

Network Church

Small Groups – Beliefs, Values and Structure

By Laurence Singlehurst (trustee)

What are Small Groups

We meet across the week in a number of small groups in each other's homes, and we come together as a church for Sunday services. Both gatherings are vital! The small group meets to experience Christ's love through others in a small intimate setting. The Sunday meeting is to experience God in corporate worship and to receive teaching from his Word. Both are necessary for God's people to be empowered and encouraged into a sense of destiny and purpose in what they do in their workplace, in their families and where they live.

We can best describe our small groups under three headings of Beliefs, Values and Structure.

Beliefs

- 1) Church works best in the big and the small, in the large congregations and the smaller gatherings, both of these are important and have their strengths which are vital for a healthy church. The strength of the small is that it builds community, it is a place that practical discipleship can be worked out and it is a platform to encourage people to be truly missional.
- 2) That these small groups have a certain DNA to them taken from the Great Commandment.
 - A - There is an element of loving God and encountering him through the Word.
 - B - There is a caring and building of community from one member to another which is expressed both in the meeting and beyond the meeting.
 - C - that these groups have a missional dynamic, that is they are empowering every member to be salt and light in their day to day life, 7am to 7pm Monday to Friday and to build relationships with those who are outside the faith community so that every member of the group is, as it were, holding hands with 2 or 3 unchurched people through their hospitality, through their projects, through their relationships in their local community.
- 3) That these groups are 'participative' and the leadership is 'light'. If the only voice you hear is the voice of the leader then that is who the group belongs to, but if you hear the voices of the members then the groups belongs to them and we all realise that the future of the church is about mobilising members to be missional disciples and that is all about participation and ownership.

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Small Groups — Beliefs, Values and Structure ... continued

Values

There are some key values that we feel underpin and give energy and these are described in lots of different ways. But Phil Potter describes them in this way:-

Value 1 – **All** involved.

Value 2 – **B**ecoming disciples.

Value 3 – **C**reating community.

Value 4 – **D**oing evangelism.

Value 5 – **E**ncountering God.

Or A,B,C,D and E.

These values are the outworking of the beliefs and they can be described in wider church meetings, talked about, preached about and then hopefully lived out within the small group

Structures

We use the structure of 4Ws which stands for Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness (other structures are used in other small groups in other churches). In my mind, given the beliefs and values, you could try and run a meeting with no structure at all but I think what would happen is in the end you would just hear the voice of the leader. The joy of a structure is that at least it gives you something to delegate around so you know you will have 3 or 4 voices speaking in that meeting. It gives a sense of confidence to the members as they know what is going to happen. Some flexibility within this is of course essential.

Within this structure are four elements which we feel are important. There is some kind of icebreaker (Welcome) which we hope every person will feel free to contribute through, which gives a sense of real participation. We have also encouraged space for non musical worship (Worship) where there can be creativity with members beginning to experience lots of different ways to worship God. It is important that people are encountering scripture (Word) and there is a real discipleship emphasis and focus on application rather than just study. Lastly, what is clearly important is that there is a missional focus (Witness) , a challenge for us to be connected to the world outside the small group.

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