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## A Study of Small Group Ministries and Their Effect Upon Christian Growth and Nurture

Robert A. Phillips

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A STUDY OF SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES AND  
THEIR EFFECT UPON CHRISTIAN  
GROWTH AND NURTURE

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Research Paper Presented  
to the Faculty of  
Western Evangelical Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Religion

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by  
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March 1979

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been an increased emphasis upon specialized studies concerning church growth. More and more, men are looking into the dynamics and elements that constitute effective and consistent church growth. In researching church growth and discipleship literature for seminary studies, this writer has found that one of the consistent elements contributing to church growth, discipleship, church renewal, and individual Christian maturity, is that of small group ministries. Church growth leaders cite the need for the church to be a place where there is true Christian community; wherein the laity is in fact recognized and functioning as a priesthood of believers; and where people come to have their total spectrum of needs met. Win Arn states:

Small groups are the purifying element of the Church. They are the praying element of the church. They are the dynamic. The church needs small groups as the loaf needs the yeast. In small groups there can be strength, power and outreach to change and move the church — to change and move the community and the world.<sup>1</sup>

The Church now appears to be in a real state of flux. Many church leaders ~~are saying that the Holy Spirit is moving in a way that has not been seen~~ in recent memory. People are looking at the Church in a new light attempting to see if, in fact, it has anything to offer which would assuage the hurts and meaninglessness of a secular humanistic society. The world has seen the hypocrisy of the church all too often! In recent years, with many prominent national figures espousing evangelical Christianity, plus the impact of churches being renewed throughout the world, the world is

taking a second look, to see if Christianity really does have any meaningful content.

When the world looks and sees a genuine love that Christians have one for another, which indicates a true sense of community, then the world will find our witness to be considerably more credible! Francis Schaeffer refers to the necessity of community by stating that we must:

...have community within the church that bears into all of life and all of life's needs — including the material needs. ...Here are the kinds of human relationships that are necessary to show community within our groups, to give what humanism longs for and cannot produce....

There is no use saying you have community or love for each other if it does not get down into the tough stuff of life. It must, or we are producing ugliness in the name of truth. I am convinced that in the 20th century people all over the world will not listen if we have the right doctrine, the right polity, but are not exhibiting community.<sup>2</sup>

According to Arthur G. McPhee, it is only as we, as Christians, exhibit community, that evangelism and belonging to a church has any real meaning. Without community Christianity is meaningless and the church makes little if any difference in life. It too has succumbed to the artificial and depersonalized influences of the plastic, computer culture around it.<sup>3</sup> Although one might take issue with McPhee concerning the rather absolute language he employs in this statement; the point is well taken, that without any practical outworking of a personal and meaningful Christian community, it is questionable whether lives are really being transformed.

One of the most important, if not the most important, ways in which community is developed is through the use of small group ministries. To a very large extent small group ministries leads to, and enhances the sense of community.



The real purpose of this paper is to study small group ministries and the impact that they are having, and have had, upon the church, the individual, and corporate church growth and nurture. There are a multiplicity of essential and characteristic elements found within small group ministries, that will be examined. Additionally it is important to ascertain some of the implications of these kinds of ministries from the perspectives of the individual, the local church, and the Church universal.

## THE PROBLEM

### Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study was to (1) examine small group ministries and determine their relevance to the needs of the contemporary Church. Additionally (2) it was deemed important to look at the essential elements which are characteristic of these ministries and detail how they contribute to the concomitant effect of Christian growth and nurture. This latter effort attempts to look at the problem as it affects the whole Church: from the individual to the corporate body; both locally and universally.

### Justification of the Study

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Churches frequently get caught up in busyness, with a great number of meetings, committees, and programs in which to involve the efforts of their people. This pattern is now being looked at with a rather jaundiced eye by many church leaders because, though there appears to be a great amount of activity, little maturity seems to occur in the lives of those so involved. In an effort to "equip the saints for the work of the ministry" many churches have turned their emphasis

to ministering to the needs of their people with the help of various kinds of small group ministries. As pastor Al Wollen has said:

"...I think our biggest ministry is to lead the people into small groups where they can share their lives openly, honestly and effectively with each other until we've got the whole church back together as a family in community."<sup>4</sup>

It is the intent of this study to benefit the writer as well as other Christians who might be concerned about church growth, and to ascertain whether small group ministries contribute to the overall spiritual health of the church.

### Limitations of the Study

The project and title were chosen because the areas of church growth, Christian nurture and discipleship have become of paramount importance to the writer. At this point in time, at least, the Lord has given the writer a great burden for seeing these areas strengthened within the church.

The study has also been very practical in that it has directed attention to the literature which has enabled the writer to perceive the strengths and weaknesses of small groups. Additionally the study will prove invaluable to the writer who will shortly assume the role of Pastor of Discipleship at the Light and Life Church in Bend, Oregon.

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~~Of significant interest is the fact that this congregation in~~  
Bend has placed a very strong emphasis upon personal Christian growth and nurture. Shortly after assuming his new ministry, the writer will endeavor to co-ordinate and implement those elements which will most readily contribute to personal and corporate Christian maturity.

The study was limited to an overview and evaluation of the literature, especially that which exemplified those contemporary churches

which are experiencing a strong need and appreciation of small group ministries. Additionally a rather superficial review was made concerning some early church leaders who ministered with and to small groups quite effectively. This was done to give a certain historical balance to the study.

Particular emphasis was placed upon a select group of contemporary pastors whose churches reflect specific and very effective use of small group ministries which facilitate church growth and nurture. The study also attempted to undertake a comprehensive review of some of the secondary literature applying to this area.

This writer feels strongly that real Christian nurture and maturity is only possible as one is instructed in, and embraces, the Bible as God's inspired, inerrant and infallible Word. For meaningful, life changing growth to occur, this writer presupposes that the Bible is the source of all truth as it relates to faith, practice, and any other areas to which it addresses itself. In short, the answers to life are found in Scripture and Christian nurture occurs as those answers are understood and appropriated.

#### Assumptions of the Study

All too often the church has placed a great emphasis upon evangelism without taking into consideration the fact that once a person has accepted Christ as his personal Savior, he is often forgotten and left to fend for himself in making a complete break with the old habits and lifestyle of sin. There has been a large emphasis upon numbers in evangelistic campaigns, but after the campaign is over, one is hard pressed to find any lasting commitments to the Lord.<sup>5</sup> The new Christian is beset

with many problems, with which only those more mature in Christ can render assistance.

Often the infant Christian confronts the problems of doubt, peer pressure, and discouragement, to name just a few. It is those who have gone through the fire themselves who can provide the insights, consolation, encouragement, or other help.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the New Testament we find the overwhelming abundance of emphasis upon leading the life in Christ which is transformed, renewed, and victorious. The fact of the matter is that this abundant life does not just happen! If it did, there would not be this important emphasis dealing with the practical elements of such things as relationships with one's family, neighbors, government, and Lord. It is quite apparent from a comprehensive appraisal of Scripture, that maturity is not automatic, instantaneous, nor necessarily easy. All Christians are in some stage of maturing development and thus find that the exhortation of the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 10:22-25) to not forsake the gathering together to exhort one another, is as practical today as in the first century. Arthur McPhee believes that without this nurturing process, the Church would soon cease to exist.<sup>7</sup>

Peter Wagner has said the thing that most commends and repudiates the reality of Christianity is Christians.<sup>8</sup> This would almost seem to be a contradiction until one reflects upon the fact that often the Christian who is commendable is in the process of maturing, while the other has never moved beyond that initial decision; and perhaps has not the faintest idea that he can and should be living the abundant, disciplined Christian life. It is while we are in the process of nurture and maturity that one comes face to face with the reality that often our tongues are

saying something entirely different than our actions.

It is only as we are nurtured do we grow in the "strength and admonition of the Lord". Nurture involves the interaction with other believers as mentioned in Hebrews 10:24,25. From this interaction comes a unified body of believers which results in community in the truest sense of the term. Then the love that Christ mentioned (his new commandment, John 13:34) is experienced, which results in a love life-style that is open, honest and bears one another's burdens. In this context the leadership learns to be servants; the laity realize that they have gifts of the Lord for contributing and ministering to one another's needs. As this becomes accepted and experienced, then the body of believers adopts a real spiritual growth emphasis which manifests itself personally as well as bodily. Although doctrine is, and will always be, important to the practicing evangelical, he becomes not so concerned with definitions of doctrine as with the practical outworking of his faith, in obedience to God's Word.<sup>9</sup>

Christ has indicated that He came "...that they might have life, and might have it abundantly".<sup>10</sup> We fully recognize that we as believers in Jesus Christ do have new and eternal life. But to see many Christians and the defeats they are continually experiencing in confrontation with the world, would certainly belie the fact that they in any way have, or ~~are experiencing this "abundant life"!~~ The exciting and encouraging thing about the effects of Christian nurture is that believers learn that the Lord has provided answers to the most troublesome problems they face. Abundant life comes when people learn that Christianity happens more than on Sunday morning. Richard Halverson states it very clearly:

Think of it this way. The program of our church is everything all the members are doing between Sundays. The church keeps house, goes to school, teaches, practices law, medicine and dentistry,

runs business and industry, farms, works on construction jobs, researches in many fields, sits on school boards, city councils, county councils, state legislatures and congress. Between Sundays the church is involved in everything productive and constructive that is happening in the community. And it does so as a witness to Christ, to the glory of God, in His love and in the power of the Holy Spirit, sensitive to its accountability to Christ.<sup>11</sup>

It is when people realize that they really can experience the abundant life that they begin to yield more and more of those areas which formerly they had reserved as not being effected by the Lord. It is then that people begin taking the Lord to school or work and they begin to fully realize that the heavenly Father really does care about the large and small elements effecting them.

Without nurture, this realization almost never comes about and people are all but doomed to an inevitable life of sterile Christianity; having form, but virtually no power! Those churches which are making a serious attempt to nurture their people are doing so, in very large measure, through the use of small group ministries.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

To facilitate communication there are terms that need to be clarified so as to eliminate confusion and misunderstanding. Thus the following definitions are given:

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##### Growth or Nurture Groups

These are small groups of people (from 4 to 20, but usually around 12) who meet together on a regular basis, with the intention of specifically learning more about God's plan for their lives, and how they as a group can help one another to experience that plan.

### Discipling

Discipling is a term used in reference to a person or persons who are nurturing others. It is usually applied to a situation that is definitely directed toward spiritual maturity, rather than just fellowship and interpersonal interactions.

### Discipleship

This is personal interaction between individuals whereby believers, through teaching, study, and practical experience become mature, spiritually healthy, Christians in which their lives are disciplined and subject to the Lordship of Christ.

### Perfecting

This term is very similar to discipling, but preferred by many of the Church Growth people.

### Equipping

Equipping is a term which refers to that preparation given the members of a local congregation, by the pastors, to enable them to effectively do the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:11,12). This would include discipling and instruction in the use of spiritual gifts.

### Home Bible Study

This terminology refers to a meeting held in a believer's home, ~~wherein the main purpose is Bible study, but which often includes fellow-~~ship, singing, prayer, and personal sharing.

### House Churches

House churches embrace the concept that wherever you have Christians meeting together, in whatever number, there you have a small church which is part of the larger Church. Many churches use this term to refer to those meetings that go on during the week in members' homes.

### Class Meetings

Specifically class meetings refer to the weekly meetings of members of the early Methodists, wherein the members sang, prayed, confessed sins, and encouraged one another in righteousness. It was usually led by a lay-leader. Today this idea and term is being used in some circles.

### Evangelical

An evangelical Christian is one who holds to the Bible as being the inspired and authoritative Word of God. He is committed to Scripture as being the divine rule of faith and practice, while adhering to the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel: e.g. the incarnation, virgin birth of Christ; His death, burial, and resurrection; justification by faith alone; and redemption through Christ by belief in His substitutionary atonement.<sup>12</sup>

### Koinonia

This Greek term most commonly denotes Christian fellowship and that interaction wherein believers share with one another in common.

## METHODS OF PROCEDURE

To better understand the basis upon which the conclusions were drawn it is important to establish the procedure used for gathering research.

### Extensive Literary Research

In undertaking this study the overwhelming amount of data was gleaned from over thirty books on church growth, discipleship, and small group ministries. Additionally religious periodicals and church growth bulletins were reviewed. Material from church growth seminars, chapel lectures, and conferences on evangelism and discipleship was also gathered from tapes.



### Personal Interviews and Experiences

The writer has gained many insights and benefits from personal interviews with: Dr. Joe Aldrich, President of Multnomah School of the Bible (and former pastor of Mariner's Church, Newport Beach, California); Clint Webb, formerly Assistant Pastor of Aloha Community Baptist Church; Jack Mathews, Assistant Pastor of Bethlehem Church; Joe Knight, Director of Adult Ministries at Beaverton Nazarene Church; Joel MacDonald, Minister of Discipleship at Hinson Memorial Baptist Church; and Don Dosedlo, Director of Christian Discipleship on Campus at Portland State University.

The personal experiences of the writer in the roles of Sunday School teacher, Bible study leader and participant, have also provided some first hand insights into the effect that small group ministries have upon spiritual growth and nurture.

### Summary of Research

In chapter two the writer chose initially to briefly survey small group ministries from an historical perspective, dealing first with the New Testament church and then with some of those church leaders who made a large impact upon the Protestant church.

In focusing upon contemporary leaders and the effects they are having upon church growth and nurture, it was found helpful to look at those leaders who have certain specific characteristics about them. For example: Al Wollen at Cedar Mill Bible Church in Portland, Oregon, has an extremely effective home Bible study program; Ray Stedman at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, has been one of the leaders in the contemporary "body life" movement; Howard Snyder, the director of the Free Methodist Light and Life Men's International, has contributed unusual and

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innovative insights into the concept of community within the church. To illustrate the universal aspects of small group effectiveness, an appraisal of Juan Carlos Ortiz and his ministry in Argentina has been undertaken.

In the secondary literature there will be an appraisal and focus upon other writings and leaders which in their own special ways either expand or support the concept of growth and nurture through small groups.

Chapter three will focus upon those elements and strengths that are characteristic of these ministries. An attempt will be made to look at the ways in which small groups function; the kinds of activities and dynamics experienced; and some of the distinct purposes for which they exist.

Finally in chapter four the implications of these ministries for the individual, the local church, and the church universal, will be undertaken. Not only will the ramifications be examined, but some of those problems that small groups experience will be considered. In this chapter the relevance of small groups to the church and its mission will also be discussed. It will be in this chapter that an attempt will be made to call the church, as the Body of Christ, to exhibit that love, that maturity, that unity, which can readily be achieved through small group ministries.

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## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It is extremely important in endeavoring to ascertain the effectiveness of small group ministries, to take a rather close look at some of the literature which sheds light on these ministries. Initially it will be of value to examine, somewhat superficially, the early church, and look at some of those elements which set that community apart and enabled the church to reach out for Christ. Interestingly enough, Scripture provides many insights into what the church was then, and what it can be today.

### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### The First Century Church

Just prior to Jesus' crucifixion, as he was talking with his disciples, he said: "'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'"<sup>1</sup> In this statement the whole tenor of New Testament community was established.

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Christ and later Paul and other New Testament writers all emphasized the necessity to show love not only to their neighbors, but especially to one another as members of the same Christian community. It was this same element of community and unity that Jesus later referred

to in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John. Herein He strongly stated that as the believers became one, the world would be able to see that He definitely was one with them as well.<sup>2</sup>

This unity was further demonstrated as we look at the church in Acts 2:42-47. Here we see a gathered body of believers who are banded together for teaching and fellowship, and taking meals together. They prayed together and most likely shared their hurts and weaknesses. We read that they had all things in common and shared with one another as each had a need. This church apparently was a house church which met in different houses rather than in one specific place. This whole identity of oneness and community led those outside the church to find favor with the Christians and obviously led to many being saved.<sup>3</sup>

It is within this early church that we see the first indication of some of the elements of small group ministries being present. We see fellowship (koinonia), exhortation of one another, needs (both physical and spiritual) being met, and a group size that was small enough to meet in houses and able to interact on a personal and intimate level.

It was in this setting and atmosphere that the church was able to have the impact upon the surrounding community and culture that it should have. It is in this context that the church is able to become the mature organism that Gene Getz says the church must be. Through the process of personal interaction, edification takes place that enables the community of believers to be a dynamic witness to the world, thus enabling that community to honor and glorify God.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of what Paul conceived of the church as being, I Corinthians 12 probably gives us some of the best clues. Paul mentions the fact that not only are varieties of gifts present, being manifested as

the Holy Spirit dictates, but that individuals manifest their respective gifts "for the common good".

He then goes on to elaborate concerning the concept of "body life". His well chosen metaphor of the church body as being compared to the human body is pointed and appropriate. Obviously, different parts of the anatomy are not superior nor inferior (concerning their respective functions), to one another.

Herein is depicted a body that is mutually interdependent: loving, caring, suffering and rejoicing together; a body composed of individual, but united elements.

Later on as the Apostle Paul was exhorting the believers at the church at Ephesus, he very clearly made the case for unity. In Ephesians 4:11-16, we see that the Lord has equipped various believers for the building up and edifying of one another for the work of the ministry. From this building up, results unity of the faith, knowledge of God, and spiritual maturity that enables the body of believers to be steadfast in their faith. Verse sixteen particularly emphasizes the fact that each member of the body has real purpose, contributing to the growth, strength, and maturity of the whole organism. To Paul it was not sufficient to just preach a Gospel of salvation. It is quite obvious that to him, the real task was to "teach every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ."<sup>5</sup>

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Richard Halverson, in examining the New Testament pattern of church community, feels that the early church did not worry about any organized plan or program for evangelism. Evangelism spontaneously happened because the church was such a healthy entity. He further states:

A cursory reading of the epistles of the New Testament will readily indicate in those sections which deal with man's response to God and with man's responsibility to his fellow man this truth: those people were heavily weighted with the burden of the responsibility of brother to Christian brother, to the relationships within the family of Christ, within the body, within the community.

The church is failing in evangelism and mission today not because she does not know what she ought to do or even how to do it, not because she does not have the tools for such a world-wide propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ-but because there is no incentive. And there is no incentive because the conditions in the body which reproduce that incentive are absent. You cannot legislate evangelism and mission. No amount of organizing and planning, programming, training and exhorting will replace the spontaneous expansion of the church when the Spirit of God reigns in the hearts of believers and they are in fellowship with one another as well as with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

In summary then, it is apparent from this brief survey of Scripture that Christ desired and even commanded his followers to love one another. Further we see in the Epistles that Paul and other church leaders, desired for people to relate well and positively to one another and the world in which they lived. Guidelines or principles were established which specifically outlined how one could live the abundant life. The vehicle for experiencing this abundant life and love for one another was the church whose members existed in intimate community with one another. This community apparently took the form, more often than not, of small house churches. It was here that members met regularly, and herein they could experience the normal and perhaps trying elements of small groups in community. As the church then existed for the edification and building up of the body, so too the church today must strive to regain that community which pervades daily life and makes Christianity more than a theoretical construct.

### The Post Reformation Church

Although it is probable to assume that there were a number of Christian groups existing which employed and experienced the benefits of small group ministries, the most outstanding example which is consistently mentioned in the literature is that of the Methodist class and cell meetings. To a very large extent it would appear that not only was the Methodist societies to base their meetings upon the New Testament pattern of house churches, but subsequent generations, especially in the contemporary church, seem also to be returning to the same form and content.

Even before John Wesley was led to the Lord by the Moravian Peter Bohler, he had had some beneficial experience with small group interactions via the so-called "Holy Club" that he, George Whitefield, and his brother Charles, were a part of while at Oxford. The purpose of the club was to meet for prayer, study of the Bible and self-examination. Obviously Wesley considered this kind of personal involvement to be of great benefit when later, as an evangelist, he saw the imperative to conserve the gains of evangelism.<sup>7</sup> Not only did Wesley desire to help the new babes in Christ to become secure in their faith, but he saw that small groups of three and four (later, up to twelve) were the means whereby people could "work out their salvation" and their faith would have practical consequences.

Wesley understood the force of small bodies, and that is why he divided his "societies" (the equivalent of our small churches) into classes.<sup>8</sup> These classes were distributed throughout the city and it was more convenient for those living in the same geographical area to meet on a regular basis. In utilizing the small group, from which many of the later

societies came, Wesley attributed the foundation and principle to the Scriptural pattern:

"In the earliest times," he says, "those whom God had sent forth preached the Gospel to every creature... As soon as they were convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek Gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other and met those catechumens...apart from the great congregation that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort and pray with them..."<sup>9</sup>

It was this concern that his followers "watch over one another", that many have considered to be the real strength behind the Methodist movement. In fact in comparing the endurance of Wesley's work to that of his contemporary and friend, George Whitefield, Basil Miller feels that Wesley's influence was the more durable and long lasting because of his capacity to organize these groups.<sup>10</sup> It is also claimed that these class meetings have been one of the primary attributes which perpetuated the Evangelical Revival in the British Isles during Wesley's ministry.<sup>11</sup>

The benefits and pattern experienced then has continued right down to the present with class meetings or growth groups being endorsed by the Discipline of the Free Methodist Church, to quote:

Christian growth groups should be formed within the congregation for the careful oversight of the members and the confirmation of seekers in the assurance of God's forgiveness in Christ. Membership in the groups ideally should be not more than twelve....

Group meetings should be devoted to meaningful, creative prayer; the study of the Scriptures; the sharing of needs, aspirations, and victories; and fellowship in Christian love. Persons not yet believers should be invited into the fellowship as they desire to learn of Christ.<sup>12</sup>

It is also interesting to note that Dean M. Kelley in writing on the reasons for the consistent and enduring growth of conservative churches, has found that the Methodist class meetings in which a lay leader looked after the moral progress of the other members, was part of the reason that drunkards and petty thieves became sober and hardworking members of the



community. Self-respect was regained and they became known throughout the community for their honesty, thrift, and enthusiasm.<sup>13</sup>

Thus it is apparent that even within fairly recent history (circa 1750), a strong emphasis upon small groups was undertaken by one of the great leaders of the Protestant faith. The interesting aspect of this realization is that there seems to be a new appreciation of this approach to ministry and the corresponding benefits. Of significance is the understanding that many of our contemporary church growth leaders; such as Ray Stedman, Howard Snyder, and Peter Wagner, also see a real need for this kind of ministry.

#### SIGNIFICANT LITERATURE

##### MIRACLES HAPPEN IN HOME BIBLE STUDY

by Albert J. Wollen - He is Pastor of Cedar Mill Bible Church in Portland, Oregon. He became Pastor in 1946 with 80 members, while today the church numbers well over one thousand. His Home Bible Class principles are in demand and are applied in numerous circles.

This book is probably one of the most significant books available documenting the effectiveness and relationships of small group ministries to individual and corporate spiritual growth. Pastor Albert Wollen authored the book with the intention of explaining how home Bible classes helped his church to grow from a little country church back in 1946 to the modern, dynamic, growing, suburban church it is today. The whole key to the ministry at Cedar Mill is that it is laymen centered.<sup>14</sup> Quite obviously Pastor Wollen strongly believes that the pastors and the other so-called professionals should attend to the business of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. In other words, he (among others) is to be the pastor/teacher who counsels, instructs, exhorts, builds up,

and encourages his people so that they might fulfill the work of the ministry to which the Lord has called them.

At Cedar Mill not only do people involve themselves in the work of the ministry on Sundays and at other Church functions, but more importantly, they have a strong sense of ministry when away from the institution. This strength in his congregation is very largely attributed to their home Bible class program.

Al Wollen sees small groups as being essential to the ministry of the church. To quote him: "Whenever believers have emphasized open, honest interaction in small groups as part of their walk with God, the church has flourished in revival, zeal and evangelism. Whenever believers have neglected this small group interaction, the church has grown cold."<sup>15</sup> From the home Bible classes, Wollen has seen a sense of belonging develop; people more honestly interact with one another; and evangelism just naturally happens without any specific programming for it.<sup>16</sup> The benefits are quite obviously numerous.

The home Bible study classes emphasize trained lay leadership. They usually attempt to retain the same size (about 12), that the early Methodists used during the Wesleyan Revival in England. Lay leadership, small size, and the home atmosphere are the ingredients which have made for the success of this ministry.

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In them people learn to pray, true koinonia is experienced, and every area of their lives become affected: business, social, personal.<sup>17</sup> It is in this context that Christians really do learn to die to self. It is here that people are truly and honestly exposed to what Scripture is saying and how they might apply it to their own lives. Along with that exposure comes the necessary interaction with other Christians who loving-

ly help one another through the difficult areas.<sup>18</sup>

Pastor Wollen is convinced that small group ministry is one of the fundamental principles of church unity. He outlines very clearly the history of the New Testament church, the church through Constantine, and up through the Wesleyan Revival. He is convinced that when the church has been alive, strong, and fulfilling its mission, it has had a strong sense of brotherhood, and fellowship within and between small groups.<sup>19</sup> In looking closely at the Wesleyan and Welsh revivals his book concludes that the two significant factors of any revival is an access to the Word of God and small intimate sharing groups.<sup>20</sup>

It is in the home Bible class setting where people's needs (spiritual, physical, emotional, etc.) are met, and also where they in turn learn to reach out to meet the needs of others. People are no longer alone; the aged are cared for; youth problems, such as delinquency, are positively dealt with; and the family unit itself is strengthened.<sup>21</sup> The lowest common denominator of small group ministries is the family unit, and this according to Wollen is the first community which must be strengthened.<sup>22</sup> The people are the ones who can really meet the needs of one another in these situations; as many of them have already dealt with those problems.

So convinced is Pastor Wollen of the need for this very personal kind of interaction that occasionally when new people indicate a reluctance to become so personally involved, he exhorts them to find a church that does not have such a deep commitment to one another in the church family.<sup>23</sup>

In the home Bible classes, "dialogue" is the essential element leading to spiritual understanding and group identification. Pastor Wollen feels there are three purposes of dialogue. 1) It enables people to per-

sonally interact with one another, through discussion. 2) People learn to understand one another and their respective points of view. 3) Dialogue allows feedback and gives a view as to what is really happening in each others lives and in the church. Mr. Wollen is convinced that dialogue is the approach that Christ and the apostles took as they interacted with one another and others.<sup>24</sup>

It is through dialogue that church members are enabled to minister through their spiritual gifts to each other. In this situation one can obtain a true expression of what the church should be. The elements of love, honesty, trust, and unity are experienced and shared. Often this dialogue takes place at an emotional level. Here the atmosphere is one of warmth, friendliness, and unthreatening discussion.<sup>25</sup> People often come with hurts and burdens, but they are borne by others; differences are resolved, and emotional problems are dealt with and healed. The net result is that peoples' lives are changed.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most positive and exciting aspects of home Bible classes, as employed at Cedar Mill, is in the area of evangelism. The home provides a place for real fellowship (koinonia) to take place, which when viewed by a non-Christian, is very positive and often leads him to the Lord. It is in this setting where people can comfortably and unthreateningly be presented with the claims of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

The last twenty pages of Pastor Wollen's book provides an excellent outline of procedures for going about organizing and effectively using home Bible study ministries. Overall the book should be required reading for those that believe, as does this writer, that home Bible studies and other small group ministries, are essential to a church that desires to experience the fullest potential that God wants for it.

## BODY LIFE

by Ray C. Stedman - He has been Pastor of the Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, since 1950.

The most significant focus that one perceives as he reads this book by Pastor Stedman is the very strong emphasis he and his church place upon equipping Christians for the work of the ministry. There is a strong emphasis upon helping one another to become holy and blameless before the Lord and to truly bear the marks of Jesus upon their lives. Throughout the book one senses the overwhelming commitment to love which is manifested as the church invades all areas of life. Jesus is truly Lord and because of that total commitment, the church has a unity which is a witness in itself.<sup>28</sup>

Obviously, from the title of the book, one gathers that "body life" is a very large emphasis. It is this emphasis which enables the church to become the effective influence upon the members' lives that it has become.

Mr. Stedman feels that much damage has been done by spiritually unhealthy Christians because in their zeal and enthusiasm they have reached out to the world, but they have done so while being in a state of spiritual ill health. They are burdened by unresolved problems, they portray hypocritical displays of prejudice and outlook. Their meetings at church are dull, unenthusiastic, entirely predictable performances. Love is shown in only the most impersonal and superficial of ways. The fundamental need in a situation like this is a return to "body life" or what the New Testament calls koinonia. Says Stedman:

...koinonia....was an essential part of early Christianity. The New Testament lays heavy emphasis upon the need for Christians to know each other, closely and intimately enough to be

able to bear one another's burdens, confess faults one to another, rebuke, exhort, and admonish one another, minister to one another with the word and through song and prayer, and thus come to comprehend with all saints as Paul puts it, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:18,19).<sup>29</sup>

Stedman feels strongly that all Christians have gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the body of Christ, which is His Church. Spiritual gifts should be recognized, understood, and employed in the spiritually healthy church, which ministers through the gifts in all areas of life.<sup>30</sup> When people understand and effectively use their spiritual gifts, then the pastors can and should restore the ministry to the people. Evangelism will then freely occur in homes, public businesses, backyards, and schoolrooms.<sup>31</sup>

Pastor Stedman is convinced that the Lord never intended for the unsaved to come to the church to find Christ. People should find Christ in their daily lives and through their normal dealings with Christians who are a positive testimony in the world.<sup>32</sup>

The church exists to teach men and women to be disciples and show them how to follow Jesus, every day of their lives, wherever they go.<sup>33</sup> Through preaching and teaching, people learn that Jesus must be Lord. It is thus the ordinary people, not the so-called professionals, who should reach out to the world. The pastor/teacher is the one who  
 equips the body for the work of the ministry.

Like Al Wollen, Ray Stedman also gives credit to the pattern and structure of the class meetings of the Wesleyan revival, as being a pattern that needs to be emphasized today. Within that kind of environment, burdens will be shared and met, and the load of counselling that the pastor and elders normally do will be reduced.<sup>34</sup>

Stedman's emphasis upon maturity and spirituality is the result of his conviction that the conditions of the first century and that of the twentieth are much the same. Thus he says: "Once again, Christians are a small minority in the midst of a despairing and pagan world, and they are confronted on every side with violence, hostility, ignorance, widespread immorality, and existential despair. They are thus thrust back into the very climate of the first century where the events and triumphs of the book of Acts occurred."<sup>35</sup>

Obviously the early church needed and focused upon maturity and spirituality, and thus the pattern of Christianity and fellowship depicted in Acts was not unusual or abnormal, but rather was the pattern which should be experienced today.<sup>36</sup>

The real story and pattern of the ministry of Peninsula Bible Church began when five Christian families who were hungering for koinonia began meeting together on a regular basis. Fairly soon others heard about the blessings they were experiencing and shortly they grew to about a hundred in number. From the beginning they stressed the emphasis for a laymen centered ministry. Prominent in those days was the home Bible class which was their fundamental outreach for evangelism. This focus has since matured and developed into what they call friendship and hospitality evangelism.<sup>37</sup>

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To some degree Stedman's church and ministry is much different than those other churches which emphasize small group ministries. Although these ministries obviously exist and are important; of particular significance is the Sunday evening "Body Life Services". Many of the benefits of small group ministries are experienced; such as personal sharing of needs, hurts, and victories; as well as the ministering to

one another with their spiritual gifts. They share Scripture, sing songs, and have Bible teaching. The leader very pointedly asks "where do you hurt?" which leads to a real and determined effort to meet those needs and heal those hurts.<sup>38</sup>

In all areas of Ray Stedman's ministry there is always the focus upon meeting people's needs; building each other up in the Lord; equipping the saints for the ministry; in short, helping people experience the fullest potential of Christian love possible.

#### THE COMMUNITY OF THE KING

by Howard A. Snyder - He was previously Dean of the Free Methodist Seminary in Sao Paulo, Brazil and presently is Executive Director of Light and Life Men International. He also was a major speaker at the International Congress of World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland.

In this book, Howard Snyder looks at the true meaning of "church", from a theological perspective. The effort here is to look at the church and determine those elements which contribute to the church's experience of real community, and how the church becomes the community of the King.

In evaluating and including this book as pertinent contemporary literature, it was felt that the emphases Snyder makes concerning the real and urgent need for community, more than justified its inclusion.

Although Community is to be highly recommended overall, it was particular-

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ly valuable to this study in that Snyder dealt with the need for the church to experience: true koinonia, unity, an emphasis upon spiritual gifts, the practice of the priesthood of believers, small group ministry and church growth (both spiritual and numerical). As a result of this study, it became quite apparent that small group ministries both enhanced and contributed to Christian community in the fullest sense of the word. Thus,



not only is a study of community necessary for one to fully appreciate the need and application of small group ministries, it is essential!

Snyder begins his book by focusing upon the relationship of the Church to the Kingdom of God and how they relate to one another. In doing so he looks at various models of the Church from New Testament times up to the present.

Of significant interest is the fact that Snyder believes that the contemporary Church must be a charismatic church, by which he means a church that experiences the grace (charis) of God, which is built up by the gifts of grace (charismata); which are bestowed by the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> He deplores the lack of warmth and personality that is evident in many churches and feels that by developing a sense of community the church will begin to emphasize people and not empty institutional structure. As Snyder puts it, "In order for the Church to be alive and growing, it must be based on a charismatic model, not an institutional model."<sup>40</sup>

Snyder goes on to describe what he sees as the two primary concerns of the early church, which are gospel proclamation, and edification of the Christian community. Because of this emphasis on community, evangelism happened as a natural by-product. Obviously there was verbal proclamation, but that was reinforced by a living practical witness.<sup>41</sup> In this context Snyder also mentions the fact that evangelism was not propagated by specialists but rather by "the natural expression of the life of the Church". The whole body shared the gospel with those they met.<sup>42</sup> He goes on to say that he sees evangelism as being three things. First, it "is the first priority of the Church's ministry in the world". If a church is not evangelizing, it is failing to fulfill its God given mandate. Furthermore, "an evangelism of cheap grace which does not call for true,

present allegiance to Jesus as Lord is not true evangelism". Secondly, "evangelism is essentially witness" in various ways using various methods, as the situation requires. This kind of evangelism emphasizes both preaching as well as the practical outworking of the good news. And finally, "witness is a function of the Church-as-community". This is an evangelism which works: it impacts upon one another's personal and corporate life.<sup>43</sup>

Snyder strongly emphasizes the need for community not only for the Church corporately, but also for the individual believer. He outlines four biblical truths: "(1) the concept of the people of God, (2) the model of Christ with his disciples, (3) the example of the early church, and (4) the explicit teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Christ's statement, 'Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them' (Matthew 18:20) quite adequately defines the Church. Authentic Christian living is life in Christian community." From this base he details the strengths of community. Spiritual growth occurs most readily in interaction with others. This interaction enhances mutual edification which is a result of ministering to one another through the individuals' respective spiritual gifts.<sup>44</sup> In this context Mr. Snyder gives an excellent overview of the validity and necessity of spiritual gifts for the Church in community. He sees each member of the body as having at least one gift and that the leaders should have those gifts commensurate with the offices they are holding. In this understanding then, all Christians are equipped to minister in some fashion and thus all members are priests.<sup>45</sup> Snyder sees gifts as being "completely central to the life, experience, and functioning of the Christian community."<sup>46</sup>

Mr. Snyder sees the Church when it is ministering in community as being an agent of reconciliation in those areas of life where people have the most difficulty. Such areas as marriage, children and parents, employee/employer, are areas that all need to be affected by the Church.<sup>47</sup>

As the Church meets needs and ministers as a true charismatic entity in and through spiritual gifts, then church growth is a natural result. This is a spiritual as well as numerical growth which is a natural consequence of spiritual life.<sup>48</sup> He perceives a church-growth life cycle which is composed of four elements. First, there is the telling of the good news, which as mentioned before, is the church's first priority. Secondly, congregations are multiplied and disciples are made. In this sense as the church expands, those coming into it, are naturally disciplined and nurtured. The numerical growth comes by division of the parent church, not by unlimited expansion. Then thirdly, as Christians are nurtured Christian community is established and strengthened. Thus we see demonstrated real koinonia or fellowship and a strong commitment to household evangelism. And lastly, Snyder sees the exercise of spiritual gifts as being vital to this overall growth. As believers minister to one another and to people who are hurting in the world, they "will be true witnesses to the love of Christ".<sup>49</sup>

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Snyder sees small groups as being one of the main ways in which true Christian community and fellowship is discovered. The very dynamic and vitality of these groups will cause them to multiply and thus they too will facilitate church-growth. Small groups "offer the ideal structure to awaken, discipline and train spiritual gifts. Growth by division is simply one step in the overall process of the Church's life and growth."<sup>50</sup>

As Mr. Snyder looked at the form of the Church from an historical perspective, he concluded that it was a church of worship, community (koinonia), leadership, nurture and witness. It was a church which had small groups (house churches) and large groups (temples) coexisting in a very compatible and supportive unity. It was "the small group providing the intense community life which gave depth to the large-group gatherings (whether the latter were for worship or for witness).<sup>51</sup>

Snyder quotes Donald Bloesch, concerning various Christian communities (often small groups) which arise "'in protest against the worldliness of the church'". Bloesch feels "'it is important that they be in organic relationship with the church lest they become sectarian....A religious community should ideally be an ecclesiola (little church) in the ecclesia'". Of interest also is that Bloesch also suggests seven marks of a biblically based community:

- (1)...it should be genuinely evangelical, committed to the gospel and drawing its principle inspiration from the Bible;
- (2) it should be a small-scale model of the Church, thus visibly demonstrating the reality of the Christian community;
- (3) it should be an agent of reconciliation between the churches, being in the proper sense catholic as well as evangelical;
- (4) it should be outreaching, with an evangelistic missionary fervor;
- (5) it will be in conflict with the principle values and spirit of surrounding culture, thus demonstrating the line between the Church and the world;
- (6) it should be an eschatological sign of the coming Kingdom of God by its radical witness to the lordship of Christ; and
- (7) it should give time to study and instruction as well as prayer and proclamation.<sup>52</sup>

He definitely sees a place for this ecclesiola or smaller, more intimate fellowship which exists within the context of the larger community. While there does exist within the Church, larger bodies, it is within these small, more intimate, groups that people can band together for specific purposes. These may be primarily nurture and fellowship

groups, or they may, besides having fellowship and nurture, also exist for the express purpose of meeting specific needs. There may be a music fellowship, a missions fellowship, a group for social reform, evangelistic visitation, or follow-up Bible study.<sup>53</sup> These small groups offer numerous positive features: (1) they recognize and allow for diversity of personalities and spiritual gifts: (2) the urgency of the task is such that it demands the undivided attention of a dedicated band of people: (3) the group's mission is always carried on best in the context of community: (4) often a small group community allows for team leadership and the sharing of tasks: (5) the mission group meets the need for both homogeneous and heterogeneous fellowship and worship: (6) finally, mission groups can concentrate upon the task at hand more effectively than can larger groups, committees or boards. These groups must always recognize their relation to, and dependence upon, the rest of the corporate church body.<sup>54</sup>

Finally, concerning small groups, Snyder says that:

First, all Christians should be involved in some form of small-group sharing built around the Word. I am not talking here about shallow fellowship groups, but about cells of true koinonia where believers take costly responsibility for each other as they live their lives in the world. Second,...the Church's task today is to find those patterns of obedience which recognize differences in calling on the one hand and the universal summons to discipleship and obedience on the other.<sup>55</sup>

In looking towards renewal of the church, Snyder makes a number of good points. The Church should evaluate the quality of community life of the church through the use of small group studies. It should ascertain what the Bible teaches about the gifts of the Spirit, focusing upon Romans 12, I Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4, and I Peter 4; as well as a compan-

ion study on the priesthood of believers. In this context the point would be to help all Christians be aware of spiritual gifts and to enable them to learn and use them for the benefit of the body. A real effort should be made to "transcend the clergy-laity dichotomy in both thought and speech". This should promote the concept that all Christians are ministers and as such have a "work of ministry". Also it would be desirable to form one or two new congregations from the parent congregation through the use of small groups. Small groups should also be created with the distinct purpose of meeting certain specific needs.<sup>56</sup>

The benefit that has been realized from a study of The Community of the King is the understanding that, among other things, real community cannot be experienced apart from the koinonia and personal inter-relationships of small groups. On the other hand, small groups are not valid nor biblical if community is not experienced nor perceived.

#### CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

by Juan Carlos Ortiz - He is Pastor of El Tabernacolo de la Fe in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He graduated from and taught in the River Plate Bible Institute.

In this very interesting book Ortiz sees the real need within the church today as being that of love. True discipleship in the sense of following Jesus in our total lives will inevitably manifest itself as an

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expression of love. Juan Carlos sees the need for the church to get back to building up, or discipling people, and not just continuing to feed them milk.<sup>57</sup> The time is long overdue for the church to grow in maturity and multiply itself both in quality as well as quantity.<sup>58</sup>

He is calling for a radical change in church structure much as does Howard Snyder in his book The Problem of Wineskins. Part of the pro-

blem is that people are not being disciplined and equipped for the ministry to the world. To a large extent he believes that proven and successful pastors should, instead of remaining with their successful ministries, go out into those areas and those churches which are having difficulties. This, to Ortiz, is a more biblical and practical approach. The trained and successful leader then goes out as a trouble shooter, trains new leaders, through discipleship, and then moves on.<sup>59</sup>

Ortiz feels that the believer in the church today is misplaced. That is, he is not functioning properly because the structure does not allow nor does it expect him to function properly. For example, Ortiz believes, along with Snyder, that the unbiblical dichotomy of clergy vs. laity keeps the members of the church from functioning properly. Additionally, the church perpetuates the concept of addition, rather than the multiplication, of members. This idea then is expanded into the crucial need for the church to embrace the concept of cells; composed of four or five people, wherein they can be nurtured and each of those in turn can go out and nurture four or five more. Along these lines Ortiz feels that the Sunday School is a non-biblical tradition which discourages the multiplication of the believers.<sup>60</sup>

Of real interest concerning discipleship, is Ortiz's concept of teaching through what he calls "formation". He believes that in the church, if people really mean business with Christ, they should not just be given inspirational sermons, but should be told what to do to be obedient people. He says that "Jesus didn't suggest or plead; He gave commands". In this sense then, disciplers, instead of being speakers, should have the courage to be fathers, and lovingly command people to be obedient to the Lord. At times this would include the neglected need for rebuke.<sup>61</sup>

From this launching pad, Ortiz then outlines certain laws of discipleship. The first being that the church must get back to the concept of submission to authority. In the club type churches, people expect their leaders to submit to them, but Scripture says that the people should be submitted to their leaders. Ortiz feels that the proper procedure in ministering to a member in need of correction, is to speak, then exhort, and if there is no progress then to rebuke with all authority. Without this approach, disciples will not be made and the people are harmed much in the same way that spoiled children are harmed. It requires real love to rebuke an individual when he needs it.<sup>62</sup>

The second law of discipleship is that before people can submit to another, that person must himself be submitted to those in authority over him. For us to exert authority we must be in submission to the line of authority over us. In his church in Argentina they eliminated the term member and instead used the term "disciple", in reference to one another. Although he recognized that none of them were yet disciples, in the truest sense of the term, at least they knew that they would all have to be obedient to the things of the Lord.<sup>63</sup>

Probably one of the most useful and exciting chapters in his book is the one entitled "Koinonia and Community Living." It is here that Ortiz details how he and his church go about making disciples. However, he does warn that one cannot successfully make disciples just by following a mechanical pattern. Of primary importance is the need for people to recognize the Lordship of Christ and His love. He refers to this understanding as being the new wine and discipleship and growth the wine-skins for it.

Of real significance is the fact that for a pastor to make disci-



ples he must also be a disciple in life situations, not just in the classroom. Here Juan Carlos makes a plea for pastors to be in submission to one another. It is when the pastor becomes an effective disciple that he in turn can realistically make disciples of others. Interestingly, Ortiz makes a statement which if taken to heart can provide unity and renewal throughout the total realm of Christendom: he says; "As a proud Pentecostal I thought I had everything because I belonged to a Full Gospel church. Little did I know how much I had to learn until I came together with other pastors—Baptists, Presbyterians, Plymouth Brethren, and Catholics. As a proud Pentecostal I had to become a humble elder of the church."<sup>64</sup>

To gain a proper understanding of the cell and community that Ortiz espouses it is necessary to put it in his own words. One must keep in mind that this is the structure around which his discipleship ministry revolves. To quote:

Although most of the men chosen as disciples in our church worked in offices and factories during the day, they still had seven nights a week for meetings. One night was spent meeting with the one to whom they submitted, another night for meeting with the ones who submitted to them. Every disciple had responsibility over two types of cells, one cell where he took the most advanced of those new converts and taught them how to be leaders, knowing that cell would soon be divided and the most advanced disciples put over additional cells. So came the multiplication. There was a "formation of life" cell, and a "formation of leader" cell. Each disciple attended two cell meetings in addition to the cell where he received for himself.

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The fourth night of the seven was used for a group meeting of all disciples. Usually this was on Sunday. If they were married, one night was reserved for the family. Those who were single were required to give a night to their parents simply because people teach by the lives they live, not by the way they talk. ..., one night was set aside for rest....

The last night of the week was used for the disciple to bring out any needs that he might have. Sometimes this was used for a special meeting with their elders. Other times one of their disciples might need to come to them with a special problem, or perhaps the night was used for chores around the house.<sup>65</sup>

This led to their need to discontinue their Sunday morning meetings to enable them to catch up on their rest (which is a revolutionary concept in itself). Also once a month all the cells gathered together for a weekend, where they experienced sharing, confession of sins and Christian community. Obviously this whole rather unorthodox approach to ministry required the disciples to be truly and completely committed to the Lord.<sup>66</sup>

Ortiz uses the term "cell" to designate "a meeting of five or more persons for certain purposes". In effect it is a house church. In the cell, people are taught to live practical lives in the kingdom of God. They remain there for a year after which they graduate to a "small community", where the emphasis is sharing and community love. Here people learn the practical aspects of living together as God's people, with the primary emphasis being koinonia. The practical considerations of hunger, poverty, and other areas of social justice are dealt with in this context.<sup>67</sup>

A further advantage of the cell group was found in the area of doctrinal teaching. Ortiz's own words best describe it:

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Sound doctrine is not just belief in the millennium, the rapture, and the tribulation. Those are philosophical definitions of our belief. Sound doctrine is teaching an employee not to be argumentative with his employer. ...If a believer is on the highway and sees a sign saying "60 miles per hour maximum speed," and he goes to 80, he is disobedient to authority. He lacks sound doctrine. "Well, he believes in the millennium." I don't care what he believes about that—the speed of his car tells me more about his doctrine than does the cast of his millennialism.<sup>68</sup>

Basically his point is that no matter how theologically correct one's verbalized doctrinal position, the practical outworking of one's faith speaks the loudest. It is the cell meetings where men and women learn the real meaning of Christianity as it applies to the warp and woof of everyday life. Again, to quote Ortiz: "Sound doctrine is not the formula of

the beliefs of our denomination; it is our conduct, the life we live. Jesus said, 'Teach them to observe all the things that I have commanded you.' That is really sound doctrine".<sup>69</sup>

In speaking of church renewal Juan Carlos believes that unless the church has an internal renewal of love, it will not matter what form the outward structure takes. He sees much of the so-called love within the church as being mere superficiality. An example he gives is that of a couple who, before they accepted Christ as Savior, would swear and fight with one another, but since their conversion when they fight they do not use bad words anymore. This analogy is further generalized to include the atmosphere at many committee and board meetings, where animosity and bitterness prevails, but without bad language.<sup>70</sup>

Love has got to begin with the leadership. Shepherds within the churches of the same city should begin to extend themselves to one another in love. One does not have to compromise his theology to do this, but by doing this he will be fulfilling the commands of Christ. A pastor's first priority should be to love his fellow pastors. The point is not to talk about your church, but to just bless the other man. After you have established a bond of love, then you can talk theology, but with a loving, and not threatening attitude.<sup>71</sup>

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Juan Carlos Ortiz believes that the Lord is grouping Christians into two categories only: "those who love one another and those who don't. He is doing it not by our doctrine, but by the way we live together and love one another."<sup>72</sup> Finally, he explains the concept of mashed potato Christianity. That is where, instead of being individual potatoes, each having individuality (in the field, in the bag, or even in the pot), they are finally mashed and group identity exists as the body of Christ. There

is no longer the tendency to think of oneself as being superior to the other.<sup>73</sup>

Ortiz believes that this attitude can only be accomplished as people are truly disciplined and learn the cost of obedience. To him the real key to evangelism is when Christians take to heart Jesus' high priestly prayer, "'that they may be one.'"<sup>74</sup>

## SECONDARY LITERATURE

### CAUGHT IN THE WEB

by John W. Hurston/Karen L. Hurston

This book is primarily a study of the effectiveness of small group ministries in the context of the large seemingly impersonal city church. The study was completed in 1977 at which time the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, Korea, numbered about 45,000 (since then, the church has grown to 72,000).<sup>75</sup> The whole structure and program is based upon the "cell" as being the smallest unit within the church. These cells number about eight to fifteen households. The whole congregation is broken down into these small cell groups and it is within these groups that personal needs are met and people ministered to by deacons. The ministry is highly organized with the leadership numbering to the thousands, and evidencing a high level of commitment and training. Dr. Donald McGavran considers this church to probably be the most highly organized church in the world.<sup>76</sup> Anyone interested in seriously employing the cell group concept to ministry would find this book extremely helpful.

A LIVING FELLOWSHIP=A DYNAMIC WITNESS

by Richard C. Halverson

This is a dynamic book about how Halverson came to understand the necessity for believers to have their own personal ministry to the world in which they live. Fellowship, commitment and small group interrelationships are very interestingly presented. This is a book which seeks to make Christianity and the witness of Christians meaningful in a modern complex world.

THREE CHURCHES IN RENEWAL

by Lawrence O. Richards

This very interesting study focuses upon three vastly different churches: Our Heritage in Scottsdale, Arizona; Mariners Church in Newport Beach, California; and Trinity Church of Seattle, Washington. The significant thing is that as different as the pastors are, and the kinds of programs and ministries they emphasize, all three churches stress a laymen oriented ministry. Of interest and pertinence to this study was the fact that all three focused upon the importance of small group ministries.

THE REPRODUCERS

by Chuck Smith

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Although this is primarily an account of the formation and growth of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California, the significance of the book is found in the ways in which the church has successfully reached out to a rather diversified spectrum of people. The important thing from the perspective of small group ministries, is found in the ways Calvary Chapel has been innovative in meeting people where they are hurting. Good in-

sights are provided into the ways in which a church can minister if it has enough love to do so.

#### HOW CHURCHES GROW

by Bernard & Marjorie Palmer

Although this is primarily a study of eleven growing churches and those elements which contribute to that growth, it does provide some valuable insights into the kinds of small group ministries some of them use. Not all of those churches studied have the same degree of emphasis upon small groups, but those that have a strong emphasis consider small groups to be indispensable.

#### WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS... READ THE DIRECTIONS

by Bob Smith

This book is written by one of the team pastors of Ray Stedman's church in Palo Alto, California. Bob Smith sees the church in general as being dull, dispirited and basically without any dynamic. He is firmly convinced that as the church looks to the biblical pattern for its functional example, the church will come alive. He has interesting sections on shepherding, church government, gifts, interpersonal relations, the Church in the world, a New Testament home Bible class, motivating men, discipleship, and many other areas which are of value to those interested in Christian nurture and church growth.

#### WITH CHRIST IN THE SCHOOL OF DISCIPLE BUILDING

by Carl Wilson

This is primarily a book on discipleship, which is drawn essen-

tially from what Wilson perceives as a biblical model. He primarily looks at the small group of twelve that Christ disciplined, then progresses to the seventy, and then the one hundred and twenty. Wilson believes that by following the same pattern, the church can effectively evangelize by creating a disciplined spiritual body, which will reflect great spiritual growth.

#### BUILDING UP ONE ANOTHER

by Gene A. Getz

While most of the other books studied tended to focus on such considerations as small groups, discipleship, nurture, and how they all affect Christian growth and nurture, this book primarily deals with interpersonal relationships. Getz discusses twelve significant Scriptural commands and the ways in which they should be applied to build up the body. It is a fine study that would be of benefit to small study groups.

#### FRIENDSHIP EVANGELISM

by Arthur G. McPhee

In terms of small group ministries, this book is of great benefit in that it points out the practical results for evangelism that small groups or individuals can experience with friendship being the tool. Not only is friendship evangelism conducted with a limited number of people, but the concept is naturally adaptable for follow-up and discipleship as well. The insights and dynamics shared are of great value to the church on any level, whether it is the individual, small groups, or even the corporate body.

#### BUILDING PEOPLE

by Donald L. Bubna

This book is somewhat similar to the preceding, but it tends to

look at the need for love and koinonia and ways they can and should be expressed. Probably this is one of the most practical books this writer has read concerning what real koinonia and love actually are. Bubna develops a study examining the special loving relationships that should exist between man and God and man and man.

#### BUILD WITH THE LORD

by Bert Ghezzi

This book is described as "pastoral advice for prayer groups in the charismatic renewal". Of significance is the fact that this study is written by a Roman Catholic who is one of the leaders within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Whether one agrees with all of the theology of the movement, one thing is certain; that the guidelines put forth in this book, are solidly biblical. Not only is the book very practical in terms of establishing small group fellowships and learning how to minister to one another, but it gives Protestants some perspective concerning the evangelical emphasis that is available within the Catholic church. Although it is never articulated as such, the book implicitly endorses the concept of the priesthood of believers.

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### Chapter III

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL GROUP MINISTRIES

This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the dynamics of small group ministries. However, it is intended to provide insights into those elements which generally are a necessary part of small group ministries. In doing this, it is hoped the reader will be able to see those positive benefits which naturally accrue to those so involved in these ministries.

In the final analysis, small group ministries meet needs: whether they be that of giving one a sense of love and belonging, or of like minded people gathering together for the purpose of Christian nurture and evangelism. For small groups to be successful they must see themselves in a double light. Obviously they meet, in part, for the fellowship and sense of oneness they derive. But more than that, they meet with the intention of reaching out to others with the same kind of needs. It is necessary for them to have a motive or purpose for ministry; and as that is experienced these groups will find that an even greater sense of oneness will be experienced.<sup>1</sup>

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As needs are met and people sense oneness and community, then it is possible for them to experience and participate in the process of Christian nurture. It is positive interaction with others, which creates the environment conducive to spiritual growth and maturity. As Arthur McPhee says, "Discipleship is more caught than taught; it is more a transference

of life than a dissemination of information."<sup>2</sup> This in essence then, is the *raison d'etre*, for small group ministries. Thus whatever type of small group ministry with which one is involved (e.g. home Bible classes, evangelism, or senior citizen, etc.), growth will occur as those needing nurture come in contact with those who exhibit in their lives, qualities for which the group exists.

Although most small groups exhibit most or all of the following elements, they are not intended to necessarily represent an exhaustive nor exclusive listing of characteristics. From this writer's perspective they do, however, represent some of the more important and typical characteristics.

### LOVE

Without question love is the essence and foundation of all ministry. Our Lord so stressed love, that he gave a new commandment, which dictated that Christians should love one another, even as he loved them. In fact, so essential is love that he said love would be the identifying mark of his disciples.<sup>3</sup> The apostle Paul later wrote that greater than any gift was the manifestation of love.<sup>4</sup> Regardless of any other purpose for which the group exists, those groups that manifest a loving atmosphere are those that will more readily achieve that purpose. It is this element

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of love that men and women are looking for, that lead them into making commitments which result in spiritual growth.<sup>5</sup> Virtually all the writers and leaders of church growth and discipleship literature agree that love is the number one quality that has to be demonstrated in order to reach the world for Christ.

Donald Bubna believes firmly that the church needs two legs upon which to walk: first, the proclamation of God's love; and secondly, the

sharing of that love in action.<sup>6</sup> It is one thing to proclaim God's love two or three times per week in the corporate church atmosphere, it is another to live out that love, in personal contact within the small group setting. As love is sensed and experienced, people feel accepted, they relax, they begin to consider that the Christian way of life may have something to offer, after all. More will be said about this later in the section on evangelism.

In church renewal thinking, it is a love-life-style that is open, honest, and bears one another's burdens which is a key element.<sup>7</sup> This kind of "love life style" is one of the major characteristics of small groups. People do not just love one another at their meetings! As they interact with others they learn to appropriate a loving life style on a consistent basis. As time goes on, regardless of their other goals, love becomes a priority of group meetings.<sup>8</sup> They learn to take Jesus as their model while becoming loving, ministering servants.<sup>9</sup> The beautiful thing about love, is that as it is shared it is reproduced in the lives of others who then reproduce it themselves.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it is readily perceived that love is of the utmost importance in practicing and experiencing our faith. This will be even further demonstrated as we look at other characteristics of small group ministries, for underlying the successful experiencing of these characteristics, is the foundation of love.

#### GROUPING

Of importance to this study is the fact that most, if not all small groups are generally composed of people who have something in common. That commonality may be expressed as a need, a goal, or the fact that they are

members of some kind of sociological category (e.g. widows, teenagers, businessmen, etc.).

Bert Ghezzi while documenting the fact that he has seen groups gather to meet the special needs of teenagers, mothers, parents, and single parents, often sees groups composed of mixed ages and needs. Generally, he attempts to fit people together who have some kind of commonality.<sup>11</sup>

In some churches such as Donald Bubna's Salem Alliance Church in Salem, Oregon, they have a "Welcome Class" which is composed of new people who are basically ignorant of things of the faith and the Lord. Bubna considers this a sort of "boot camp" of Christian principles. These Welcome Classes last for six months and then a new one begins, with new people. Says Bubna:

The warmth of real Christian relationships are often first experienced in small groups, and can then spill over into the larger fellowship. Old "graduates" of the Welcome Class often return to share with us. Not long ago, one said: "What I'm learning more and more is that the Christian walk isn't something you do alone... and it started for me in this room".<sup>12</sup>

It is in this kind of setting or grouping that people recognize that they are all in the same situation: all equally ill-informed, without the fear that they are going to be embarrassed by someone more knowledgeable than they. It is here that they can talk together, informally, and discover  
 the reality of the faith as co-learners.

First Baptist Church in Dalles, Texas, has a very extensive specialized group ministry. They have a department for singles which not only ministers to their spiritual needs, but they have a large number of planned events and outings for them. Most churches, in recent years, are encountering more divorced people, many with children. First Baptist

recognized this need and the fact that these people had problems not normally faced by the rest of the congregation. Therefore they created specialized groups to enable these people to meet together for the mutual support that was available. Other groups at First Baptist centered around sports and the newly married (Honeymooners).<sup>13</sup> Of significance is that whenever there is a need at First Baptist, the church attempts to find a group which can meet that need.

At Trinity Church in Seattle, Washington, they have recognized the benefits of personal interaction, and have turned some of the groups that previously existed for other purposes, into groups that interact not only for those purposes but for fellowship and discipleship. This has been the case with their church board. Now rather than just getting right to business, they interact as brothers and friends, getting to know one another, and thus finding that the business is more effectively concluded.<sup>14</sup> The attitude stressed at Trinity is not small groups as much as it is an attitude of personal relations. Thus:

It's important to realize that the personal dimension can come into the life of the church and be expressed in a variety of ways and settings. Small groups. Informal, sharing congregational services. One-on-one relationships. Board and committee meetings. Counseling. Classes. Whenever believers get together, they can and should take time to care for each other- and then, united in spirit and love, they can perform the tasks to which they are called.<sup>15</sup>

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The First Mennonite Brethren Church in Wichita, Kansas, has found it very beneficial to organize their small groups around occupations or professions. They attempt to place all their teachers, medical people, contractors, and so on, into the same groups. They have 15 to 20 units meeting together once a month in homes or cafes, wherein they have a short devotional and then a time for sharing. Even though they shuffle

the membership of the groups every six months they find that a great bond of love is formed within the group.<sup>16</sup>

Richard Halverson, in detailing how he came to understand the needs for fellowship within the church, relates how important it was for him to spend time with men of the church once a week at breakfast meetings:

We learned many things in that first breakfast group. First of all, as we sat together week after week, we grew to know one another at increasingly deeper levels. We came to love one another and to really care and be concerned about our brother's spiritual welfare as well as his family and his work. In our prayer times we found ourselves more anxious to support one another with intercessory prayer not only at the breakfast but throughout the week. Thus this deep, wonderful friendship developed. I learned the meaning of being with men—just with them.<sup>17</sup>

From this and other experiences, Halverson has concluded that the best way to train men is to spend time with them in as many kinds of situations as possible. He, as well as Juan Carlos Ortiz, feels that this was the method that Jesus used in training his disciples.

In addition to the above mentioned groups, people gather together for specific purposes. There may be music fellowships, social reform groups, evangelistic or mission teams, follow-up Bible study groups, multimedia, and Christian nurture groups. While these groups are meeting for a specific purpose, they all attempt to have times of Bible study, sharing, and prayer.<sup>18</sup>

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From the foregoing we see that to a large degree, small groups usually are aligned according to some element of commonality. It is this which Dr. Donald McGavran refers to as the homogeneous unit.<sup>19</sup> While he tends to use the term in reference to large groups of people (e.g. blue collar workers, Republicans, Jews, whites, etc.) the principle appears to be valid when applied to smaller groups as well. Obviously people desire

to identify, to belong, to relate: thus when a group of people who already have something in common, invite others of like interests or background to get together for Bible study or Christian nurture, half the battle is won.

### PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

In recent years, many people have raised the cry that the church is becoming or has become as impersonal as the secular materialistic, plastic society in which it exists. People in churches which have more than 120 people often tend (unconsciously) to not want to grow any larger, because to do so would mean that they no longer have the close personal fellowship which has been enjoyed in the past. This is what Dr. Peter Wagner calls koinonitis, which is basically a terminal illness of a church which has turned inward and thus exists to meet only its own needs.<sup>20</sup>

The problem evolves in part from the fact that when a church grows large enough so that its members no longer identify closely with one another, they begin to feel impersonalism setting in.

Dr. Joe Aldrich feels that there is a very special and personal dynamic at work in small churches and it is in these churches that people usually tend to feel the most loved, cared for, and needed. Dr. Aldrich believes that for a church to remain healthy and growing, it must maintain this small church dynamic by encouraging and developing small groups.<sup>21</sup> In effect there ends up being many small "churches" within the larger corporate context.

In many people's minds the church and its influence is seen to be distinct and separate from the everyday mundane concerns of life. However, it is when a church is meeting needs and people identify with one another in a positive way that people perceive the reality of the faith. It is

through small groups that the church begins to impinge upon the everyday needs of its members. In the small group, spiritual growth is hastened and encouraged; and trust and faith is built because people can be personally involved. They not only receive encouragement from others, but they can give it as well.<sup>22</sup>

As one considers the needs and benefits of personal involvements in small groups, one begins to realize that meetings (such as prayer meetings) need not be considered obligations, but opportunities to develop personal relationships. The emphasis is not so much on this meeting or that activity, but rather another chance is provided to strengthen the bond of personal identity and fellowship with others.<sup>23</sup>

The ability to openly and freely share personal needs, victories, and even defeats is of primary significance in the small group context. Those churches that can effectively convey this concern are those which readily attract others. For too long many churches have allowed their people to live a lifestyle of privacy and loneliness. People should come together in groups to share, love, listen, and celebrate the joys of the Christian faith. Thus churches like Bob Girard's, Our Heritage in Scottsdale, Arizona, has endeavored to accomplish these goals by forming what it calls CHUM groups, which is an acronym for Christian Home Unity Meetings.<sup>24</sup>

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It is this personal involvement which leads to a sense of "family" (which will be dealt with more extensively later). Dr. Aldrich, when he was pastor of Mariners Church in Costa Mesa, California, strongly emphasized the need for personal involvement in people's lives. As people would come together in 21 "little churches" he found each person developing a sense of unity and being uniquely used to minister to one another.<sup>25</sup>



Of importance is the realization that the greatest burdens people bear are those which are internal and emotional. Within small groups the opportunity exists for people, as they interact, to develop a sense of trust which then enables them to more readily alleviate those burdens.<sup>26</sup>

People tend not to become personally involved in a setting wherein they are confronted with monologue, as in a lecture setting. (It is even questionable whether communication is taking place.) However, personal involvement and communication do take place as one finds oneself in a dialogical setting. It is this concept that Al Wollen believes is the heart and core of small group ministries. He sees three functions of dialogue: First, people interrelate with one another where they can be honest and open; secondly, dialogue helps people understand what we believe and what we are thinking; and third, it restores the tension between vitality and form.<sup>27</sup>

A good example of a need-meeting-church that ministers through small groups is Mariners Church. Some people have said that if they had to choose (and they are glad they don't) they would probably choose their small group over Sunday service. It is in the context of these groups that people meet the financial and spiritual needs of one another. Food is often shared. At times when people become extremely burdened by some emotional problem or concern, there are others in the group who reach out and provide the support necessary.<sup>28</sup>

When people begin interacting on a personal level within the small group context, it becomes very natural for them to practice and be involved in prayer. In referring to the natural application of prayer in home Bible classes Al Wollen states:

...it will be discussed among the group as to what practice exists in their lives. Out of that discussion comes a natural response to pray for individuals expressing need in the group. Prayer should become spontaneous so that when someone shares a need there will be a natural pause to remember and pray for this person's need. In this natural conversational manner, prayer will find its own level and will intensify as the group grows together.<sup>29</sup>

Occasionally one will meet Christian people who profess to have real difficulty in praying out loud in the corporate church setting. They desire to pray publicly, but have never done so and are fearful to even attempt it. However, if they can be induced into becoming involved in a small group, they begin to relate to others and realize that others have the same or different fears which need to be overcome. People then gain the confidence to pray openly before the Lord, without any fear of ridicule as they are supported and encouraged by others.

As indicated previously, Howard Snyder believes that virtually all small groups, regardless of other objectives, naturally become involved in Bible study and prayer. The dynamics of the prayer time is well illustrated by Bert Ghezzi:

The prayer meeting is a gathering of people who assemble to praise the Lord, to listen to him, and to grow in loving one another. ...Before, during, and after the gathering, participants grow in learning to love one another with supportive words and expressions of affection.

The prayer meeting is the heart of the prayer group because it centers the participants on the Lord. Loving the Lord with our whole heart, our whole mind, with our spirit, with our body, and all our possessions is the first requirement of God. In the prayer meeting, loving the Lord wholeheartedly is the essential activity which we express in diverse ways. Praise and song not only draw us nearer to him, but enable the Lord to draw us nearer to each other. In the prayer meeting the Lord provides us with a lesson in brotherhood which we can apply in our daily lives. Thus the prayer meeting also prepares us to follow the Lord's second great commandment which is essential to the Christian life—loving one another.<sup>30</sup>

As one looks at the early church, one sees those waiting in the up-

per room participating in corporate prayer. The one hundred and twenty were in a spirit of unity and "one mindedness,...continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14) while waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Later, after the day of Pentecost, we see new believers, not only involved in fellowship and teaching, but devoting themselves "continually to prayer" (Acts 2:42).<sup>31</sup> Obviously, not only is it natural for prayer to be a necessary part of small group ministry, but it has biblical antecedents. Prayer is the bonding agent of human to divine, it is the means whereby those who have come together on a horizontal plane unite on the vertical to express themselves to their Lord. Virtually all small groups whose purpose is focused upon obedience to the Lord, find that prayer is indispensable.

In many church growth circles today there is a renewed emphasis for the church to return to the Reformation concept of the priesthood of believers. Philip Schaff, the great church historian, has said: "The New Testament recognized only one high priest, Jesus Christ. The entire body of believers equals the kleros."<sup>32</sup> The problem as Ted Engstrom has pointed out in Christianity Today (1-5-79) is that the churches, especially as they have multiplied their staff, have often given the impression that the "professional" is the one who is hired to do the work of the ministry.

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Many church leaders are now re-emphasizing the concept of the priesthood of believers and as such are endeavoring to help their people to see themselves as believer-priests.<sup>33</sup>

In facilitating this understanding of every believer being a priest, small group meetings are ideal training centers. It is here, as people interact, learn their spiritual gifts, and minister to one another, that the reality of their priesthood can be truly experienced. Jay Adams in

his fine book Competent to Counsel, points out very graphically, that through biblically centered counselling, directed by the Holy Spirit, believers should and can be extremely effective as counsellors. Pastor Al Wollen attests to this concept as he states:

This quality of sharing as the church in community can develop within small groups. Years ago as pastor of a small church, I spent many hours a week in counseling. Now, in a much larger church, I don't spend half that time and I am seeing ten times better results. Why? Because the people are sharing their lives with each other. They are doing the work of ministry among themselves instead of relying on the pastor.<sup>34</sup>

Once a church body recognizes that all the believers are called to do the work of the ministry and their pastor/teachers are to equip them for that task, then virtually all the meetings of the church are mobilized to accomplish that goal. Especially is this the case with small groups. In the personal interaction and involvements of these groups, people can be properly equipped to minister to each other and the world about them. Some Sunday schools are small and intimate enough that they function very well as small groups and it is in them that often the equipping can effectively be carried on. There is one church which has a small group Sunday school for businessmen through which they teach Christian business ethics.<sup>35</sup> Often as people get caught up in worldly interactions, issues become cloudy, or even purposely overlooked, and thus the group can be used to bring Christian perspective back into focus. Consequently, the individual so involved will be better prepared to be the witness to the world that Christ desires.

Another church which has strongly emphasized the equipping ministry is Hillside Church in Armonk, New York. There, using groups of twelve to fifteen women, the pastor specifically trains them to reach out into their respective neighborhoods with home Bible studies. The pastor feels that their outreach to the unchurched is more than he personally could

accomplish in three lifetimes.<sup>36</sup>

Bert Ghezzi writes "All Christians have a God-given service to perform which is essential to the proper functioning of the local church".<sup>37</sup> Consequently, it is important that the church employ whatever tools are available to enable their people to learn and be equipped for these services. Thus through such groups as Sunday school, home Bible classes, prayer fellowships, etc., people are being equipped not only to reach out to each other, but to a world that desperately needs the Good News they bear.

### SPIRITUAL GIFTS

One cannot discuss in much depth the concept of believer-priests and the equipping ministry without focusing upon spiritual gifts. Robert Girard in placing spiritual gifts in the context of the believer's ministry feels that "each believer-priest is a specialist in his specially gifted area."<sup>38</sup> Most authorities believe that each believer has at least one spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit to enable those believers to minister to the church body. Obviously, as one looks at passages such as: I Corinthians 12:7, "But to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."; and I Peter 4:10, "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (as well as the rest of I Corinthians 12); one readily

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perceives the relationship that spiritual gifts have to the ministry of the individual to the body.

In referring to the need for the believer to discover and use his spiritual gift, Ray Stedman says:

It is very significant that in each place where the gifts of the Spirit are described in Scripture the emphasis is placed upon the fact that each Christian has at least one. That gift may be lying dormant, inchoate, unused. You may not know what it is,

but it is there; for the Holy Spirit makes no exceptions to this basic equipping of each believer. It is vitally essential that you discover the gift or gifts which you possess, for the value of your life as a Christian will be determined by the degree to which you use that which God has provided you.<sup>39</sup>

Thus we see that for us to even experience the potential in ministry that God has intended for us, we must be vitally concerned about what our gifts are and how best to use them.

In terms of the equipping ministry it is perceived that we should attempt to dispense with the concept of the multi-gifted man (the "professional" minister) and focus rather upon a multi-gifted body, much more effectively doing the work of the ministry.<sup>40</sup>

The ministry and practice of spiritual gifts is also further enhanced in the context of the small group. Howard Snyder feels that small groups create an atmosphere that "recognizes and allows for diversity of personalities and spiritual gifts." It is tragic that often people are all forced into the same tasks, never once taking into consideration the fact that many or most of them are not gifted to minister in that way. Of even greater concern to Snyder is when gifts are left dormant or unused. It is within these small groups that the proper outworking and understanding of spiritual gifts can best be appreciated.<sup>41</sup> Paster Wollen would agree: "...It is in the home Bible class atmosphere that the church can best share these spiritual gifts and minister one to another. This results in the development of Christian character and affords a seedbed for evangelism."<sup>42</sup>

Spiritual gifts are given by God for the building up of his body, the Church. When people are growing in the Lord, being nurtured, equipped, and disciplined, it is because others with the necessary gifts are ministering to them. With the resultant maturity that comes with nurture, people

then learn that they too have a ministry to perform as they come to understand, identify, and use their own gifts.

#### EMPHASIS OF THE WORD

Common to all groups, besides prayer and fellowship, is a strong dependence upon God's Word as their source of ultimate authority and direction. The Word is the standard which protects from heretical excesses or omissions. As groups meet together the answers to life's problems are clearly defined as people faithfully search Scripture. In fact so overwhelmingly important is study of the Word, that the great majority of small groups meet in the form of home Bible classes.

Although prayer, fellowship, and other kinds of personal interaction takes place frequently and consistently in the home Bible classes, at Cedar Mill Bible Church the predominant emphasis of the ministry is Bible study. Al Wollen sees a great multiplicity of benefits directly emanating from the foundation of Bible study. His book, Miracles Happen in Group Bible Study, documents how the total program of individual and corporate church growth occurs as people take God's Word seriously, study it, and apply it to their lives. Pastor Wollen feels that if a group is well grounded in Bible study, then the unity mentioned in Acts 2:1 will be readily forthcoming.<sup>43</sup> It is also interesting to note that of the three churches Larry

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Richards looks at in Three Churches in Renewal; and most of the eleven examined by Bernard Palmer in How Churches Grow, they all place an extremely strong emphasis upon the supremacy of God's Word as their handbook for living. All of them utilize small groups to facilitate the understanding and appropriation of His Word for their lives. When one considers that the focus of many small groups is discipleship and evangelism, it is small

wonder that there is this primary emphasis upon Bible study.

The reason Bible study in small groups is so effective, is that people can dialogue about how Scripture applies to their everyday lives. No one is put down for asking what may appear to some to be a "dumb" question. The group looks upon their time together as an opportunity to be co-learners. The primary questions asked are: what does Scripture say, and what does it say to me? In this setting there is no authority but the Bible and it is allowed to speak for itself.<sup>44</sup> Different groups spend differing amounts of time in Bible study; however, all groups consider, study and discuss its implications upon their lives.

Consistently, as this study was pursued, in virtually every book researched, the authors and church leaders attributed individual and corporate growth to a strong emphasis on Bible teaching and study. Without exception one obtains the definite impression that without meaningful study of Scripture, one could not clearly and positively know God's purpose for one's life. Not only does Bible study enable people to receive direction in life, but they come to understand how they as individuals can and should relate to others in their group. In fact all relationships are positively affected. As people interact with their groups and apply biblical principles to their lives, their dealings with the world are improved and they can closely relate to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

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#### NURTURE

In discussing the characteristic of Christian nurture as it applies to small group ministries, it should be noted that the foregoing material is essential to the nurturing process. The in-depth focus of this section will deal more pointedly with that characteristic of small groups which



facilitates maturation, discipleship, spirituality and accountability.

The world has long seen the hypocrisy within the Church, which in large measure has existed because the church neglected to nurture those who have made initial decisions to follow Christ. Peter Wagner indicates that until fairly recently, one of the larger major evangelical denominations in the United States has continually reiterated over and again the basic Gospel message without much emphasis upon discipleship or the sanctified life.<sup>45</sup> With this kind of emphasis it is no wonder that many Christians show a great disparity between what they profess and the way they live. When people accept Christ, rarely are they completely transformed from a life of sin to a life of holiness. Thus, it is imperative that those believers be instructed in the principles of Christian holiness and come to realize that they are called to a life of spiritual maturity and consistency.

It would appear from the emphases that leaders involved in renewal movements are making, that the need for discipleship, maturity, and spirituality is more readily perceived than previously. Donald Bubna states it very concisely: "The goal of the church is to produce mature, Christ-like people, and this spiritual growth process is greatly facilitated by our learning to minister together and to one another."<sup>46</sup> It is as people, through the process of Christian nurture, become more Christ-like, that the world will be able to perceive the reality of the faith which we profess. As people mature in the Lord, the doctrine represented by their actions will become consistent with Scriptural injunctions. Richard Halverson sums it up this way:

Just as the healthy body demands a balance between intake and elimination, the healthy Christian needs to come to Christ, to

practice fellowship, to join others in worship and instruction so that he may be nurtured, strengthened and equipped for the purpose of going into the world where the need is. There he is to minister in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the love of God. That is where the work is--out there in the world.

The healthy Christian experience is a balance of coming and going, of intake and service, of receiving and giving, of nurture and labor.<sup>47</sup>

In church renewal thinking, there seems to be a de-emphasis of numbers with an increased emphasis upon spiritual maturity. The three churches studied in Richard's Three Churches in Renewal, all indicate a corresponding lack of concern about numbers while maintaining an increased focus upon building people spiritually. The conviction shared, is that as these churches look to the needs of the individual and help him grow to Christian maturity, the Lord will naturally provide the increase. To quote Richards:

It is not that winning people to Jesus is unimportant; it seems rather that the focus is placed, as Gib Martin says, "on maturing believers." As believers mature, they do reproduce. Where there is maturity, there seems little need for pushing people into a witness that may seem unreal because Christ has not been formed sufficiently in the one who testifies of Him. Instead there seems to be with maturity a boldly written "letter about Christ delivered...and written, not with pen and ink but with the Spirit of the living God, engraved not on stone, but on human hearts" (II Corinthians 3:3).<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion is that when people become mature in the Lord their faith is so dynamic and filled with vitality that reaching out to others is just a natural reaction.

When we look back at the original purpose of John Wesley's "class meetings", we see that he perceived the great need to conserve the results of his evangelistic efforts. He realized that without nurture and group interaction, his new converts would not be grounded in the faith and thus would soon be lost again.<sup>49</sup> It is interesting to note that the church

today seems to be awakening to this same need as well, and consequently we see increased attention to small group ministries as a vehicle in achieving maturity.

In acknowledging the need for maturity, it is obvious that maturity does not "just happen". In large measure, it is a process which as we have seen, involves discipleship and a commitment on the part of church leaders to facilitate those conditions which most readily contribute to spiritual growth.

The real need is to help people to become disciples in the sense defined by Juan Carlos Ortiz, to quote:

...A disciple is one who follows Jesus Christ. But because we are Christians does not necessarily mean we are His disciples, even though we are members of His kingdom. Following Christ means acknowledging Him as Lord; it means serving Him as a slave. It also means loving and praising.<sup>50</sup>

The total resources of the church should be mobilized to accomplish that end. Ortiz sees discipleship as being more than mere instruction, it has to occur in life situations.<sup>51</sup> That is why discipleship is most effectively accomplished in the context of one-on-one or other small group relationships. It is here that theory is placed into practice and practical considerations are applied.

Concerning these principles, Richard Halverson strongly agrees.

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He believes, as does Carl Wilson (With Christ in the School of Disciple Building), that the biblical pattern that cannot be improved upon is the one which Christ used. Not only did Christ teach the twelve, but he lived with them; spent time with them; was concerned with their every need. Halverson stresses the preposition "with" in describing the discipleship methods used by Christ. He (Christ) was with his disciples, in virtually every kind of situation, and thus what he was saying was practically de-

monstrated in association.<sup>52</sup>

Obviously, most small groups do not and cannot exist in that type of closeness (for various reasons). However, the principle is valid and men like Halverson, Al Wollen, and Ortiz all agree that small groups of two to four or five, are the means to most effectively disciple people. Halverson further states that intimate Christ-like relationships with a few, benefit many.<sup>53</sup> When people in these small groups are discipled then their relationships to families, friends, neighbors, and employers, all improve. Not only that, but the corporate witness of the church is strengthened and enhanced.

Alvin Shifflet believes that even the larger group, such as home Bible studies, is the best tool for discipleship that the church has.

To quote:

...We just need a stronger emphasis on discipleship.  
Small group Bible study is the best tool I know for that.  
When people really begin studying God's Word, it affects them.  
They become better disciples and often end up ministering in the church. I can have pastor's classes and tell new members what I think, but that's not effective. They've got to get involved on their own in Bible study.<sup>54</sup>

The problem often exists that when a new believer accepts Christ, he is expected to come down to the church (which to him is rather strange and even intimidating), and there be preached at and hopefully, with time he will mature in the Lord. It is threatening to him because he is forced into a different cultural environment, cut off from those friends and neighborhood surroundings which previously had given him security. To combat that problem Arthur McPhee suggests that:

...instead, why not disciple the new Christian in his own neighborhood, among his own friends and relatives through a small group and a sustained personal relationship? Why not involve him with Christians of similar background, and with some of the same perspectives and needs? By all means, help him to identify with

a congregation where he feels he can really worship, but don't just leave him there!<sup>55</sup>

Not only is this a more natural and less threatening approach, but the new convert can then effectively be a bridge for evangelizing his old friends and relatives.

Admittedly it is rather difficult to make meaningful distinctions between maturing, discipleship, and spirituality. They are all involved with one another to a certain degree and as one is accomplished, usually the others either benefit or are responsible. But this writer believes that as people are maturing in the Lord, as they are disciplined, then a meaningful and concomitant increase in spirituality will be noticed.

Again the problem is to take theory (which is presented in lecture settings such as morning worship hours) and enable one to apply practical holiness and spirituality to one's life. There are churches which specifically have groups designed to meet this need. In them the focus is to determine how to apply Christian ethics and principles of separation to daily life. Bernard Palmer relates the story of one pastor who confronted the problem:

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"Our survey showed a need in this area," the pastor explained. "We have always thought of ourselves as a Bible teaching church, and in one way we have been. But, far too many of our people were drawing a hard line between their secular lives and their spiritual lives. The Discovery groups have helped us to erase that distinction and to apply the teachings of God to every area of our lives."<sup>56</sup>

The effects of these groups on people in that church have been profound. Men have testified to seeing a practical relationship between one's faith and daily life. One man who used to pay off people to get business was convicted of the unethical, but not illegal practice. He quit his job and turned down a similar one. Another who was required to lie to custom-

ers left his job.<sup>57</sup> It is when men and women are convicted and challenged to be holy unto God and holiness is applied to their lives twenty-four hours a day, that the church is fulfilling a task that has often been neglected.

It is as people appropriate the plain teachings of Scripture that the church's effectiveness is determined:

...the real measure of the effectiveness of a congregation is what happens when the congregation is not in the sanctuary or the Sunday school or meeting officially as boards or committees or councils. The measure of the effectiveness of any local congregation when it is gathered, is the measure of what that congregation is doing when it is dispersed.<sup>58</sup>

To accomplish a mature and effective congregation a congregation must depend upon small groups and other tools to lead its people into a state of spirituality. It is only then that people's lives will manifest a consistent witness which will enhance rather than contradict their statement of faith.

Another element of the nurturing process that is particularly compatible with the small group setting is that of accountability. The Scriptural admonition to be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:21) is often overlooked and avoided within the modern church. Yet it is true that those churches which are growing the fastest and most consistently, are those which place demands upon their constituents.<sup>59</sup>

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As one looks at both the New Testament church and the Wesleyan revival, one sees a strong emphasis upon conforming to a godly way of life. In both situations the members lovingly encouraged, exhorted, and were accountable to one another. This accountability was that much easier because it was practiced in small intimate, loving groups.

Robert Girard believes that it is within the group context today,

that the church must practice submitting to, and being accountable for, one another.<sup>60</sup> An excellent example of this is the following:

Accountability is another way in which sharing groups can help us deal with obstacles. For example, I have been able to master several personal problems by sharing them with others, telling them what I am doing to overcome them, and asking the group to hold me accountable by asking me about the problems regularly. If I am unusually silent about the problems in future meetings, they feel free to ask me how I am doing. By the grace of God, we can make each other stronger through regular personal sharing.<sup>61</sup>

As we regain a sense of accountability and submissiveness to one another, we will not only experience more victory in our lives, but the church will be made the stronger for it.

#### EVANGELISM

In looking at church structure and the ministry of small groups, Howard Snyder sees them as being "...the most effective structure for the communication of the gospel in modern secular urban society."<sup>62</sup> The real benefit in terms of evangelism is that when people are invited by friends into the unthreatening environment of a home, they are more likely to respond. Thus people who are not familiar with the church can respond and be encouraged to join a small group for fellowship or perhaps even Bible study.

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When we make an effort to be a friend to our non-Christian acquaintances and neighbors, inviting them into small fellowship groups, or just being involved in our family lives, then we build relationships. It is as we build relationships, in non-threatening ways, by association and identification, that we earn a right to be heard concerning our faith.<sup>63</sup> Not only do we earn a right to be heard, but people then have an opportunity to see the results of Christian nurture in our lives.

The benefits of that nurture have already been mentioned, but the results of nurture is shared by a quote that Donald Bubna makes concerning Richard Halverson:

Some years ago I heard Dr. Richard Halverson say that "when people are in the right relationship with God and with one another, evangelism happens spontaneously, consistently, and almost effortlessly."<sup>64</sup>

Thus as people get their lives together they experience the blessings and benefits of the "abundant life" and they just naturally and enthusiastically desire to share it with others. Says Bubna:

...witnessing is not what we do, it is what we are, spilling over into what we do and say. Jesus was saying that when he lives in us through the power of the Holy Spirit, then our entire lifestyle will tell of him, wherever Christians scatter throughout the whole world. Christ in us, the hope of glory, shining through so that the world can see who he is and what he can do: that is what we are supposed to be witnesses of.<sup>65</sup>

So effective is the small group for evangelism that some authors feel that the major part of the church's future evangelism success will be in the streets and houses where people live, not within the walls of church buildings.<sup>66</sup> Snyder in his fine book The Problem of Wineskins, writes:

...the evangelism which will be most effective in the city will use small groups as its basic methodology. It will find the small group provides the best environment in which sinners can hear the convicting, winning voice of the Holy Spirit and come alive spiritually through faith. It will find that faith is contagious when fellowship is genuine. Robert Raines testifies in New Life in the Church, "I have watched proportionately more lives genuinely converted in and through small group meetings for prayer, Bible study, and the sharing of life than in the usual organizations and activities of the institutional church."<sup>67</sup>

However, this is not to say that small groups and the institutional church are diametrically opposed. For Snyder goes on to say that, "the small group is best seen as an essential component of the church's structure and ministry, not as a replacement for the church."<sup>68</sup> Snyder, like Donald Bubna and Arthur McPhee, is strongly convinced that the emphasis of



the church should be evangelism through fellowship. They all agree that when a church is in loving relationship to one another and exhibiting positive personal involvements that it will not be so much a matter of Christians going out to evangelize, as it will be the world readily wanting to come in and partake.

### CHURCH GROWTH

Previously in this paper the small group elements contributing to spiritual growth and maturity have been looked at primarily from the perspective of the individual. However, it must be noted and strongly reaffirmed that as individuals mature and experience the vitality and cohesiveness of small groups, there will be an even more far reaching and beneficial affect upon the growth of the church. As individuals demonstrate the reality of Christianity, churches will be renewed. And with this individual and corporate renewal, will come a concomitant increase in the growth of the church, both spiritually and numerically.

Win Arn and Donald McGavran have indicated in their study of growing churches, that small groups is the characteristic which is most significant.<sup>69</sup> Says McGavran:

Dr. Meyer's study indicated that the growth of a church did not correlate with the training of the minister, or the excellence of the Sunday School, the building, or the musical program. It correlated with the number of small face-to-face groups. If a church had a large number of small face-to-face groups, it grew. If it had big Sunday School classes and big church services, the chances were it did not grow.<sup>70</sup>

An exception to this statement, at first glance, would be the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, Korea. The church now has an active membership of about 72,000 and has five, two-hour long services each Sunday. These services number about 16,000 in attendance. However, the real se-

cret to this church and other large successful churches, is that they have broken their membership down into household fellowship, or cell groups. Each cell group includes about eight to fifteen family units.<sup>71</sup> It is this cell unit which is the smallest common denominator of the church; and also the unit which justifies Dr. McGavran's statement about the need for face-to-face groups, for a church to be a growing entity.

The cell unit principle of church growth, at Full Gospel Central Church, has been so successful, that many churches from the United States and around the world are now sending men to the church, which conducts seminars. Aloha Baptist Church in Aloha, Oregon, and Bethlehem Baptist Church in Lake Oswego, Oregon, have both sent leaders to Korea to study their methods. Both churches attribute much of their respective and impressive growth to this concept.<sup>72</sup>

It must be noted that small groups, in order for them to be effective in terms of outreach and church growth, must strongly avoid the temptation to exist only for their own self-edification and fellowship. Just because a group has a warm time and is blessing the individuals within, does not mean that church growth will result.<sup>73</sup>

It should be re-emphasized, however, that often edification which occurs helps the individual members to mature in the Lord, and then they in fact do become effective witnesses, resulting in church growth. It is therefore important for those leading such groups to help the group to maintain an evangelistic posture and avoid introversion.

### COMMUNITY

The preceeding characteristics discussed within this chapter, in their own respective ways, all contribute to and develop a sense of com-

munity that is essential for a body of believers to experience. When people share a sense of identity and purpose; when they become a part of one another's concerns, needs, and lives, then true Christian community is experienced.

Community comes then, from human relationships which impinge upon all areas of life, whether emotional or physical. As Christians laugh and cry with one another, as they extend biblical hospitality (Titus 1:8); then the church community portrays a reality which is irrefutable; a reality which repudiates the superficiality of secular humanism.<sup>74</sup> Community derives from people taking risks; of being available and vulnerable. This is the "costly koinonia" to which Snyder refers.<sup>75</sup>

The need of the church today is to return to the community attitude of the early church. This was a church which was born in community and it was a church wherein the members lived for one another and not for things.<sup>76</sup> One of the biggest losses to the church is the thousands of young people who have been lost to it because the church is not a "loving, caring, watching-over-one-another, family".<sup>77</sup>

In attempting to overcome the impersonalism and superficiality of the modern "seculurban" church, Al Wollen sees small groups as playing a vital role. It is within small groups, with people interacting and meeting needs of one another, that the church may take on the identity of a family and truly exhibit community.<sup>78</sup> In this context, people do the work of the ministry, and become responsible for each other.

There are four fundamental reasons that Dean Kelley sees as being the cause of the growth of conservative churches:

...(1) They are willing to put in more time and effort for their cause than most people do for even their fondest personal ambitions. (2) They have an assurance, a conviction of rightness,

of being on the side of God, that most people in most human endeavors cannot match. (3) They are linked together in a band of mutually supportive, like-minded, equally devoted fellow believers, who reinforce one another in times of weakness, persecution, and doubt. (4) They are willing to subordinate their personal desires and ambitions to the shared goals of the group.<sup>79</sup>

It is apparent that the above are all characteristic of those elements which ideally are available and found within the context of small groups. One can readily perceive that by experiencing those characteristics, a strong sense of identity and community is possible.

Francis Schaeffer in pointing out the extreme importance of community writes:

...there is no use saying you have community or love for each other, if it does not get down into the tough stuff of life. It must, or we are producing ugliness in the name of truth. I am convinced that in the 20th century people all over the world will not listen if we have the right doctrine, the right polity, but are not exhibiting community.<sup>80</sup>

Obviously, a perceived sense of community is an imperative attribute for the church to display, if it is going to be the agency for disseminating the Good News that Christ intended. When the church is interacting, loving, meeting-needs, and caring for one another, it is demonstrating to the world, in a way not otherwise possible, that there is real content and truth in the claims of Christianity. We are told that people will know we are Christians by our love. That love will be demonstrated when the world perceives that, as Snyder puts it, we manifest the fact that we are "The Community of The King".

### SUMMARY

When the church uses small groups effectively, people learn to become a part of one another's lives, and perceive the need to minister to each other as God has equipped them. Love becomes a reality, rather

than some kind of abstraction. People become involved in the church in a new and vital way. No longer are the activities of the church body perceived as being only for those "holier-than-thou" few. Involvement leads to the realization that there is more to being a Christian than Sunday morning.

With involvement and recognition of one's need to interact with others, Christians see and experience the practical out-working of spiritual gifts in their lives and the lives of others. It is in this personal setting that people can look to and experience the practical application of God's Word to their lives. They learn that their ultimate and fundamental authority must be the Word of God.

It is within the context of the small group that nurture and discipleship can most effectively be experienced and accomplished. It is here that people are challenged, exhorted, and held accountable for their progressive growth in the Lord.

With nurture and growth will come a corresponding increase in evangelism. People's lives will reflect the reality of being "joint heirs with Jesus". The fact that their Christian lives have more meaning and content, because of personal interaction, will naturally manifest itself in an enthusiastic sharing with neighbors, friends, and other unsaved people who in turn will often respond to the Gospel.

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Obviously, when people experience their faith as having practical effects upon their daily life, then others will respond and they too become involved, thus bringing more people into God's kingdom. It is this total picture of a faith which is practical, dynamic, maturing, and costly, which causes churches to grow.

Probably more than anything else, as churches utilize and expe-

rience the benefits of small group ministries, a sense of community is developed. Obviously, the initial relationships develop between a limited number of people within small groups. But it is only as people meet needs of one another that bonds of fellowship, or koinonia, develop. With this comes identity, most especially to the group, but also to the larger Body of Christ, both locally, and universally.

In considering those characteristics which appear to be most representative of small group ministries it is apparent that most of them interrelate. This is to say, that whenever a small group is functioning successfully, you will find a large percentage of those positive characteristics present. The reason for this is obvious. For example; as a group demonstrates love, personal involvement is encouraged, people are nurtured, evangelism occurs, the church grows, and community becomes a reality. Obviously, one could take almost any combination of small group characteristics and see how one affects the experiencing and outworking of the others.

Most church growth/renewal authors agree that the small group is the primary and fundamental unit of fellowship and nurture found within the church. Many see the small group as being the most biblically correct form of ministry and thus a pattern to which the church should return. In terms of helping people experience the fullest dimension of the Christian life, the small group is indispensable.

## Chapter IV

### PROBLEMS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### PROBLEMS

It would appear from the previous material that small group ministry is perfection itself, with overwhelming benefits accruing to its adherents. Although many people do feel that the small group is the most Scripturally correct form of ministry and the strengths are such as to demand their utilization, one should be cognizant of certain problems which must be dealt with and overcome.

Probably the single most glaring difficulty confronting the practical application of small group ministries is that of tradition. It is interesting to note from this study that the small group concept is considered to be Scripturally and historically valid. And yet, in many areas of the Church, any deviation from the norm of two or three meetings in the church building on Sunday and a mid-week service (again in the church building), is considered to be heresy. The church is not the church if the ministry is carried on in any place but the edifice erected as "the church" (or so people steeped in tradition would have us believe). This attitude is actually based upon historic precedent, going as far back as the Reformation.

In looking at some of the reasons for the results of the Protestant Reformation, the reformers desired to get back to the concept of the priesthood of believers and a faith which related to the everyday problems of life with practical results. In spite of this desire, much of

the Roman Catholic, clergy-laity dichotomy was carried over. As Howard Snyder puts it:

The result is that modern Protestant churches — whether presbyterian, congregational or episcopal in form — are more impressive for their similarity than for their differences. Regardless of the label, much Protestant ecclesiology is based more on tradition than on Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

Thus until fairly recently (with the exceptions of some groups such as the Quakers and the Anabaptists) the church has stressed the idea of a "professional clergy" who are essentially paid to do the work of the ministry.

In conjunction with this concept was (and is) the prevalent attitude that the "church" was a building located on the corner of 4th and Main rather than the invisible Body of Christ, which is present whenever two or more believers are gathered together. Thus even today as people and churches talk about ministering to one another in new and innovative ways (e.g. home Bible studies, groups for divorcees, senior citizen groups, all of which usually meet in a setting other than the church building) many of our tradition minded brethren get upset. The real problem is the fact that the "traditional church forms (service, singing, order of worship, time and length of worship, etc.) are somehow equated with such sacred doctrines as the "virgin birth," and the "Second Coming of Christ".<sup>2</sup>

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Both Juan Carlos Ortiz and Howard Snyder call for "New Wineskins" to accommodate the Church in an age of change and in an age when the Holy Spirit seems to be leading the Church into a time of great renewal.<sup>3</sup> To quote Snyder:

Every age knows the temptation to forget that the gospel is ever new. We try to contain the new wine of the gospel in old wineskins--outmoded traditions, obsolete philosophies, creaking institutions, old habits. But with time the old wineskins be-



gin to bind the gospel. Then they must burst, and the power of the gospel pours forth once more. Many times this has happened in the history of the church. Human nature wants to conserve, but the divine nature is to renew. It seems almost a law that things initially created to aid the gospel eventually become obstacles — old wineskins. Then God has to destroy or abandon them so that the gospel wine can renew man's world once again.<sup>4</sup>

It would appear from the research data available that those churches which are open to the leading of the Spirit in whichever ways He leads, are those experiencing phenomenal growth. These churches are seeking new ways of ministering to a dead and dying world. They are recognizing and practicing the concept of believer-priests ministering to one another with their spiritual gifts, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Churches must make the distinction between what is merely tradition and what is biblically absolute, the latter being subject neither to change nor compromise.

Once a church or a body of believers has progressed to the point of practicing and experiencing the benefits and satisfaction of small group ministries, there are other problems which sometimes arise. As believers break out of the tradition-bound stuffiness of "business as usual", and begin to inhale the aroma of ministering to each other in a small group, there is occasionally the tendency to feel superior and "more enlightened" than those other church members who have not yet progressed to that point of freedom. Especially is this true when groups (within a church) spontaneously arise, without a corresponding commitment to small groups by the larger church body.

If a group is not careful, much damage can be done if it manifests this kind of independent spirit. At times, if they are not properly shepherded, the tendency to go off on a tangent all their own, may occur.

Sometimes this can lead to division within, not only the group, but also within the larger parent body.<sup>5</sup> Pastor Al Wollen makes a pertinent observation:

There is every indication that this small group movement is of the Spirit for this age. It is going to grow in the future, probably with even greater rapidity than in the past. The question remains, however, will it be embraced by the church and will it become a church movement, or is it going to be an outside movement, given recognition only by a few churches.

There are many problems relating to the growth of this movement. Certainly there are many fears and misgivings in the minds of pastors. It is a movement that desperately needs dedicated leadership. That leadership, as I see it, should be from the pastors. Rather than being defensive, we need to embrace it and to give it the leadership it needs so our lay people can feel its relationship to the local church. It is my earnest hope and prayer that pastors of all denominations will embrace small group concepts for their congregations and that the movement will gain the impetus needed to affect and change our generation.<sup>6</sup>

Thus not only should a church avail itself of the blessings of small groups to equip and build up its members, but the smaller group needs the balance and support afforded by the larger body. The important thing to stress is that all things be done in an orderly fashion, in a manner reflecting the love of Christ.

A somewhat similar kind of problem is that of group "introversion". In this a group, as it experiences the blessings of meeting one another's needs; experiences the satisfaction and joys of using spiritual gifts for the Lord, having fellowship, and bearing burdens together; often begins to focus primarily on itself. The tendency is for the group, as they experience "body life", to become an end in itself. They become self-centered, inward looking, rather than outward reaching.<sup>7</sup>

It is this attitude and experience of introversion and existing primarily to meet the needs of the group that Peter Wagner calls koinonitis. Not only do they not reach out, but they are not really too happy if

someone new comes in who is not part of what has become a clique. This problem is a terminal illness not only for the group, but for a whole church which exhibits this attitude, as well.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose for which all groups must exist is to equip its members to effectively be a witnessing body, impinging upon the world for Christ, both as individuals and as a group.<sup>9</sup> As Donald McGavran writes: "every small group must say to itself, 'We have failed unless, and until, in this small group we have converted some of the unconverted, and fed some of the spiritually hungry.'"<sup>10</sup> When a group is doing that, it is fulfilling its purpose and there is no danger of its becoming a select social club.

### IMPLICATIONS

The concept of small group ministries is not only valid, it is practical in numerous ways. Considering these facts, one is faced with such questions as, how does (or will) small group ministries affect the individual, the local church, and the Church universal?

In considering the first question pertaining to the individual, one is really faced with the larger question of whether or not Christianity has any real content or meaning. It would appear from psychological and philosophical studies that one of man's most fundamental motivations for doing or participating in any pursuit is based upon whether or not that pursuit brings meaning into one's life. Those things in which man is involved and which bring satisfaction are those which bring him a sense of meaning into life.<sup>11</sup>

For most people, meaning and self-worth is derived from their occupations.<sup>12</sup> Others derive meaning from expressing themselves in

creative ways through arts, crafts, or humanistic endeavors which benefit others.

Yet, it is precisely in this area of meaning and self-worth where Christianity is superior to any other meaning-inducing mechanism. Christianity explains man's reason for existence and gives him purpose and reality that is available nowhere else.

Often within the church, people are confronted with the claims of Christ, and the anticipated blessings of Christian fellowship, only to find such blessings and fellowship sadly lacking. Not only are blessings and fellowship lacking, but there is no incentive within those bodies to reach out in evangelism or mission activity. As Richard Halver-son says:

And there is no incentive because the conditions in the body which produce that incentive are absent. You cannot legislate evangelism and mission. No amount of organizing and planning, programming, training and exhorting will replace the spontaneous expansion of the church when the Spirit of God reigns in the hearts of believers and they are in fellowship with one another as well as with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>13</sup>

As individuals become involved in small group fellowship, learning to love and be loved, the reality of the faith will manifest itself. Not only will the individual hear about the new life that is available in Christ, he will experience it as well. This experience will give content and meaning to a faith which until then had been perhaps little more than an abstraction. ~~The fact that small groups have the inherent potential~~ to solidify one's faith, and provide the context in which to see people's lives and attitudes changed by the Holy Spirit, creates the conditions for the spontaneous expansion of the church.

As men and women are strengthened and nurtured in the Lord through

The ministry of small groups, people will perceive their call to ministry, they will become equipped to reach out, not only to one another but to a world which is in despair. People will see that not only does ministry occur within the church building (wherein they are further trained themselves), but that they too can minister as believer-priests in home Bible studies, at work, in nursing homes, etc.

When the church finally recognizes that all the members are ministers, equipped with spiritual gifts, by the Holy Spirit, each being a necessary part of the Body of Christ; then the church will become the dynamic force within its community that God intended. Whenever that happens within a church body, the neighborhood, and community in which the members reside and work, naturally experience the affects of Christianity. Churches will be renewed and as renewal takes place, there will be a new relevance for the poor, the masses and other, formerly disenfranchised, groups. With renewal will come the New Testament emphasis upon community, priesthood of believers, purity, discipleship and the understanding and use of spiritual gifts.<sup>14</sup>

Implicit within this reality is the fact that churches will grow larger, either as an increasingly large entity itself, or as it reproduces itself, in the form of daughter churches. Whatever the case, when the world perceives meaningful change in the lives of those who claim the name of Christ, then they too will take seriously the claims of Christianity. They will come into small groups and see and experience the life changing reality found within. Experience will convince them Christianity really is practical, not only as the exclusive means of eternal salvation, but as the means whereby one can experience abundant life here and now.

In looking at the implications of small groups to the Church universal one can readily perceive a number of advantages. Initially, as each pastor attempts to equip his people for the work of the ministry, he can readily multiply himself by developing leadership within the small group context. As more leaders are developed, it is conceivable that up to 75% of the Church body could be involved in home Bible studies or other small groups. As people focus upon their oneness in Christ and gather together in homes for small group ministry, denominational barriers will seem insignificant and the place for inter-church competition will disappear.<sup>15</sup>

Already throughout the United States and the world, people are gathering in small groups not as Baptists, or Methodists, or whatever, but as Christians desiring to know how to apply the commandments of Christ to their daily lives. In the Philippines, in Haite, and Australia, home Bible studies are proliferating and the Church in those and other countries is growing in leaps and bounds. In communist China and the Soviet Union, Christians not only have been able to maintain their faith against spiritual and numerical erosion, but they have even increased, with the Church continuing to exist in the form of cell groups.<sup>16</sup> In Shanghai alone, there is in excess of 3,000 cell groups consisting of not more than eight people who meet regularly to study God's Word.<sup>17</sup> For them the focus is Christ and his claims upon their lives. There is no preoccupation with considerations of denomination. They are first and foremost Christians loving and serving their Lord and one another. Here the Church is not in decline as has often been suspected since the Communist takeover, but rather the Church is growing stronger and increasing.<sup>18</sup>

Thus the biggest affect and implication of small group ministries,

is that of Christian unity. As individuals are united with one another within the context of small groups; and those small groups are united within the larger corporate body; and so on, then the reality: "that all of them may be one,...so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21) will be experienced. Ideally this will lead to what Snyder calls an "evangelical ecumenism". To quote:

The goal of authentic ecumenism is not a super-church with power and prestige but rather a worldwide fellowship of believers united under the Word and dedicated to the conversion and salvation of mankind. What we should aim for is... an evangelical ecumenism which places Christian mission above institutional survival.<sup>19</sup> (italics his)

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## Chapter V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The primary purpose and rationale for this study has been to examine small group ministries in an effort to understand and appreciate the influence they may have upon individual and corporate Christian growth and nurture. The result has, in effect, been to establish an apologetic for small group ministries.

As the church is buffeted more and more by liberalism and apostate churchmen, the world is seriously looking to see whether or not the church truly has any relevance. For far too long there has been too much discrepancy between what the church has been saying and what it has been practicing in reality.

The world is becoming more impersonal, artificial, and plastic, as time goes on. People are confronted on every side by anonymity. The last place people want and expect impersonalism is within the church. However, if the church does not confront this problem and the problem of faith which has no practical relevance to daily life; then the church is going to have a difficult time convincing the world that it has something of value to which to listen and respond.

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Perhaps more than at any other time in history, the church must exhibit a reality and consistency that is unseen and unheard of in the world. To do that the church must return to the historic position of not only leading people to the Savior, but of building up the members of the



church as well; to enable them to live not only holy and spiritual lives, but to be prepared and equipped for the work of the ministry.

As people come into the church they must be looked upon not as more "ecclesiastical scalps" to be hung in the musty cobwebbs of statistic books, but rather as individuals which have just begun a life which not only will positively influence their personal attitudes and relationships, but will, as time goes on, prepare them for the work of ministry.

It is the responsibility and obligation of every Christian and church to bring those new believers in Christ to a place of nurture and Christian maturity. Although teaching and preaching are both necessary and essential for the edification and building up of believers, the most effective context in which people can be disciplined and grow to Christian maturity, is within the small group.

Within small groups not only do people relate more positively, but the environment is such that people's needs (of whatever type) can be met. It is here as people experience personal involvement with one another, that true Christian love can be experienced and manifested. Here people can come to understand and employ spiritual gifts for the building up of one another.

It is the unthreatening environment of the small group which enables people to collectively study God's Word and ask questions which they might be fearful of asking in the larger setting of the church or Sunday school. Here too, people learn not only that we have a prayer-answering God, but they learn that they too can and should be praying both publicly and privately.

Small groups are the best tools that the church has for not only nurture, but evangelism as well. People who would otherwise be intimidated

by the church and its trappings, find enjoyable, the small intimate group which meets in such unthreatening places as homes or coffee shops. Friendship evangelism using small groups, is one of the most effective methods of evangelism available to the church. The real benefit of the small group and evangelistic outreach is that as people are brought in to the group, and won to the Lord, they can immediately be placed in a position of discipleship and nurture within the same group.

Naturally, as small groups reach out, meet needs, and consequently bring others in, the group will grow. Every group that is fulfilling its mission will always grow and split. That must be the pattern. As groups become overcrowded they, by necessity, must split off and form new groups which in turn will grow and split. This is the classic pattern of growth by multiplication, which is the pattern necessary to affect the church growth needed to reach the world for Jesus Christ.

It is the understanding of this study that small group ministries are probably the single most effective method of bringing: nurture in the individual; vitality for the local church; and spiritual and numerical growth for both the local church and the Church universal. To repeat Win Arn:

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...the basis for effective organized movements is small groups of committed people. Small groups are the purifying element of the church. They are the praying element of the church. They are the dynamic. The church needs small groups as the loaf needs the yeast. In small groups there can be strength, power and outreach to change and move the church — to change and move the community and the world.<sup>1</sup>

The church has a challenge to not only introduce people to Jesus Christ as Savior, but to strengthen and perfect them, to enable them to do the work of the ministry to which they are called. The world looks for a faith that "changes lives", a faith so meaningful that its adherents live

what they preach. When Christianity is experienced in a loving dynamic way; when people are placed before things; when burdens are borne by one another; then its claims are incontrovertible! It is this reality that is striven for and most readily achieved in small group ministries.

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## FOOTNOTES

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## Chapter I

<sup>1</sup>Win Arn, and Donald McGavran, How to Grow a Church (Glendale: Gospel Light Publications, 1977), p. 103.

<sup>2</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, The Church At The End of The 20th Century (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1972), pp. 72-73.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur McPhee, Friendship Evangelism (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 120.

<sup>4</sup>Albert J. Wollen, Miracles Happen in Group Bible Study (Glendale: Regal Books, 1976), p. 51.

<sup>5</sup>McPhee, p. 121.    <sup>6</sup>McPhee, pp. 125-26.    <sup>7</sup>McPhee, p. 118.

<sup>8</sup>Seminar conducted by C. Peter Wagner, church growth leader, during a week of lectures on "Church Growth" at Western Evangelical Seminary, March 27-31, 1978 (tape available at Western Evangelical Seminary Library).

<sup>9</sup>Lawrence O. Richards, Three Churches in Renewal (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 8-11.

<sup>10</sup>John 10:10.

<sup>11</sup>Richard C. Halverson, A Living Fellowship = A Dynamic Witness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 106.

<sup>12</sup>J. D. Douglas, ed., The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974).

## Chapter II

<sup>1</sup>John 13:34-35.    <sup>2</sup>John 17:21-23.    <sup>3</sup>Acts 2:42-47.

<sup>4</sup>Gene A. Getz, Sharpening The Focus of The Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 53.

<sup>5</sup>Colossians 1:27-28.    <sup>6</sup>Halverson, pp. 65-67.

<sup>7</sup>New International Dictionary, p. 1034.

<sup>8</sup>Basil Miller, John Wesley (Minneapolis: Dimension Books, 1943), pp. 81-82.

<sup>9</sup>Miller, p. 80.    <sup>10</sup>Miller, p. 82.

<sup>11</sup>Donald N. Bastian, and others, Book of Discipline (Winona Lake: The Free Methodist Publishing House, 1975), p. 65.

<sup>12</sup>Bastian, pp. 65-66.

<sup>13</sup>Dean M. Kelley, Why Conservative Churches Are Growing (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 64-65.

<sup>14</sup>Wollen, p. 9.    <sup>15</sup>Wollen, p. 17.    <sup>16</sup>Wollen, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup>Wollen, pp. 12-14.    <sup>18</sup>Wollen, p. 24.    <sup>19</sup>Wollen, pp. 26-30.

<sup>20</sup>Wollen, pp. 32-37.    <sup>21</sup>Wollen, pp. 41-47.    <sup>22</sup>Wollen, p. 49.

<sup>23</sup>Wollen, p. 53.    <sup>24</sup>Wollen, p. 69.    <sup>25</sup>Wollen, pp. 71-82.

<sup>26</sup>Wollen, pp. 82-85.    <sup>27</sup>Wollen, pp. 95-97.

<sup>28</sup>Ray C. Stedman, Body Life (Glendale: Regal Books, 1977), pp. 9-37.

<sup>29</sup>Stedman, pp. 113-14.    <sup>30</sup>Stedman, pp. 53-60.

<sup>31</sup>Stedman, pp. 86-93.    <sup>32</sup>Stedman, p. 100.    <sup>33</sup>Stedman, p. 107.

<sup>34</sup>Stedman, p. 118.    <sup>35</sup>Stedman, pp. 145-46.    <sup>36</sup>Stedman, p. 146.

<sup>37</sup>Stedman, pp. 148-51.    <sup>38</sup>Stedman, pp. 155-59.

<sup>39</sup>Howard A. Snyder, The Community of The King (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1978), p. 57.

<sup>40</sup>Snyder, pp. 58-61.    <sup>41</sup>Snyder, p. 73.    <sup>42</sup>Snyder, p. 92.

<sup>43</sup>Snyder, pp. 101-105.    <sup>44</sup>Snyder, pp. 74-76.    <sup>45</sup>Snyder, pp. 76-96.

<sup>46</sup>Snyder, p. 76.    <sup>47</sup>Snyder, p. 107.    <sup>48</sup>Snyder, pp. 117-18.

<sup>49</sup>Snyder, pp. 121-26.    <sup>50</sup>Snyder, p. 131.    <sup>51</sup>Snyder, p. 147.

<sup>52</sup>Snyder, p. 149.    <sup>53</sup>Snyder, pp. 150-55.    <sup>54</sup>Snyder, pp. 155-57.

<sup>55</sup>Snyder, p. 158.    <sup>56</sup>Snyder, pp. 183-86.

<sup>57</sup>Juan Carlos Ortiz, Call to Discipleship (Plainfield: Logos International, 1975), p. 8.

- <sup>58</sup>Ortiz, pp. 14-18.    <sup>59</sup>Ortiz, pp. 21-25.    <sup>60</sup>Ortiz, pp. 26-29.  
<sup>61</sup>Ortiz, pp. 71-73.    <sup>62</sup>Ortiz, pp. 73-74.    <sup>63</sup>Ortiz, pp. 75-77.  
<sup>64</sup>Ortiz, pp. 99-100.    <sup>65</sup>Ortiz, pp. 101-2.    <sup>66</sup>Ortiz, pp. 102-3.  
<sup>67</sup>Ortiz, pp. 103-4.    <sup>68</sup>Ortiz, p. 109.    <sup>69</sup>Ortiz, p. 110.  
<sup>70</sup>Ortiz, p. 123.    <sup>71</sup>Ortiz, pp. 126-30.    <sup>72</sup>Ortiz, p. 135.  
<sup>73</sup>Ortiz, p. 136.    <sup>74</sup>Ortiz, p. 136.

<sup>75</sup>Interview with Jack Mathews, Assistant Pastor, Lake Oswego, Oregon, November 22, 1978.

<sup>76</sup>John W. Hurston and Karen L. Hurston, "Caught in the Web" (Published by Mountain Press and Church Growth International, n.d.), p. 58.

### Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>Arn, pp. 165-66.    <sup>2</sup>McPhee, p. 127.    <sup>3</sup>John 13:34-35.

<sup>4</sup>I Corinthians 13.    <sup>5</sup>McPhee, pp. 56-58.

<sup>6</sup>Donald L. Bubna, Building People Through a Caring Sharing Fellowship (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1978), p. 23.

<sup>7</sup>Richards, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup>Bert Ghezzi, Build With The Lord (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1976), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup>Ghezzi, p. 26.    <sup>10</sup>Bubna, p. 24.    <sup>11</sup>Ghezzi, p. 100.

<sup>12</sup>Bubna, pp. 76-77.

<sup>13</sup>Bernard Palmer and Marjorie Palmer, How Churches Grow (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), pp. 83, 99.

<sup>14</sup>Richards, p. 51.    <sup>15</sup>Richards, pp. 52-53.    <sup>16</sup>Palmer, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup>Halverson, p. 93.    <sup>18</sup>Snyder, pp. 154-56.

<sup>19</sup>Donald McGavran, Understanding Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 85.

<sup>20</sup>Seminar given by C. Peter Wagner, church growth leader, on "Church Growth" at Western Evangelical Seminary, March 27-31, 1978 (tape on file at Seminary Library).

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Joseph Aldrich, Bible School President, Lake Oswego, Oregon, February 7, 1979.

<sup>22</sup>Ghezzi, p. 97. <sup>23</sup>Ghezzi, p. 94.

<sup>24</sup>Opinion expressed by Robert Girard, pastor and author, in an address ("Let's Hang Loose - Let's Hang Loose Together") tape available from National Association of Evangelicals, Wheaton, Illinois.

<sup>25</sup>Richards, pp. 47-49. <sup>26</sup>Wollen, p. 85. <sup>27</sup>Wollen, pp. 61-62.

<sup>28</sup>Richards, pp. 48-49. <sup>29</sup>Wollen, p. 118. <sup>30</sup>Ghezzi, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>Getz, p. 64. <sup>32</sup>Girard. <sup>33</sup>Richards, pp. 34-35.

<sup>34</sup>Wollen, p. 50. <sup>35</sup>Palmer, p. 22. <sup>36</sup>Palmer, pp. 41-42.

<sup>37</sup>Ghezzi, p. 28. <sup>38</sup>Girard. <sup>39</sup>Stedman, pp. 40-41.

<sup>40</sup>Getz, p. 127. <sup>41</sup>Snyder, p. 155. <sup>42</sup>Wollen, p. 97.

<sup>43</sup>Wollen, p. 78. <sup>44</sup>Wollen, pp. 113-15. <sup>45</sup>Wagner seminar.

<sup>46</sup>Bubna, p. 139. <sup>47</sup>Halverson, p. 23. <sup>48</sup>Richards, p. 59.

<sup>49</sup>Howard A. Snyder, The Problem of Wineskins (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), pp. 147-48.

<sup>50</sup>Juan Carlos Ortiz, Disciple (Carol Stream: Creation House, 1975), p. 10.

<sup>51</sup>Ortiz, Call, p. 100. <sup>52</sup>Halverson, pp. 112-13.

<sup>53</sup>Halverson, p. 115.

<sup>54</sup>John Maust, "Church Priorities For '79," quoting Alvin Shifflet, Christianity Today, January 5, 1979, p. 18.

<sup>55</sup>McPhee, p. 46. <sup>56</sup>Palmer, p. 22. <sup>57</sup>Palmer, p. 22.

<sup>58</sup>Halverson, p. 77. <sup>59</sup>Kelley, p. 54. <sup>60</sup>Girard.

<sup>61</sup>Ghezzi, p. 99. <sup>62</sup>Snyder, Wineskins, p. 139. <sup>63</sup>McPhee, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup>Bubna, p. 139. <sup>65</sup>Bubna, p. 140.

<sup>66</sup>David A. Womack, The Pyramid Principle of Church Growth (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1977), p. 138.

<sup>67</sup>Snyder, Wineskins, pp. 141-42. <sup>68</sup>Snyder, Wineskins, p. 142.

<sup>69</sup>Arn, p. 104. <sup>70</sup>Arn, p. 104. <sup>71</sup>Hurston, p. 24.



<sup>72</sup>Interviews with Jack Mathews, Assistant Pastor, Lake Oswego, Oregon, November 22, 1978; and Clint Webb, Assistant Pastor, Aloha, Oregon, November 15, 1978.

<sup>73</sup>Arn, p. 104. <sup>74</sup>Schaeffer, p. 72.

<sup>75</sup>Snyder, Community, p. 157. <sup>76</sup>Wollen, pp. 43-44.

<sup>77</sup>Wollen, p. 49. <sup>78</sup>Wollen, pp. 50-51. <sup>79</sup>Kelley, p. 51.

<sup>80</sup>Schaeffer, p. 73.

#### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Snyder, Wineskins, p. 52. <sup>2</sup>Getz, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup>Ortiz, Call, pp. 82ff.; Snyder, Wineskins, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>Snyder, Wineskins, pp. 15-16. <sup>5</sup>Snyder, Community, pp. 156-57.

<sup>6</sup>Wollen, p. 125. <sup>7</sup>Getz, p. 73. <sup>8</sup>Wagner seminar.

<sup>9</sup>Getz, p. 74. <sup>10</sup>Arn, p. 116. <sup>11</sup>Kelley, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup>Kelley, p. 49. <sup>13</sup>Halverson, pp. 66-67.

<sup>14</sup>Snyder, Wineskins, p. 51. <sup>15</sup>Wollen, p. 122.

<sup>16</sup>Wollen, p. 123. <sup>17</sup>Wollen, p. 32. <sup>18</sup>Wollen, p. 32.

<sup>19</sup>Snyder, Community, p. 176.

#### Chapter V

<sup>1</sup>Arn, p. 103.

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