

Aligning Affinities to Your Small Group Model

By Steve Gladen (updated March 2019)

How do you get the most out of your affinities in your church but yet stay true to small groups? At most churches, in their Adult Ministries, you have four major affinities—Men’s, Women’s, Couples and Singles. As your church grows you start to have more affinities and sub affinities. Having affinities in your church is natural and a common way to structure around. If your “delivery systems” (Acts 5:42) are your weekend services and small groups, how do you use affinities strategically and with alignment to your small group ministry to produce what you want.

Before reading any further, if your church doesn’t know what they want to produce in a follower of Christ, then that should be your first step. At Saddleback, we want each individual to balance the Great Commission and Great Commandment in their hearts. We use the Spiritual Health Assessment to help accomplish this. Chapter 10 in “Small Groups With Purpose” will help outline health for the individual and group.

Once you understand the goal, then you can use your affinities as a strategic means to help compliment your Small Group Ministry. Our affinity leaders at Saddleback are full time and are called Small Group Pastors (old term Area Leader) simply because they oversee an area by affinity and, if the affinity is large enough, by geography. They care for small groups by affinity. For example, our Singles Ministry is led by a Small Group Pastor, a line of Community Leaders, and individual small groups who all meet under the affinity of being “singles”.

Our major affinities are Men’s, Women’s, Couples, Singles, Workplace, and Online. To give you some perspective, thirteen years ago when we had 260 groups, they were all under me—I was the affinity! As your groups expand, your ability to expand by affinity and geography will grow. All affinities report under the Small Group Team so alignment can happen. If they don’t, it is far easier for “silo-ing” to happen.

See chapter 6 in *PLANNING Small Groups With Purpose* for more information on Community Leaders.

The Small Group Pastor over an affinity has many of the same duties of the Small Group Point Person of most churches. For example, a Small group Pastor of Women’s Ministry might plan a Community Event just for women, whereas a Small Group Point Person might plan a Community Event with a wider scope of appeal. While their strategies must be in keeping with the vision and mission of the overall Small Group Ministry, how the Small Group Pastors accomplish their individual goals may vary greatly. Methods that might work for the Singles Ministry might not work for the Online Ministry. The key is empowering the various Small Group Pastors under the general umbrella of Small Group Ministry while avoiding the trap of the “silo” mentality. Our Small Group Pastors carry the strategic initiative of the Small Group Ministry, and we have to not only allow them to do that in the way that best fits their particular affinity and personality, we need to encourage them to do so.

The Small Groups Pastors (affinity) are responsible for:

CONNECTION (Large Event) – This is a church-wide event promoting the Affinity, strategically in line with getting people into small groups (examples - 40 Days of Purpose or Community Campaigns, Men’s conferences, and Couples Seminar, etc.). These are generally held one time a year, and gather people from the church and community to an event to get them into small groups.

COMMUNITY (Medium Event) – Community Events mobilize the giftedness of those in your church (volunteers) or the community (examples – classes, retreats, and seminars). They are a great way to specialize on specific topics for a target audience. For example, a few years back we had a woman who led couples who were expecting babies through Lamaze training. We open these types of events to the public, and the result is twofold. One, your people are given an opportunity to use their giftedness. Two, offering such events to the community attracts people to your church.

Whether you are holding a Connection event, or a Community event, the ultimate goal is to increase awareness and get these people into a small group. For smaller churches these made be combined strategies.

CURRICULA – Small Group Pastors review the affinity-based tools and resources to support small groups. They provide input and suggestions on curriculum, tools for small groups, seminars, and workshops that serve to strengthen the small groups in their care.

CARE – A primary part of the Small Group Pastors ministry is to recruit and resource individual Community Leaders. Small Group Pastors use the Spiritual Health Assessment/Planner, training, events, and meetings to encourage **health** in the lives of their Community Leaders. The Community Leaders cannot encourage the community of small groups in their care if they do not “get it”. The Small Group Pastors job is to ensure they not only get it, but they also pass it along the “why” we do it.

Affinities are great ways to attract and connect people. They do not need to be in competition with the Small Group Ministry, but understand how they can align and move the church to their ultimate goal.

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