

Minister's Page

Congregational Benefits from a Successful Small Group Ministry Program

by the Reverend Steve J. Crump

Have you ever considered the unintended benefits of a small group ministry program? When you have a successful program, you know it. Talk up the success of your program. Nurture your program no matter what its size. Your program can grow with steadfast attention and guidance. Say, "If you're not in a small group, you may be missing out on a key connecting point in our congregation." Encourage groups to hold symbolically an empty chair for a new member. The act of welcoming a new person shifts the relational dynamics of a group. The benefits are twofold: a new person is welcomed and the group gets to practice the art of hospitality, a spiritual practice worth cultivating with wide ranging applications in our lives, both in and outside the church.

And speaking of cultivation, have you noticed how the presence of small groups encourages right relationship and diminishes acting-out behavior in the larger church community? The modeling of right relationship in small groups extends to right relationship in other arenas of our lives. A successful small group ministry sets norms for good communication and well-being.

Let's speak proudly of our group leaders' involvement in our programs. Once a year, have them stand for a brief recognition in a church service. Do not hesitate to say, "Our leaders are hand-picked for their leadership and listening skills."

Small Groups, Deep Connections.

Not long ago leaders in our program discussed a model for listening to difficult emotional material when it is occasionally shared in the early check-in portion of a small group meeting. What should a leader do? Scuttle the format for the evening? No. It is usually not necessary to do that. Here is one of our solutions: a leader may ask the group members to be silent for one minute before proceeding with check-in. Allowing the evening to proceed after a minute of silence provides two benefits: we acknowledge that something significant was shared and we acknowledge we are carriers of trust by virtue of our covenant with one another.

Remember the prediction years ago that we would one day live in a high-tech, low-touch world? We live in that world. People are looking for maturational and spiritual growth. Plus, when a group member is in trouble, she or he will get a call from the group leader and, most likely, there will be a referral to our Congregational Care Committee or to the Pastoral Care team.

Small group ministry brings deep listening, a dimension of depth, and care to our lives. Such an experience engenders respect for persons through right relationship. We insiders benefit, of course, but I believe the larger world is meaningfully touched by our work. Give witness to this work.

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