

A Good Method for Assigning Groups

By Simon Kaplan, Eno River UU Fellowship,

Durham, North Carolina

Small Group Ministry Journal, Fall 2012/Winter 2013

In years past, the Covenant Group Leadership Team at ERUUF has struggled with the group assignments, but this year we lit on a process that is easy, efficient, and quick.

At the end of the sign-up period, we had 52 new applications, with requests fairly evenly mixed between Covenant Group (meet twice a month), Chalice Circle (meet once a month for 8 months) and no preference. Each applicant's main details were transferred from their sign-up form to a 3" x 5" index card: blue for Covenant Group (CG), yellow for Chalice Circle (CC) and green for no preference. These included, in big letters, name, availability (days and times), preferred location (at the fellowship or in homes), gender and age (15-year spreads), to allow for diversity in the groups. Making all the cards took about one person-hour.

Some couples had requested they be in the same group; their two cards were taped together so when one was placed, the other was too. Others had requested they be in different groups; we used a jagged shaped outline on the card to alert us to that, or to someone with particular transportation issues.

We started with CGs (blue), since several groups were looking for new members. We prepared a purple index card for each existing group, showing how many people they needed and where and when they meet. We spread these out across a table top, Monday on the left and Sunday on the right. Then we looked at the blue cards. The first consideration was always availability, so we looked first for people with few options. One person could make Thursday evenings only, and by good fortune a Thursday evening group needed another member, so that was an easy assignment. Same again for Sunday night. Monday is a very popular evening in our program, and more than one of those groups

needed people, so we scanned the blue cards for people who could do Monday. That took care of nine more applicants. Now we looked at the green cards ("no preference"), and continued looking at the times a person could do and placing them where there was a need.

We noticed that there were a good number of people available on Sunday afternoon, and were able to form a new daytime Covenant Group, with a new purple card for the group and a red card for the group leader.

Once we had placed all the blue cards and some of the green ones and it looked as though we had roughly the right number in each group, we looked at the spread of men (who, alas, are all too rare in our program) and shifted a few people around, again always checking they could do the time we were shifting them to. We moved one or two people to get a better age mix, and we looked at the makeup of each group just to make sure there was an overall good fit. We double checked that everything was as it should be with the jagged shape requests, then wrote the abbreviation for each group on each card. We gathered and paper clipped the cards for each group, purple on top, and put them aside.

Then on to the Chalice Circles (yellow). We laid out cards for days of the week across the top, again Monday on the left, and placed people—including leaders on red cards—under evenings they were available. It was quickly apparent that there was very little interest in a daytime CC. At one point we noticed we had about 5 people in one group and about 15 in another, but it didn't take long before we had three more-or-less evenly sized CCs.

We checked the application form of the jagged shaper with transportation issues, and looked for a matching zip code. By good luck we quickly

found a fellow group member in the same zip; a look at a map told us she lived just a few blocks away. We called her from our meeting and she readily agreed to offer a ride. We then tweaked the CCs for a good mix of gender and age, gathered and paper-clipped the cards, made an aqua card for each new group, and put them aside.

There were only two people—both with narrow availability—whose desired time could not be accommodated. We called them from our meeting and offered alternative times. Neither person could make these; they were disappointed but understanding.

Each member of the Leadership Team agreed to pass on to a couple of group leaders the contact details for their new members. Our database keeper took the cards and application forms for keying into Excel, and after less than 90 minutes we were done!

-Taken from the Small Group Ministry Network
Journal, Fall 2012