

Small Group Ministry: A Requirement for Church Membership?

By Michael Durall

Small Group Ministry is part of congregations with various denominational affiliations. Believe it or not, current church literature reflects a growing number of congregations in which belonging to a small group is expected of all members. This is not a, “You have to” deal, but rather a, “You’re fortunate to” situation.

In any congregation, the maximum number of people who will join a so-called “groupy group,” involving a check-in period and discussion, is about 40 percent. Most people don’t join a church looking for that experience. In such churches, the quality of small groups also varies widely. Churches that expect all members to belong to a small group view the subject from a very different perspective. It’s about building a deeper spiritual life.

Most often, there are three levels of small group ministry. The first is for newcomers, and focuses on getting to know the church, the faith, and one’s fellow congregants. This is a powerful method that allows people who are new to make friends, a key factor in whether they will remain in the church.

The second level is growing deeper in the faith, which involves further reading, and sometimes writing regular summaries of your faith journey. The third level is outreach and service. These three levels are not mutually exclusive. For example, all are encouraged to help those who are less fortunate.

The big difference in the three-level method is that group leaders have a concentrated focus, and are highly trained to be effective in their roles. An added bonus is that members always know what the next step in the journey will be.

Regardless of the type of small group ministry your congregation chooses, a cardinal rule is that no group should ever become closed. A closed group is a clear signal that the congregation consists of insiders and outsiders, exactly the opposite of the community we wish to build. Michael Durall is parish consultant and the author of five books about congregational life. Contact information can be found on his “all church, all the time” blog, www.TenMinutesOrLess.blogspot.com

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