

**A Group-Splitting Experience**  
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Carefully...deliberately...with aforethought; that's how we began our covenant group ministry. In a process that took several years, our timeline began with one person's vision, then another's, and as we became more visible in our church community, the vision grew until we had a strongly committed group of five who formed an implementation team and met every two weeks for the better part of a year to plan our entry into small group ministry. We knew, of course, that we couldn't anticipate the nature of each progression and obstacle on our path to our "grand opening" last fall, but we did try to touch all the bases; we wanted to be as prepared as possible. After having agenda-driven business meetings for four or five months, we decided to limit business to our first half-hour, and to begin to practice our small group ministry skills with a covenant group gathering each time we met. We loved the closeness and the opportunity to "just talk." As you might imagine, our covenant group time quickly became an indispensable part of our lives. One of our group said that whether our covenant group ministry kickoff began with a large number of groups or none, that we had already begun our ministry; that if ours was the only group that was ever formed, it would be sufficient for us.

In our planning meetings, we talked about how we would utilize the facilitators (our Implementation Team members) depending on how many groups were formed, but we weren't really thinking about how forming new groups would impact the personal relationships we had formed among ourselves by effectively splitting our own group. As our two initial new groups formed, it worked out that three of our team would be co-facilitators and members of our evening group and one would co-facilitate the afternoon group. I, as covenant group coordinator, became co-facilitator of the afternoon group and a member of the evening group. Once the schedule had been made, it was a sudden realization that one of us would no longer be in a covenant group with the other three members of our hardy little team. That recognition was accompanied by a sinking feeling that represented real loss; we were not prepared for the bond that was developed during the implementation team's time together at the start. Although we knew we were to break up and attend to the new groups that would be formed, we were surprised at how we felt about being in different groups.

I'm sure that this sense of loss is what makes splitting any small group so difficult. We experienced it even though I consider ours to be a very successful split. Part of what made our success possible is that we expected the split, although perhaps not the level of emotion connected with it, and understood the reasoning behind its necessity. We had a definite date when we knew there would have to be changes. The division of the group members was due to schedule availability alone, not by clique. We still were able to see one another at church and implementation team meetings. We know that we will have opportunities to get together in the future, and the possibility of being brought together in another covenant group down the line sometime. Our saving grace is that we knew from the beginning that our groups were not planned as permanent placements; there was always the awareness that we would meet in one group for a period of time, and then a new group would emerge.