

Nurturing the Church through Small Groups: Why Is It So Important?



UNACH



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Introduction

- ▶ The South American Division has determined that the process of making disciples must include three elements: fellowship, relationship and mission.
- ▶ During the past several years, the division leaders arrived at the conclusion that the best way to articulate these three concepts is organizing the church in small groups.



Introduction

- ▶ This presentation argues that it is essential that every church leader (especially the pastors) should understand the importance of organizing the church in small groups.
- ▶ Doing so will enable them to expand their understanding of three ecclesiological concepts that are essential for the church to fulfill its mission.



Introduction

- ▶ J. D. Payne said: “The *most critical issue facing the expansion of the North American Church today* is a theological issue.”
 - ▶ One of the main challenge of the church: Ensure that their doctrines are biblical but also their practices and procedures.
 - ▶ The way we do things must be biblical too.
 - ▶ Jesus said: “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Mathew 7:24)
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Introduction

- ▶ The problem is that, perhaps unconsciously, we have invested important biblical words with non-biblical meanings.
- ▶ Example: For many “ministry” is the job of the pastor.
- ▶ I would like to propose that the practice of small group concept will help us restore some important ecclesiological concepts.



My Personal Journey

In 2011 - I was asked to teach a new course about the subject of Discipleship and Small Groups in Adventist University of Chile.

The problem was that I had never belonged to a small group regularly.

This brought to my memory a *Real Theology Concept* shared by John Dybdahl in one of my DMin classes.

For him, Real Theology is **reflection after obedience.**



My Personal Journey

Along with my wife, I decided to pray to start a small group.

God helped us meet 3 other families.

Through this experience I started to learn what it means to love and be loved as part of the Family of God.

I understood that discipleship lessons are learned through life's experience.

This kind of lessons helped me understand that obedience lets me experience a biblical truth (and what it is means to know in a biblical sense). For example: Adam and Eve case (Genesis 4:1).



My New family



My Personal Journey

- ▶ My personal journey in practicing this divine counsel enabled me to expand my understanding of three ecclesiological concepts that are essential for the church to fulfill its mission:
 - ▶ 1. The concept of the church
 - ▶ 2. The concept of discipleship
 - ▶ 3. The concept of pastoral ministry

I can testify that this has been a real blessing for me.



1. The Church

The small groups help us expand a biblical concept of church. The church is not primarily an institution, but a community.

The first century Christians did not go to church, they were *the* church.

The idea of church as “a place to go” has given rise to the “consumer church.”



The Church

- ▶ According to Daniel Sanchez, Emperor Constantine is one of the easier identifiable factor for the institutionalization of the church:
- ▶ The church in the times of Constantine promoted this ecclesiastical structure:
- ▶ Pastor + [public] building + Programme = the [real] Church.



Community

Circular Leadership

Interdependence

Relations

Reproduction

Institution

Pyramid
Leadership

Independence

Programs

Proselytizing

The Church

- ▶ Jesus did not appoint a chief apostle. He established a Community and Advisory Leadership.
- ▶ The transition in the Apostolic Church was from the synagogue community to Christians home churches.
- ▶ The Christian Church is not any kind of community, but a community with a message to the world (Matt. 16:16).



John 3:34-35

- ▶ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (NIV)



The Essential Truth:

- ▶ Church is primarily a community. It is a place where no one is alone.
- ▶ The church is a school of love. Every member needs to learn how to love better.



2. The Discipleship

- ▶ In the NT, the small groups are the natural growth environment of new disciples.
- ▶ Preaching led to conversion because justification by faith is an experience between God and me.
- ▶ In other hand, community encouraged sanctification because discipleship is not a private experience.
- ▶ Thus, biblical discipleship is a communal experience. (Grapes are a good example of communal growing).



The Discipleship

- ▶ “So the Christian community is a place where we can begin to practice the Christian life together. It needs to be a place where we succeed and fail in an atmosphere of acceptance and adherence to the Law of God” (Jeffrey Arnold).



The Discipleship

- ▶ “We need to be in a group to make us accountable to each other about our life in Christ, to truly worry about each other, and to witness for Christ properly” (Russell Burrill).
 - ▶ Remember: “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another”. (John 13:35) (NIV)
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The Essential Truth:

- ▶ There are victories that we do not achieve alone. Small groups are the natural growth environment for new disciples.
- ▶ “Therefore confess your sin to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).



Ellen G. White

- ▶ “What is the object of assembling together? Is it to inform God, to instruct Him by telling Him all we know in prayer? We meet together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another’s hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigor from the Source of our strength” (2T 578).
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3. Pastoral Ministry

- ▶ It seems that the Adventist pioneers regarded the primary mission of pastors as preaching the gospel in new territories.
- ▶ In this sense, small groups release the pastors to fulfill their ministry.
- ▶ When the small groups are responsible for pastoral care, the pastors may engage in "equipping the saints for ministry" and evangelization of new places.



Biblical Offices

Offices (by laying of hands)	Apostolic Church	Adventist Church
Office 1	Apostols	Apostolic Pastors
Office 2	Elders/Bishops	Elders/ (Locals Pastor)
Office 3	Deacons	Deacons

Pastoral Ministry

- ▶ “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11,12).
- ▶ “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Romans 15:20).

Ellen G. White

- ▶ “Instead of keeping the ministers at work for the churches that already know the truth, let the members of the churches say to these laborers: ‘Go work for souls that are perishing in darkness. We ourselves will carry forward the services of the church...’



Ellen G. White

- ▶ ...We will keep up the meetings, and, by abiding in Christ, will maintain spiritual life. We will work for souls that are about us, and we will send our prayers and our gifts to sustain the laborers in more needy and destitute fields'” (6 T 30).



Ellen G. White

- ▶ “If the proper instruction were given, if the proper methods were followed, every church member would do his work as a member of the body. He would do Christian missionary work. But the churches are dying, and they want a minister to preach to them. . . . They should be taught that unless they can stand alone, without a minister, they need to be converted anew, and baptized anew. They need to be born again” (Ms. 150, 1901, in *Evangelism*, 381).
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2 Chronicles 20:20

- ▶ “...Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”
 - ▶ I would like to suggest that we need to recover the apostolic dimension of pastoral work.
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The Essential Truth:

- ▶ Pastoral ministry needs to recover its evangelistic focus. That means, the pastors need to invest most of their time in planting new churches in new places and the rest in equipping church members to accomplish their mission.
- ▶ This is the starting point: the change of a church begins in the heart of its pastor.



Conclusion

- ▶ “Today God needs leaders who are new Moses to lead his people out of Egypt to the promised land. It's time to start driving the church back to the biblical model. God needs these leaders now” (Russell Burrill).



We can change the future

