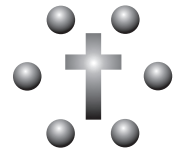




# Why Small Groups?

## Quick Start Guide 1



This is the first in a series of 'Quick Start Guides' for small groups. This resource sheet is for Ministers and Kirk Sessions who are considering either starting or expanding small groups in their congregation. There is plenty here to get a discussion going. Further reading and asking other congregations about their experience is recommended especially if proceeding to the implementation phase.

### What is a small group?

It's important for everyone to be on the same page so that no one is talking at cross purposes. This resource series defines a church small group using the following criteria:

- Size: from about four to sixteen people (any smaller is not really a group and any bigger is not a small group).
- The group meets on a regular basis—from once a week to once a month.
- Small group members can either be from the congregation or people with no church connection from outside the congregation—it depends whether the group is evangelistic or more discipleship focussed—it can be a mix!
- Leaders are always congregation members and ideally should be approved by the Minister and Kirk Session.
- These are Christian small groups so there is always a consistent element of evangelism or discipleship (occasional meetings that are purely social can be beneficial for building group relationships).
- Small groups can be more specialist, e.g. GriefShare or evangelistic, e.g. Alpha or Christianity Explored.
- Home groups are probably the most common sort of small groups (this resource series is designed particularly but not exclusively for home groups) – these groups may also be called contact groups, life groups, etc.

### IMPORTANT!!

Small groups are not a replacement for Sunday worship and listening to preaching but are complementary. However, for medium to large congregations where it can be difficult for people to get to know each other and interact on the basis of their faith, small groups are essential to create a Christ centred community.

### How small groups complement Sunday services

#### Sunday services strengths:

- The unique dynamic of praising God as a large group (Revelation 7:9-10)
- Preaching God's word by someone with extensive training (normally the Minister) for the edification of the whole congregation and the evangelism of non-Christians who may be present.
- A visible public witness of God's gathered people.
- Public prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and intercession emphasise a corporate sense of Christ centred community.

#### Small group strengths:

- A deeper shared experience of praising God
- Learning together from God's Word, sharing insights, answering specific questions and the unique dynamic of being able to check understanding.
- The witness of individual testimonies to encourage believers and persuade non-believers.
- A sense of Christ centred community in sharing life together in prayer, mission/evangelism and pastoral care.

## Why introduce or expand small groups?

- To deepen relationships in a larger congregation in order to encourage a greater sense of being a Christ centred community rather than individuals who happen to come together for worship on a Sunday (note that this has a positive effect on Sunday worship as well).
- To provide opportunities for discipleship so that people grow in their faith in Christ and their involvement in his mission for his church.
- To provide a way for Christians to care for other Christians in order that pastoral care is not solely left to the Minister, Elders or pastoral care team (see separate resource sheet on pastoral care).
- To provide a way for people who are interested in exploring what it means to be a Christian to do this in a non-threatening small group setting.

## Biblical encouragements to use small groups:

- The many 'one another' verses in the New Testament: love one another (John 13:34), care for one another (Galatians 6:2), motivate one another (Hebrews 10:24), encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16, Romans 15:14), worship with one another (Ephesians 5:18-20), show hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4:9) and pray for one another (Ephesians 6:18). The New Testament clearly recognises the role of gifted and called elders who teach and care for the congregation to a great extent but also the responsibilities of individual Christians as highlighted in these 'one another verses'. The dynamic of 'one anothering' happens best in small groups.
- Jesus' model for the core of his earthly ministry was a small group of twelve disciples.
- We read of people in the early church meeting in each others' homes for prayer and teaching (Acts 12:12, 20:7). While Acts is descriptive rather than prescriptive as a model for church, it certainly shows that this works!
- Our society emphasises individuality which can influence us to keep our faith private whereas what we need to grow are strong relationships between Christians in order to build each other up in Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25).

## When introducing or expanding small groups may be a bad idea...

- If there is a lack of leaders – spiritually immature or worse, unconverted people will be 'blind leaders of the blind.' To produce leaders look to existing small groups (see resource on leading a small group) and/or training people who are gifted, have good Christian character and are committed to the congregation. You may need to release them from other commitments in order to do this.
- If there is serious conflict/disagreement in the congregation – small groups may make the division worse if some groups take one side and others take the other side. Once the situation is resolved though, small groups are ideal for encouraging people to grow in spiritual maturity and loving one another.

## What next?

If it is decided to introduce or expand small groups, please see the resource on starting and coordinating them.