and the individual group members, and study. That love was extended into the church toward the people of God. The following were some basis character qualities required of a small group leader.

A small group leader is one who is willing to be flexible in leadership style and ministry method.

A small group leader is one who has a willing spirit to grow in relationship with God, discover new truths, develop spiritual gifts, learn new skills, gain a Christ-like attitude, and share leadership functions with others.

¹Dan Williams, *Seven Myths about Small Groups: How to Keep from Falling into Common Traps* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 32.

A small group leader is one who is willing to be directed by a future vision to be open to looking beyond the present and accepts in faith the process of working towards future goals.

As the Apostle Paul relates, “I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13-14).

A small group leader is one who is willing to model a style of mutuality, calling the group into mutuality and invite the members to “come and share with me.”

A small group leader is one who has compassion for others—a disposition of solidarity toward another’s pain, the action of entering into the context of that pain as one’s own, a commitment to overcoming the cause of the pain itself. Jesus said to His disciples, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

A small group leader is one who has the ability to perform executive functions—planning, organizing, scheduling, and executing. Luke reports in the book of Acts, “In those days when the number of disciples was increasing. . . . So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:1-4).

A small group leader is willing to commit time and effort to receiving adequate training in the principles for working with a small group. The future success of the group will depend on the leader’s willingness to take the time needed to learn, practice, and integrate the skills required for leading a small group.

A small group leader is willing to commit the necessary time to the small group. Once a group begins meeting regularly, it is reasonable for the leader to set aside at least two hours of preparation time for every hour the group meets. The leader must be committed to devoting scheduled time not only to preparation, but also to making calls to members, recruiting new members, and being there to lead the regularly scheduled meetings.

A small group leader is not over-committed in other activities. Being a small group leader is a commitment. It takes time and energy. It requires a self-disciplined person who plans and schedules their life according to priorities. As was stated earlier, those priorities include daily devotions, prayer, and reflection. A small group leader must schedule planning time for each meeting well in advance, journaling time following each meeting, time for making necessary telephone calls, and time for leadership continuing education. A person who is over-committed to other activities simply is not in a position to give adequate time and energy to leading a small group.

A small group leader is willing to listen and to be non-judgmental. We often perceive listening to be almost passive. Yet really good listening takes commitment and energy. Much of what we do as good listeners takes place without saying a word. It involves comfortable eye contact, a quiet and open posture, and sincere acknowledgments, such as a timely nod or a look of questioning or encouragement. It requires emptying one's own mind of other thoughts and personal agendas and opening one's self to be wholly present to another. Sometimes the best way to listen is to feed back (active listening) your perception to the one who's speaking, reverbaling what the

speaker has expressed. Sometimes replies, questions, and brief, sincere responses help the one who is speaking to clarify thoughts and feelings.

A small group leader recognizes the need for confidentiality within the group setting. He/she will display the spirit of confidentiality and not only display but stress confidentiality among the group members. All who participate in the small group must be assured that whatever they share with the group will be kept strictly confidential.

In other words, what is said within the group stays within the group! An open and safe atmosphere flourishes when group members and, especially, the group leader are trustworthy. A group leader will never repeat what another has said unless given specific permission. A group leader will not only demonstrate confidentiality but also will expect and insure the same from all the group members.

A small group leader does not come to the group with hidden agendas nor manipulate the members of the group to agree with a preconceived idea. A small group leader is not self-seeking, but is flexible and sensitive to the mood and the expressed needs of the group. To allow others to think for themselves and to accept their differing views and ideas requires a degree of spiritual maturity. It is necessary for a small group leader to be self-differentiated. A self-differentiated leader will have sufficient confidence so as to require no hidden agendas and to feel no need to manipulate other group members.

A small group leader is assertive and self-confident. Individuals who think and behave assertively are people who have an active orientation to life and participate fully in life, with a sense of God-given personal power. Assertive men and women live decisively, aware that life is full of choices and sensitive to their responsibility to make

decisions about those choices. While assertive Christians may not always know immediately which choice they want to make; they will move deliberately toward information and people; they will ask for the time necessary to make a good decision; and they will feel free to modify or change that decision, should such a change be indicated. In much the same way, assertiveness is not only something you do. Assertiveness is a way you are. Assertiveness grows out of your maturity and your ability to know and respect yourself as an individual, an individual unique by God's design. Assertiveness is one of the outward signs of an integrated personality.

A small group leader has energy and a sense of humor. We have all seen how too much seriousness can be destructive. It can cause chronic anxiety and drain our energy. It is characterized by lack of flexibility in response, a narrow repertoire of approaches, persistent efforts to try harder, an inability to change direction, and a loss of perspective and concentrated focus. That is the reason why the expression, "It is good to be able to laugh at one's self," has healing merit.

A small group leader should not currently be experiencing a major personal or spiritual crisis. During times of personal or spiritual crisis we are focused inward. Therefore, it is difficult to give the needed energy and enthusiasm to a group of people who are in need of the leader's guidance, support and encouragement. Once we have worked through our personal crisis and have experienced healing and renewal, then we are in position to look outward. Having taken the time and energy to constructively work through a personal crisis can equip a person with excellent *tools* for helping others deal with personal crisis.

A small group leader is not the master but *the servant* of the people in the group. The leader demonstrates genuine warmth, understanding, and an easy manner. And yet, with all said and done, we must recognize that as human beings we cannot expect to be perfect leaders. Only Jesus Christ was a perfect leader. But each of us can try to emulate His example of servant leadership and strive to be the best leader we can be.

Train Small Group Leaders

It was important that small group leaders be well trained in order to function as the group's facilitator or guide. All persons who participated in small group leadership training were committing themselves to follow and learn from Jesus Christ, who is the center of Christian spirituality. This is discipleship. This is discipleship was built on the same foundation as that of Christ's disciples two thousand years ago. In the small group setting, the leader had to call people to Jesus and not to themselves. In the group, members called one another to Christ. There was no private faith in Christ. Christ lived for people. Leading a small group carried the responsibility for nurturing the faith of others in the group. We are one another's keepers for faith in Christ. We do impact one another's enthusiasm or frustration in our faith journey. Small group leadership was an acceptance of responsibility for the faith development of your group members. This required sensitivity to the uniqueness of each person. This nurturing process needed relational skill and spiritual character.

As we mentioned earlier, there was a training course for prospective small group leaders that was held both in the fall of the year and again in the spring. Participants were expected and encouraged to attend all classes. The course was designed to provide the theory, experience, and practice needed in order to gain the knowledge and skills

necessary to become an effective small group leader. Participants also gained the confidence and competence needed to begin leading an effective small group.

The course offered necessary background for people to become a skillful leader as they gained experience in the life of their small groups. Specific areas that were covered included leading a group discussion, leading an inductive Bible study, building group relationships, learning about small group dynamics, learning communication skills and how to interpret communication, learning how to handle conflict creatively, and learning why confidentiality is of the utmost importance in small group ministry.

Content of the Program

The small group program for the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, consisted of four classes. Each class gradually took the small group members to becoming solid mature Christians. This program was adopted from many of the fastest evangelical growing churches in North America and abroad. Needless to say these churches have grown exponentially. This program was adapted and partially changed to meet the needs of the Fresno Spanish Church. Let's look at the four levels of the small group program. (Please see appendix C for the outline of each class)

Win

The purpose of this class was to help the members have a sense of ownership, and to transform our church members from being consumers to contributors. This class helped incorporate each new member into the church fellowship. One of the things each church struggles with is trying to keep the members we reach, and this class helped us accomplish that. By teaching this class we let our visitors and new members know that

we care and are interested in their personal and spiritual growth. Along with this class, we introduced each student with the ministry programs our church had to offer.

We explained to them the benefits they would receive in becoming members of our church. Some of those benefits were that they will officially become members of the local and worldwide church, they would receive spiritual guide from their local pastor, and they would be exposed to the numerous ministries our church has to offer. In the content of this class we have included an introduction to the program and then we move on to study the four sessions of the class: (1) “The Plan of Redemption,” (2) “Seventh-day Adventist Church History, (3) “The 28 Fundamental Beliefs of Our Church,” and (4) “Seventh-day Adventist Church Structure.”

This class was so important because it allowed us to set the tone and expectation level for everything else that followed. This class was only four hours long and we offer it on a Sunday. Not only was this class imparted but it was to be followed with some time to mingle and get acquainted with the new church family. Lunch after the meeting was always a part of the program. Through this class our members showed evidence of Christian commitment and they were motivated to give, serve, pray, and share their faith. The importance of helping members develop friendship within your church cannot be overemphasized. Relationships are the glue that holds a church together. Friendships are the key to retaining members. For this reason my wife and I invited the new church members to come to our house, where we provided them with a special meal. Our goal was to try to make them feel welcomed into their new church family.

Through this class we encouraged the group to join a small group. A small group that provided the personal care and attention every member deserves, no matter how big

the church becomes. Another thing we can say about incorporating the new believers into a small group is that it was one of the most effective ways of closing the back door of the church.

Consolidate

The New Testament is very clear that God's will for every believer is spiritual maturity. He wants us to grow up. Paul said; "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph 4:14 NIV).

The purpose of this class was to accomplish the ultimate goal of spiritual growth—to become like Jesus. Spiritual growth does not just happen once you are saved. There needs to be a planned program. Spiritual growth needs to be intentional and it requires commitment and effort to grow. A person must want to grow, decide to grow, and make an effort to grow. In Phil 2:12-13 says, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you your salvation" (NIV). Paul is talking in these verses about spiritual growth to people who are already saved. Now we must understand that spiritual growth is a process that takes time. Ephesians 4:13 says our goal is that all of us reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, become mature, attaining to the whole measure in the fullness of Christ.

Despite our wish to speed up the process, spiritual growth is a journey that will last a lifetime. Through this class we tried to educate the members about the importance of becoming solid and mature Christians. The most practical and powerful way to get

believers headed in the direction of spiritual maturity was to help them establish habits that promote spiritual growth. We believed these habits are to be enjoyed rather than endured. We didn't want people to be afraid of spiritual exercises that strengthened and developed them.

The purpose of the class was to establish four basic habits of a disciple: (1) the habit of time with God's Word, (2) the habit of prayer, (3) the habit of tithing, and (4) the habit of fellowship. These were based on statements made by Jesus that define discipleship: a disciple follows God's Word (see John 8:31-32); a disciple prays and bears fruit (see John 15:7-8); a disciple is not possessed by his possessions (see Luke 14:33); and a disciple expresses love for other believers (see John 13:34-35). The main purpose of this class was to get people started on the journey. They leaved committed to the process and to the basic habits that are necessary for growth. Although they struggled along the way, people left the class permanently changed.

Disciple

The third level of the small group model for the Fresno Spanish Church was called Discipleship. God expects every Christian to use his/her gifts and talents in ministry. If we can ever awaken and unleash the massive talent, resources, creativity, and energy lying dormant in the typical local church, Christianity will explode with growth at an unprecedented rate. The greatest need in the Fresno Spanish Church was the release of members for ministry. A Gallup survey discovered that only 10 percent of American church members are active in any kind of personal ministry and that 50 percent of all church members have no interest in serving in any ministry. Think about that! No matter how much a church promotes involvement in ministry, half of its members will remain

spectators. These are the people who say, “I just don’t feel led to get involved.” The encouraging news that Gallup uncovered is this: 40 percent of all members have expressed an interest in having a ministry, but they have never been asked or they don’t know how. This group is an untapped gold mine! If we can mobilize this 40 percent and add them to the current 10 percent already serving, your church could have 50 percent of its members active in a ministry. Every church needs an intentional, well-planned system for equipping, mobilizing, and supporting the giftedness of its members. You must set up a process to lead people to deeper commitment and greater service for Christ.

Through this class we taught that every believer is called into ministry. God calls all believers to minister to the world and to the church. At the Fresno Spanish Church, we taught that every Christian was created for ministry (See Eph 2:10), saved for ministry (see 2 Tim 1:9), called into ministry (see 1 Pet 2:9-10), gifted for ministry. The Bible clearly teaches that God gives each believer certain spiritual gifts to be used in ministry (see Rom 8; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4). Through this class we helped each member find their spiritual gifts; we equipped them and mobilize them to do ministry in the area that goes along with their talents, abilities, and life experiences that they have.

The discipleship class was a four-hour class that exposes people to the biblical basis for ministry; we explained to them the importance of getting involved in the church through service. After they had taken the class the pastor met with each church member personally to help them in following a placement process. In this placement process we helped the member identify three or four possible areas of ministry.

Send

Once we had helped each member identify their spiritual gift, we then went on to place each member in an area of service where they can be the most effective. In this class we affirmed the believer in their God given mission and we sent them out to do ministry. They learned about their calling to be ministers for the Lord. They learned about creative ways to share their testimony and to share the good news of salvation to the people closest to them. Each member was equipped, encouraged, and empowered to go out and share the good news of salvation with the world around them. In this class they learned that sharing the Good News was a privilege and also a great responsibility. God wants everybody to be saved and He is given us the wonderful opportunity to go and tell others about the love of Jesus.

Mode of Delivery

The small group program for the Fresno Spanish Church was delivered as follows: I took the first three months of a given year to look for and recruit the leadership team. Concentration was placed on a small group of people in the church who met the requirements of a good and Godly leader. The basic qualifications to become part of the Small Group Ministry Team included: the ability to explain the Small Group Ministry vision; the ability to work well with others; and the ability to encourage small group leaders who need encouraging, to confront small group leaders who need to be confronted, and to guide small group leaders who need guidance. A member of the Small Group Ministry Team knew when someone in a group needed referral. They had acquired listening skills, a thorough knowledge of group dynamics, and processed a positive, encouraging attitude.

These were some of the requirements of a godly small group leader. This group of people was recruited by the pastor. Once the small group leadership team had been established, they became committed to once a week meetings, where they received training on how to become an effective small group leader. As we mentioned earlier, there was a training course for prospective small group leaders that were held both in the fall of the year and again in the spring. Participants were expected and encouraged to attend all classes. The course was designed to provide the theory, experience, and practice needed in order to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to become an effective small group leader. Participants also gained confidence and competence needed to begin leading and effective small group.

The course offered necessary background for one to become a skillful leader. Specific areas that were covered included leading a group discussion, leading an inductive Bible study, building group relationships, learning about small group dynamics, learning communication skills and how to interpret communication, learning how to handle conflict creatively, and learning why confidentiality is of utmost importance in small group ministry. The training produced a capable and efficient team ready to lead a congregation to become not a church with small groups but a church of small groups. After six months of weekly meetings with this leadership team, I was then ready to present to the group the vision for the church. In order to accomplish this, the leadership team was invited to a weekend retreat at Camp Wawona (a Seventh-day Adventist camp in Yosemite). The purpose of this retreat was for the group to pray and ask God for His leadership, and His wisdom to implement the small group model in the Fresno Spanish Church. Much time was dedicated to prayer and to the plan and purposes for which God

has created us. On the last day of our retreat I presented the vision I had for the church and how we as the leadership team accomplished that goal. I placed strong emphasis on God's desire to expand his kingdom, and the only way we accomplished that is by mobilizing the laity to do ministry. At this time I knew there would be a number of questions about the program since this was the first time they heard about it. I was ready to respond to any of the questions, and then we entered into another session of prayer before we took a vote and decided to implement this program in the church. Once the decision was made to go ahead and implement this program, then I explained to them what it was going to take from each one of them—commitment, time, and sacrifice—to make it happen. The date of when the program was to be implemented was decided at this meeting and each member of the leadership team received a packet with the entire program. We then closed the retreat with an anointing service and prayer as we went to our congregation with the desire to empower the Fresno Spanish Church to win the lost for the kingdom of God.

Summary

As the small group program was implemented in the life of Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, my hopes and expectations were that more souls would come to the knowledge of Jesus Christ; that closer caring relationships will be discovered and nurtured in the small groups; that individuals will experience a unique environment which fosters spiritual growth; that genuine Christian community will be achieved; and that those who participate would be empowered to live their life in a Christ-like way. This small group model at Fresno Spanish Church served as an intentional means to bring people closer to the love of God in Jesus Christ. As people

shared their faith journeys and their personal needs and concerns, they found themselves celebrating together the joy of Christian fellowship. I strongly believe that just as Jesus called the twelve disciples into community to care and share in Christ-like lives, He calls us yet today.

CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION
OF THE PROGRAM

Implementation of the Program

In order for a program to be successfully implemented, it needs to have the full support of the leadership team. To gain the support from the church board members, the vision needed to be casted.

Gain the Support of Church Leaders and Board

The small group model for the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church was implemented in January of 2007 but the planning and the organizing of the leadership team was done in the year of 2006. I first went to the board of elders and informed them about the need to train, equip, and mobilize the church members to do ministry. I asked for their support for a new program that I wanted to introduce to the church. I gained their support: They agreed with me and told me to go ahead and do what I knew needed to be done. Towards the end of January, I went to the church committee meeting where I presented to the board the need to help our church members fulfill God's purposes for their lives. I gave a mini-talk on God's plan for every church member and then I went on to inform them of my commitment to accomplish this. I explained to them that this was a

project that would take some time to implement because I first needed to form a small group leadership team.

In the first church board meeting of the year 2006, I presented the request to allow me to start a small group leadership team. The church board unanimously agreed to allow me to form a group of leaders that would help me organize and implement the small group model for the Fresno Spanish Church. At the meeting some of the board members liked the idea so much, they expressed a desire to be part of the small group leadership team, and of course we included them in the team. It was a very encouraging meeting. At the meeting, I realized the importance of a leader coming to his board with a working plan already outline, with a goal or a vision. I believe that in order for a leader to build credibility with church members, he must be able and prepared to introduce to his congregation to a plan of action which mobilizes the congregation into doing ministry. That night I went home satisfied on how the meeting went. My wife and I prayed about this plan and began searching for the kind of leaders best suited for this small group leadership team. We prayed for wisdom in selecting this group and made sure they met the requirements we were looking for.

Form the Small Group Ministry Team

Great things happen in small groups. The formation of a Small Group Ministry Team was established. The selection of this leadership team was to meet some requirements.

Select and Recruit Members for the Team

The basic qualifications to become part of the Small Group Ministry Team included (1) the ability to explain the Small Group Ministry vision; (2) the ability to work well with others; and (3) the ability to encourage small group leaders who need encouraging, to confront small group leaders who need to be confronted, and to guide small group leaders who need guidance. A member of the Small Group Ministry Team will know when someone in a group needs referral. They will have acquired listening skills, a thorough knowledge of group dynamics and will process a positive, encouraging attitude.

The responsibilities for a member of the Small Group Ministry Team will be to champion or support our small groups and to monitor the health of the groups through personal interaction with small group leaders. A team player will report to the small group pastor; periodically visit the small groups; encourage and guide the small group leaders in their own growth; and help train small group leaders to find their co-leaders. They will continue to develop their small group ministry skills. These were some of the qualifications we looked for in a leader.

Equip the Small Group Ministry Team in a Small Group

By the end of February, my wife and I were able to find twenty-five leaders who would commit to being a part of this leadership team. They committed themselves to meet as a group once a week (every Monday at 7:00 p.m.) and once a month on Sundays for four hours. We did this for a period of six months and finished studying two books by

John Maxwell—*The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player* and *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*.¹ The following is a general content review of these books.

The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player: In order for a good team to work well, the team needs to have good team players. Organizations, of all types, accomplish more when people work together. But, ultimately, a team is simply a collection of individuals. The challenge for each individual team member is to become the kind of person who can maximize his/her contribution and push the team forward towards fulfill its mission. *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player* can assist you in meet this goal by helping you develop into a true team player. In this book, Maxwell's methodology is based on what works. He examines the triumphs of winning team players such as Quincy Jones, Ronald Reagan, Bob Taylor, and many others, identifying the character traits that brought success their way. The goal of this class was for leadership team members to learn how qualities such as discipline, enthusiasm, communication, preparation, and commitment to individuals can improve a team's effectiveness as a whole. Our group took two months to read this book.

The second book we read was *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*. Reading this book was very inspiring because we enjoyed learning the process of team building, and witnessed the positive impact it had on every aspect of our lives. This book helped us remember that everyone is part of a team. If you are married, you and your spouse are a team. If you give your time to a church, you are part of a team of volunteers. And while everyone knows teamwork is a good thing, they may not know how it really works.

¹John Maxwell, *The 17 Essential Qualities of a Team Player* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002); John Maxwell, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001).

Maxwell through this book, in his easy-to-get-it approach, explains the process of building a winning team, making it simple to grasp, retain, and put into practice.

I chose these books because I knew they would be key in establishing the way we were going to conduct ourselves with each other and would help us develop the level of commitment I was looking for in this group. This was a great experience we went through: we got to know each other better and as their pastor, I became better acquainted with the strengths and weaknesses of each leader. We were then ready to receive some training on small group principles. Furthermore, in order to have an effective and ongoing small group ministry, it is important to establish basic principles for functioning in a healthy way. The following five basic principles were presented to establish a sound foundation, which will be an integral part of small group ministry at the Fresno Spanish Church.

Small group ministry shall do the following:

1. Provide an environment for building and developing relationships
2. Provide an opportunity to minister to one another
3. Provide a nurturing, caring community
4. Promote spiritual growth and development
5. Encourage life transformation

By the end of May the small group leadership team already had an idea of what it meant to be an effective team player, and what it would take to establish the small group model in the Fresno Spanish Church.

Maxwell, in one of his seminars, once said regarding recruiting leaders that you must first win their hearts before you can win their hand. For this reason my wife and I

decided to dedicate and set aside from our personal budget some funds in order to regularly invite our new leaders to our home and feed them. We did this several times, and what a blessing it was to hear them ready and willing to work as a team for God's kingdom. They were delighted and glad to be a part of a group that would soon develop a working plan to mobilize our entire congregation to do ministry. Investing in the leaders closest to you will bring you great dividends. We connected and we laughed, and then we were a team ready to launch and present to the leadership team the small group model for the Fresno Spanish Church.

Present the Plan for the Program at a Spiritual Retreat

Our next step was to invite them to a spiritual retreat where I would present to them the plan of work for our church. We could have chosen to do it at the church in a classroom but we realized there would be many distractions and feared some of the leaders would not show up to the meeting. This meeting was in my opinion the most important meeting, so we chose not to take any risks and decided to hold this meeting away from their homes, in the beautiful Camp Wawona (a Seventh-day Adventist Camp in Yosemite National Park). We wanted to have their undivided attention, and Camp Wawona is the perfect place, where there are no television or cell phone distractions. We could have not chosen a better place. I contacted each leader and asked them to plan for this retreat. By the grace of God we got 100 percent participation. They all made the necessary arrangements to attend the retreat.

I explained to them that at this retreat I would share with them the vision we have for the church. Each leader was willing to participate and help at the event. My wife and I

made the necessary preparations: We put together a program for the retreat, organized a cooking team who provided excellent meals for all the leaders, and provided them with directions and maps to the camp. We designed a three ring binder to house the materials for the small group model program. Everybody arrived safely. We first had supper; we enjoyed the fellowship and had a delicious meal. After our dinner we came together for our first meeting, which was an introduction to the program. After our studies and pray, we went to bed around 9:00 pm. On Saturday we covered a bit of material: we had three seminars in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning seminars explained and explored the purpose of our church and how God has called us to win the lost for His kingdom. And in the afternoon session, we presented the small group model for the Fresno Spanish Church. It was a bit scary because we were not sure whether the leaders were going to buy into the idea or not. At this point, the leadership group had already connected with us, they liked our leadership style, and they appeared willing to work with us, but I was not sure whether they would appreciate the envisioned plan for the work we had for the church.

For two hours, my wife and I gave them a general overview of the program, explained the contents for each class, and the goals we had for each church member. We talked to them about the purpose of each class: the goal for each member was to influence and transform them from being spectators to becoming participants.

We did not entertain any questions in between the presentations saving all the questions for the end. On Saturday evening we close the day with some social activities, which were organized by the first elder of the church. We not only enjoy the time

together, but we were preparing an army of leaders who were ready to mobilize the church to do ministry.

The retreat was a total success: The leadership team liked the program. They saw the potential and gladly wanted to take an active part in this project. On Sunday morning we had a delicious meal, and then we finished the program by asking our leaders to go to the church and start letting our congregation know about the wonderful working plan we had for the church.

Implement the Small Group Model in the Church

The exciting part of this program is definitely the implementation of it. Once the Small group leadership team had been established, we moved forward and in detail presented the program to the Church Board first and then to the entire congregation.

Present a Detailed Plan to the Board

In the fall of 2006 at the church board meeting, the small group model for the church was presented in detail. Some board members had questions, although, at the end of the meeting they unanimously approved the program. Not only did the church board approve the program, but they decided to financially support the program by setting up a special account for this program. All seemed to be working well. I always kept in mind the phrase that says proper prior planning prevents poor performance. The planning and the time spent organizing each step of the plan was then paying off.

Prepare the Congregation for the Program

During the months of November and part of December of 2006, I committed myself to presenting sermons on the priesthood of all believers, spiritual gifts, and the

God's purposes for the church. Each Sabbath we announced the importance of finding a place of service in the family of God. A couple of weeks before the program's registration, we presented a number of Power Point presentations encouraging church members to plan and decide to be part of this program.

I affirmed my congregation declaring to them the biblical fact that we were created for a purpose. I also spoke on spiritual gifts. I invited them to plan ahead to be a part of a training program that would prepare them to be all that God wants them to be. The congregation was ready: They had been informed for two months before the August event that launched the program, and they were ready to participate in this program.

Register Participants at a Big Event

On the day of the event, that is the first Sabbath of the year 2007, tables were already set up, with snacks and registration booths, and my leaders were now selling the idea and encouraging people to register and to plan to attend to this program. We had four registration booths in strategic areas of the church and banners all over the building promoting the program. The registration booths were open from early in the morning until the end of the worship service. During the worship service we reminded and encouraged the congregation to register before they leave. Lots of people registered—youth, adults, and the elderly. Many still had questions about the program, and they were answered by my team leaders. The church felt enthusiasm for the beginning of something new. After the church service, we picked up the registration information and planned to have a meeting with the leaders later that afternoon. That afternoon the leadership team came together to count and find out how many people had registered and further plan the implementation of the program. By the grace of God, that first Sabbath we registered

about 120 people. For three consecutive Sabbaths, we had registration available. By the end there was a total of 195 people who wanted to be part of this movement.

At this point, I would like to pause and share some of the elements that helped us implement this program: (1) church board approval, (2) a pre-existent leadership team, (3) the program was a part of the church budget, and (4) in the months leading up to the implementation the congregation was motivated to participate.

Train Participants through Equipping Classes

Since the registered group was relatively big, the leadership team came up with a plan to facilitate the eager participants. It was decided to offer the first class (Win), three times a week for two consecutive weeks. We chose to have in each class no more than thirty-five students. The size of the class allowed us to meet the needs of each student, and to answer each and every one of their questions. We ended up offering the first class six times in two consecutive weeks.

Those who participated in the first class expressed how much they liked it. Some even said that they had never been informed about the structure of our church and how it operates. Others said they had not known much about the roots and history of how the Seventh-day Adventist Church came into existence. It was a great class: We noticed that not only was the leadership team excited about the direction our church was going, but that our church members were excited as well.

By February, we were already offering the second class, called “Consolidate.” This class was presented to students in a very creative way. We explained the concepts and benefit of spiritual discipline and challenged each student to decide to develop the spiritual habits of praying, reading God’s Word, fellowship, and faithfulness in

supporting the church with their finances. In a very creative way we tried to encourage our students to develop those spiritual habits.

We even offered incentives to motivate them. For example, we offer a free New Testament on CD to those who read the whole New Testament in thirty days. A few took up that challenge and at the end of thirty days they finished reading the New Testament and received their gift. We did everything we could to encourage our members to have their daily devotions with God and to faithfully attend and support the church with their finances.

In March we offered the third class, "Discipleship." Everybody in the class was anxious to know what their gifts were. Throughout this class we instill in each student the awareness of the greatness of our God who has given us gifts and talents and, thus, we have a need and responsibility to put them to work. We explained how different we are from each other but God created us to complement each other with the gifts and talents God has given to us. It was a great class.

In April we offered the fourth and last class, called "Send." In this class explored and confirmed for each student their God given gifts and helped in the decision making process of how they were going to implement their gift in and outside of the church. By now you may be asking, did all the students registered finish the whole program? The answer is no. Some missed the second class while others missed the third class. We encouraged those who missed one of the classes to be ready to take the missed class the next time it was offered. Obviously we kept records of the church members who did not finish the program and when the class they misses was offered our leadership team made it a point to contact them and invite them to take the missed class. Those who finished the

program were very grateful for what they had learning in the classes, and when they put to work their God given gifts, the whole congregation was encouraged to support the program and to be part of it.

In May we graduated about sixty-five members, about 30 percent of the members registered. We considered this a success. To have sixty-five new church members on fire for the Lord was great news. These new church members had great dispositions towards do whatever it takes to reach the lost for the kingdom of God. This was a great group, it reminded me of the story of when Jesus sent out the seventy to preach the word. This group was now ready to put their God given gifts to work.

While we kept offering the classes each month for those who did not finish the program, we also worked very closely with those who did finish the program and wanted to implement their gifts and talents to enhance the kingdom of God. These were some of the results. It was very exciting to see how many of my church members now wanted to start a new ministry. Not just any new ministry but a ministry that went along with their God -given gifts. Let me just share a few examples.

New Ministries: An Outgrowth of the Program

Small Group Ministry

Some of the members, who went through the program, decided they wanted to start small groups in their homes. We affirmed them, provided them with the necessary materials, and sent them out to do the work God has called them do. The congregation was informed about the existing small groups so they could join one of them. About twenty-five small groups were formed. Through this ministry we won many of our friends for the kingdom of God.

The Hospitality Ministry

The hospitality ministry was started as a result of a church member named Maria Garcia. She had served the church as the community service director for many years. After she had participated in the program she shared with me, "I've been a community service director for so many years and I haven't seen one single person won for the kingdom of God through my ministry." She was faithful in her ministry but was not being fruitful.

I said to her, "Sister, let's keep you in that same department but now let's change the services we provide." I continued, "You are an excellent cook, and wouldn't it be great if we decide to provide our congregation and its visitor with free breakfast and lunch every Sabbath? The fellowship time during the meals is going to create an atmosphere of camaraderie, and many of our visitors are going to choose to be a part of our church simply because of the meal services we provide."

Maria was delighted, and she replied, "Preacher, I am ready to start this ministry." Maria formed a team of church members who love to work in the kitchen preparing meals for the entire church family. She was able to form a team consisted of about forty members. Now, each year, this ministry requires the services of more than forty church members, who serve over twenty thousand meals. The church supported this service financially during its first year of ministry, now the hospitality ministry team raises their own funds. Many souls have been won for the kingdom of God through this ministry.

The Mechanics for Christ Ministry

Brother Isain went through the whole program. At the end of the program, he said, "Preacher, the description of my gifts are not that clear and I don't know what I

should do to grow the kingdom of God.” After studying his spiritual gifts profile, he came up with a wonderful idea. He said “I am a mechanic, what if I form a small group for mechanics and four times a year we offer the service of a free oil change to the whole community.” I was pleasantly surprised and excited by the initiative and creativity of this new idea, and I said, “That is a great idea. Let’s do it.”

Three months later, the group had initiated the idea and was serving the community. This small group provided over twenty-five oil changes on their first day of service. Since then the number of cars being served has grown every time they offer this service. When people come to get this service done for free, they ask why we are offering this service. Through this service, many have been won for the kingdom of God through this ministry.

The Hair Stylist Ministry

Irene Alvarez went through this class and said, “I like helping people, especially single moms, but I don’t know how to do it.” After a few days she came with the idea of offering free haircuts to our church members. She did that for two months every Wednesday from 3:00 to 6:00 pm. Though the services were free, some church members who benefited from this service gave her some monetary tips. One day she came up to me and said, “Pastor some church members gave me some tips and this is not my money so I want to give it back to the church.” I told her, “That money belongs to your ministry,” and asked her what she wanted to do with it. She said, “I want to use that money to help single moms with a bag of groceries.” And that is what she did with the money. Many of those single moms are now new members of our church because of one church member who was willing to use her gifts and talents to bless the neediest.

The Prayer Ministry Small Group

This ministry was established in the Fresno Spanish Church as a result of a church lady who attended the program. Hortencia Villasenor felt called to start a small prayer group in the church. Her goal was to invite those in the congregation who were able to come and meet at the church once a week to pray. The group began with only a few ladies. Now the prayer ministry group has about thirty to forty members actively participating in this ministry. Recently they conducted a program called forty mornings of prayer. The program consisted on praying at five in the morning for forty consecutive days. I first thought nobody would show up. I was wrong every morning before going to work about forty to fifty people show up for prayer. It's a great ministry and I praise God for those who are leading it.

The Preaching Ministry

Some of the students who went through the program discovered they had the gift of preaching. We gave them more training on homiletics and prepared them to conduct an evangelistic effort. Six social hall facilities were rented in the community to hold those meetings. One of the evangelists was a former catholic priest by the name of Roberto Alvarez. He was so excited to preach his new faith from the pulpit. An evangelistic team was formed around him and Roberto's campaign was a great success. As a result of his work we had four baptisms.

Helping the Homeless Ministry

A sixty-year-old man name Erasmo Toquillas, took the classes and expressed his desire to minister to the homeless. He said my dream for this Christmas is to raise funds

to give blankets to the homeless. He shared his dream with other church members, and as a team they all help brother Erasmo fulfill his dream. Over one-hundred blankets were distributed among the homeless. Now him and other elderly men get together regularly to plan future events to help the needy.

Guitar Ministry

“Free guitar lessons” was the announcement Manuel Mazariego made to the whole congregation. Manuel loves playing the guitar, so he uses his gift to motivate others to come and learn. Now he has a team of over twenty students learning to play, and their new ministry is now visiting the sick and singing to the elderly in nursing homes.

Community Service Event

Three times a year we bring all of these ministries together and launch a city-wide event where we offer free services to the community, such as free oil changes, free food, free haircuts, free dental services, free counseling services, free games for the children, free prayer, and free Bible studies. The community service event brings about six to eight hundred new people to visit our church. This event helps us bring the large crowds and they get acquainted with our church. Through this event, we make initial contact with many and invite them to come and benefit from the programs and services our church offers.

Summary

As it has been previously stated, all of these small group ministries are not only dedicated to serving the community but to promote the fellowship they need as a group. It

is very exciting to see a congregation that clearly understands its mission and the purpose for its existence. We used to have only a few members actively involved in doing ministry, but now we have the majority of the members getting involved serving the community. By the grace of God and through the implementation of a small group model in the Fresno Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church, we have been experiencing not only numeric growth in the form of baptisms but also each church member displays a spirit of unity and service.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter some conclusions and recommendations will be presented based on the information gathered through the implementation of the small group program in the Fresno Spanish Church. The Small Group Ministry has been designed to help existing groups to obtain greater recognition and to become more intentional in their existence. They have been encouraged to become a part of this growing ministry and have been included under the Small Group Ministry *umbrella*. As new members are being received into the life of the church, they are invited to become a part of a small group. This might be an existing group or a new members' small group.

Conclusions

As Small Group Ministry has been implemented in the life of Fresno Spanish Church, we have experienced the following positive outcomes: (1) closer caring relationships have been discovered and nurtured in the small groups; (2) individuals have experienced a unique environment which has fostered spiritual growth; (3) genuine Christian community has been achieved; and (4) those who have participated have been empowered to live their life in a Christ-like way. I can definitely say that the small group ministries in our church is serving as an intentional means to bring people closer to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

For many years in the Fresno Spanish Church very little emphasis was placed on evangelism as is shown in the baptismal records of the church.

Now that the small group model has been established in its fullness, we have been able to see in the church members a desire to witness and reach out to the community they live in. Many new members have been won for the kingdom of God. Many have been baptized and by the grace of God, and the implementation of the small group program, the Fresno Spanish Church has planted a new congregation of 150 solid of committed new members. Definitely the culture of evangelism has been established in the Fresno Spanish Church through the implementation of the small group model.

The church has grown numerically but it has also grown in the level of fellowship we now experience. Many ministries which the church did not have before, we now enjoy the benefits of. There has been an explosion of new ministries, established and run by previously inactive church members who benefited from the school of ministries program and were able to discover their spiritual gifts and used them to serve and win others for the kingdom of God.

Our community service events attract a great number of visitors, allowing them to become acquainted with our church. As local media features our events and informs Fresno about the free services we offer, many former Adventists have been inspired and encouraged to come back to church. I strongly believe these community service events demonstrate the true essence of undefiled religion. Helping the needy and offering free services to the community is an expression of the love of God to them. Ellen G. White once said,

Good deeds are the fruit that God requires us to bear: Kind words, deeds of benevolence, of tender regard for the poor, the needy, the afflicted. When hearts

sympathize with hearts burdened with discouragement and grief, when the hand dispenses to the needy, when the naked are clothed, the stranger made welcome to a seat in your parlor and a place in your heart, angels are coming very near, and an answering strain is responded to in heaven. Every act of justice, mercy, and benevolence makes melody in heaven. The Father from His throne beholds those who do these acts of mercy, and numbers them with His most precious treasures.¹

Soon after we implemented the small group program in our church and saw the great benefits it brought, other churches have expressed their desire to know more about what the Fresno Spanish Church is doing and have inquire about the small group model we have. We have gladly shared with many pastors the materials and the process we follow so that the small group model can be implemented in their churches. These materials are available upon request at Jazielh@sbcglobal.net.

Recommendations

When implementing this program, the pastor must be aware of the great level of commitment called for on his part. If the pastor is not totally sold on the program, no matter how much the congregation wants it, the program will not succeed. But if senior pastors believe in the program and implement it, they along with their congregation, will experience great soul winning success. Another factor that is essential to the success of the program is the training and equipping of a core of small group leaders that will carry out the small group model. The pastor cannot and should not do this alone. Before implementing this program and launching it to the congregation, it also needs to receive the church board's approval.

¹Ellen G. White. *Pastoral Ministry* (Washington, D.C: Pacific Press, 1995), 115.

When the school of ministries program was first implemented, we were a bit aggressive in teaching the school of ministries classes to large groups. Soon I realize that a smaller number of students per class is much better than teaching the class to a large group. I recommend that a class should not have more than ten students. This will help instructors develop a deeper connection with their groups and enable them to better understand the needs of individual group member.

As the pastor of this church, I have been blessed by the wonderful congregation I serve. And, as a result of their hard work, I have enjoyed the privilege of sharing this program with all the pastors of the Pacific Union in a West Point of Evangelism event, and at the North American Division 2010 Seeds Conference.

APPENDIX A

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY SURVEY

When you knock at the door, most people have several questions that come to mind. Who are you? Why are you here? What do you want from me? How long will you stay? It is important to answer these questions immediately. When coming to the door say the following:

“Hello my name is _____ and this is my friend _____. We are conducting a community religious questionnaire in this area sponsored by The Community Church of Seventh-day Adventists. We’re wondering if you could help us by answering a few brief questions.”

Ask the community survey questions. After you have completed the questions, make the following transition:

Thank you for participating in the survey. In appreciation for the time you have taken to answer the questions we’d like to give you this book. It’s called, “_____”. I’m sure you will enjoy reading it.

I believe it is important to emphasize that this questionnaire should be backed up with something to present to people who show interest beyond the questions. Here are the questions to be used, as adapted from Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Church* page 190.

1) What do you think is the greatest need in this area? 2) Are you actively attending any church? 3) Why do you think most people don’t attend church? 4) If you were to look for a church to attend, what kind of things would you look for? 5) What can I do for you? What advice can you give to a minister who really wants to be helpful to people?

APPENDIX B

VALUE-NEED ASSESSMENT

_____ *We value reaching lost people in our community, helping them develop a personal relationship with Christ.*

_____ *We value reaching lost people outside our community.*

_____ *We value our 28 Fundamental Doctrinal Beliefs.*

_____ *We value the dynamic worship of God in our services.*

_____ *We value spiritual growth via small-group communities.*

_____ *We value ministry involvement, unleashing the gifts in people to help them grow through serving others.*

_____ *We value disciplining existing Christians.*

_____ *We value the loving community among our membership.*

_____ *We value Christian education.*

_____ *We value public evangelistic meetings.*

_____ *We value good financial stewardship.*

_____ *We value teaching.*

_____ *We value creativity.*

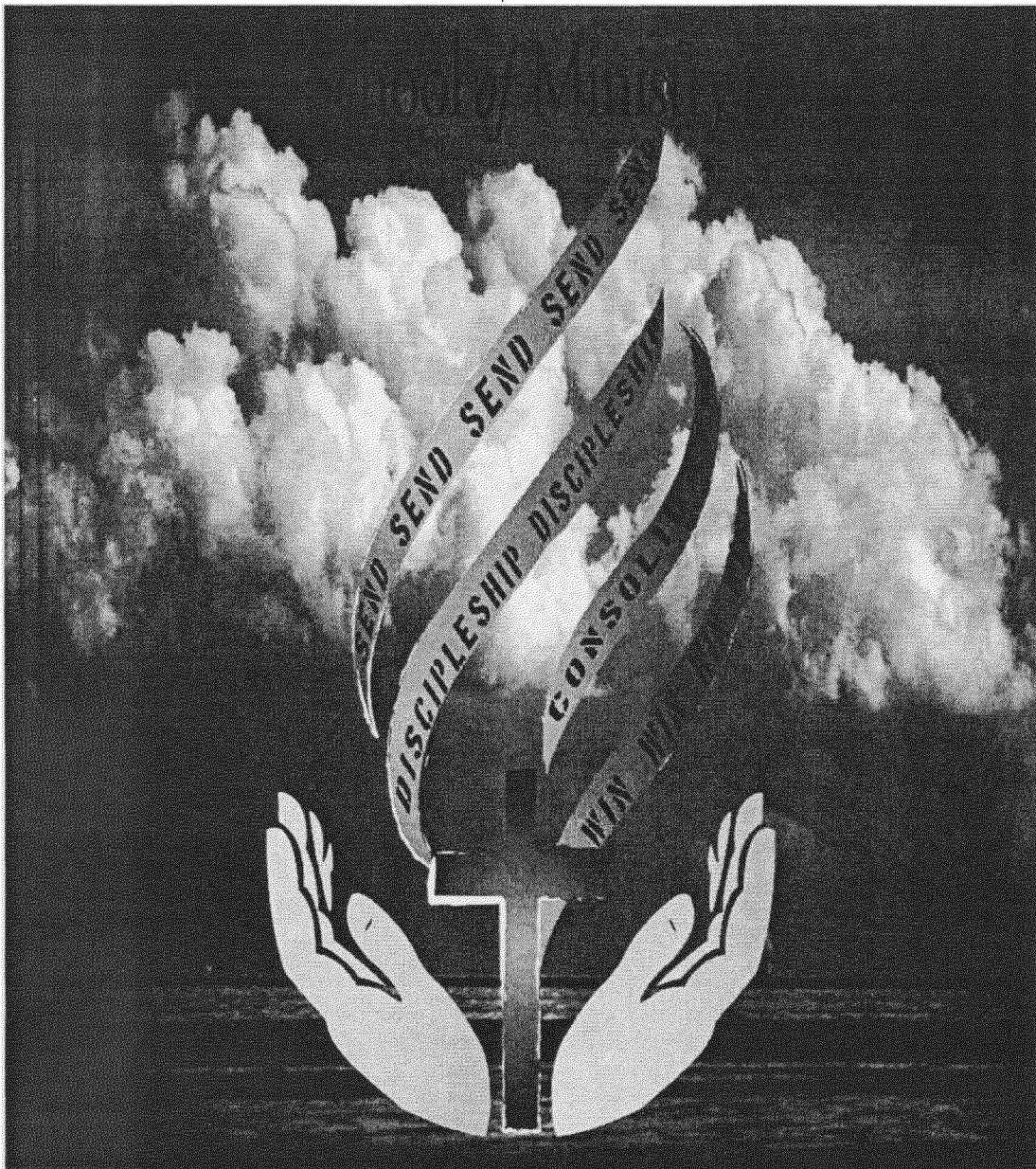
_____ *We value our children and youth.*

_____ *We values the community service*

APPENDIX C

SMALL GROUP MODEL

Class Outlines



WIN
Class I

Class Outline

SESSION ONE: OUR SALVATION

- What it means to be a Christian
- The symbols of salvation: Baptism and Communion

SESSION TWO: OUR STATEMENTS

- Our Purpose Statement
- Our Faith Statement
- Our Lifestyle Statement

SESSION THREE: OUR STRATEGY

- The History of the Seventh Day Adventist Church
- 28 Fundamental beliefs
- Who we are trying to reach (target)
- Circles of commitment/4 covenants

SESSION FOUR: OUR STRUCTURE

- How Our Church Is Structured
- Our Affiliation
- What It Means To Be A Member
- What Now? The C.L.A.S.S. Program

CONSOLIDATE

Class II

Class Outline

SESSION ONE:

- Introduction: Spiritual Maturity and Habits
- How to Get a “Grasp” on Your Bible
- The Habit of a Daily Time with God

SESSION TWO:

- The Habit of Prayer: Talking with God
- The Habit of Tithing: Giving Back to God
- The Habit of Fellowship: Enjoying God's Family
- How to Start And Maintain Good Habits

DISCIPLESHIP

Class III

Class Outline

SESSION ONE: MADE FOR MINISTRY

- What the Bible Says About Ministry
- How Has God Shaped Me?
- The Process For Discovering My Ministry
- Identifying My Unique S.H.A.P.E.

SESSION TWO: SERVING THROUGH FRESNO SPANISH CHURCH

- Fresno Spanish's Vision for Ministry
- Previewing the Opportunities ("Menu")
- Developing a Heart to Serve
- Where Do I Go From Here?

SEND

Class IV

Class Outline

SESSION ONE: DISCOVERING MY MISSION

- God's Purpose in Creating Us
- Jesus' Mission on Earth
- Why Jesus' Mission Must Matter to Me

SESSION TWO: SHARING THE MESSAGE

- Part 1: My Testimony—The Story of How I Began a Relationship with Jesus
- Part 2: The Good News—Explaining How to Accept Christ
- Communication Tips: How To Share Christ More Effectively

SESSION THREE: FISHING IN MY MISSION POND

- 5 Keys to Spiritual Fishing
- How People Come to Christ
- How to Build A Bridge of Friendship

SESSION FOUR: BECOMING A WORLD-CLASS CHRISTIAN

- What On Earth Is God Doing?
- How To Get In On What God Is Doing: Acts 1:8 Opportunities
- What It Takes to Be On-Mission for God

Note: A CD with the complete program is available upon request.

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