



How to ...

Create effective small groups

Small groups

Small groups that focus on equipping us to be Christ's ambassadors help to grow whole life, faith-filled, mission-focused disciples. In such groups disciples are nurtured and given confidence to live out their faith in their families, at work, and in their communities. In small groups deeper relationships are formed which create a sense of belonging and a good environment for effective pastoral care.

Getting started

- Share the vision with the church leadership and the congregation. Explain clearly why you feel it is right to explore launching small groups, what these might look like and how people would benefit;
- Look at what exists already:
 - do you run a Lent or Advent course which could continue to meet after the fixed time period ends.
 - could you start by running a Lent or Advent course – small groups don't have to run all year round.
 - do interest or activity groups already exist which could be expanded to be a discipleship small group – the bell ringing group, seniors fellowship group, choir or church maintenance group.
- Identify, train and equip leaders for the groups;
- Invite people to join a group. This is a continuous process so the invitation needs to continue to be offered throughout the church year. Good communication about the existence of groups, their place within the life of the church, the range of groups available and how people can join is important;
- Identify what materials the groups will use, or what structure they will follow. Will every group follow the same materials, or are the group leaders free to identify resources that they feel will best meet the needs of their group? Will small group materials be linked to the bible passage that was focused on the previous Sunday? www.disciplekit.org is a good directory of discipleship resources;
- Support group leaders by holding regular training and support sessions with them and encouraging them to support one another also.

What makes small groups effective?

Effective, flourishing small groups:

- Exist with a focus that goes beyond simply fellowship, or Bible study;
- Invite people to join the group – they are open, welcoming and growing, not closed and restrictive;

- Focus on whole-life discipleship (see our guide for exploring whole-life discipleship in small groups [here](#))
- Prioritise relationships and spend time investing in strengthening these. This can create effective support networks where group members pray for, pastorally support and connect with one another outside of the small group meetings;
- Have about 8-12 members. If a group is growing and becomes too large then it can multiply (see below). A smaller group of just 3 or 4 can also work well in the right context with the right people;
- Provide opportunities for open and honest sharing in a relaxed atmosphere;
- Offer hospitality to members, expressing this through the sharing of food, drink and care;
- Have good leadership and coordination and are investing in building up the next leader for the group;
- Have leaders who are accountable to the church leadership structures;
- Meet regularly in a venue which makes the group members feel comfortable (this could be a home, the church or a third space like a coffee shop);
- Respond to the needs of members – working around or accommodating childcare issues or shift working demands;
- Are well profiled and prioritised within the life of the church;
- Follow a programme of content which is engaging and relevant to the group members;
- Could be based around age, geography, interests, stage of life, activity or origin;
- Have a vision for why they exist and how everyone expects to benefit from the group;
- Make use of technology – WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and other online services can be utilised to enable group members to share prayer requests or invest in relationships outside of meeting times. In a context where people work shifts or struggle to regularly due to childcare arrangements, perhaps a small group could operate entirely online.

Multiplying

If small groups are inviting people to join their groups, then they should grow to a point where there is a need to multiply to create space for future growth. If this multiplication doesn't happen groups will tend to be self-limiting in terms of size and growth will be restricted.

However, if group leaders are intentionally investing in building up the next leader for the group then multiplication can be done effectively without disruption caused to the existing group.

In some contexts, simply dividing the group can work well, the existing leader leaves with half of the group members to establish a new group, and the 'leader in training' is released to lead the remaining half of the group. Both groups now have room to grow again.

However, relational dynamics can mean that this can be a painful process and the fear of 'leaving friends behind', prevents groups from dividing or the divide happens badly.

An alternative approach is that the existing group leader leaves to establish a new group and invites any group members who would like to, to come with them. Perhaps only two people do. The 'leader in training' takes on the leadership of the group which now has a little room for further growth, and the new, much smaller group, establishes itself and has plenty of room to invite new people and grow before then multiplying again in the same way.

Written by: Chris Priddy; Head of Parish and External Relations