

The Saddleback Small Group Difference

Part 2

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Growth by Campaigns, Not Disrupting Community

Small group ministries live in a constant tension between fellowship and evangelism. Do the people in our small groups continue to grow closer together or do we ask them to leave those groups so that we can grow the number of groups? What do we do about the people who have just recently joined a group? How long should a group stay together? These are all questions that get considered in every small group ministry, often proving that there is no light without fire. It is, after all, a delicate balance.

We have grown to more than 2,500 adult small groups at Saddleback Church because we use a campaign to launch new groups every year. Since 2002, campaigns have increased small group participation at our church from 30 percent to 110 percent. We now have more people in small groups than attend our weekend services (on average). And, rather than taking energy from our small groups by forced division or multiplication, the campaign approach actually adds energy to groups. There's an excitement to being involved in a church-wide effort.

Leadership Potential, Not Proven Leaders

Our HOST strategy is designed to first get people into serving and then build them into leaders. If you wait for perfect people to lead your small groups you'll be waiting until Christ's return. But you don't need "all star, super trained" small group leaders to create a successful small group ministry! All you need is people who are willing and obedient. Remember, God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called. So, you can relax and heave a great sigh of relief. This small group strategy will help you no matter your church size. Using Biblically solid studies, even a member with a very young faith can host a small group in their home. We get people in the game early in leading groups—and then help them get to where they need to be. Seems that's the model that Jesus showed us when he picked twelve ordinary men. His first requirement was "follow me".

But no ministry can grow much unless there is an infrastructure to support it. We look at the people who are serving as hosts and we identify the ones who are natural shepherds. Then we begin to raise these people up through a Small Group Leadership Pathway that helps them understand the ministry, recognize God's call in their lives, and then trains them in head and heart fundamentals so they can be effective in the ministry right from the beginning. We take Hosts and turn them into Leaders! When people have reasonable knowledge of what to do they enjoy the ministry more because they see God working through them quickly. This is literally part of a street-to-staff pathway that greets people at the front door and guides them into greater service for the kingdom within the small group ministry.