

Background

Many people think of adult Sunday school as just sitting in a class and absorbing knowledge. But several years ago, Fair Oaks realized that the dynamics of smaller groups of adults within the church should take on other dimensions - like people really caring for each other, doing service projects together, and helping one another develop personal ministries. They should have more of the characteristics of a church than of a class.

Out of this realization grew the small-church concept. This concept was intended to give people a broader vision of what an adult Sunday school class should be. Adults would still meet during the Sunday school hour for instruction and fellowship. But more importantly, they would see themselves as a distinct body of believers (a small-church), not just a Sunday school class.

The Concept

In biblical terms, a 'church' is not a building. It is a body of born-again Christians, whether small or large.

The large church at Fair Oaks has many advantages. It provides good facilities, strong children's and youth programs, good music, an aggressive missions program, specialized ministry staff, and many people contacts.

But at Fair Oaks, there are also smaller units of believers within the larger church body. These small churches have their own distinct advantages. They provide levels of intimacy that are not equalled on a 'large' church level. They allow individuals to quickly recognize and meet the needs of others. They also provide opportunities for personal growth and ministry in a small-group setting.

A small church is a sharing/caring/learning group within a larger church body where people can quickly get involved and make new friendships. It has plans and programs to help people grow spiritually so that they can be more Christlike in character and action. It provides a means for members to identify and use their spiritual gifts so that they can utilize the talents God has given them. It develops ministries to address and meet the needs of others to encourage giving and provide opportunities for sharing. It emphasizes the need for outreach and the importance of Christians sharing their faith with others.

Each small church is headed by a pastor-teacher. The job of these leaders is to shepherd their flocks. They teach sound biblical doctrine that leads to personal application of scripture. They motivate and direct other class leaders in their ministries, and encourage and equip others for service within the body. They are personally involved with their flock so that they can recognize and address their needs. And, although they may delegate some of these responsibilities, they are accountable to Fair Oaks through the board of elders or staff for the direction and implementation of their small-church ministry.

Purpose and Goal

The purpose of a small church is assist members to be successful in gaining unity of faith, knowledge of the Son of God, spiritual maturity, and Christlike attitudes and actions (Ephesians 4:13). The goal is for individuals in the small church to reflect the following in their lives:

- a. An ongoing vital relationship with Jesus Christ ("Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Colossians 1:10).
- b. The recognition and use of their spiritual gift in a church-related ministry ("And since each of us have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly." Romans 12:6).
- c. Outreach to others through evangelism, discipleship and caring ministries ("Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Matthew 5:16).

Small churches need to develop a variety of activities and programs to achieve these goals. These programs may include the Sunday morning class, periodic socials and other fellowship-oriented activities, weekly small-group Bible studies or care-units, and other caring, sharing, and teaching ministries. The following should be some objectives of these programs:

- a. To reach prospective class members ("Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you." Matthew 28:19,20).
- b. To produce an atmosphere of warmth and acceptance ("Let love of the brethren continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers." Hebrews 13:2,3).
- c. To teach sound biblical doctrine ("But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine." Titus 1:16).
- d. To promote daily application of scripture ("And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ." Colossians 1:28).
- e. To equip people for ministry within the church ("And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ." Ephesians 4:11,12).
- f. To encourage members to share their faith with others ("But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith," 1 Timothy 1:5).

Small churches should work together with other groups and church leaders in implementing programs to achieve these goals and in providing the necessary training.

PHILOSOPHY OF SMALL CHURCHES

The following diagram represents one way that the ministries of a small church can flow together to achieve its goals.

SUNDAY AM CLASS:

Hospitality

This is often the **INITIAL CONTACT** with people. The first goal is to welcome them so they'll feel at home and comfortable.

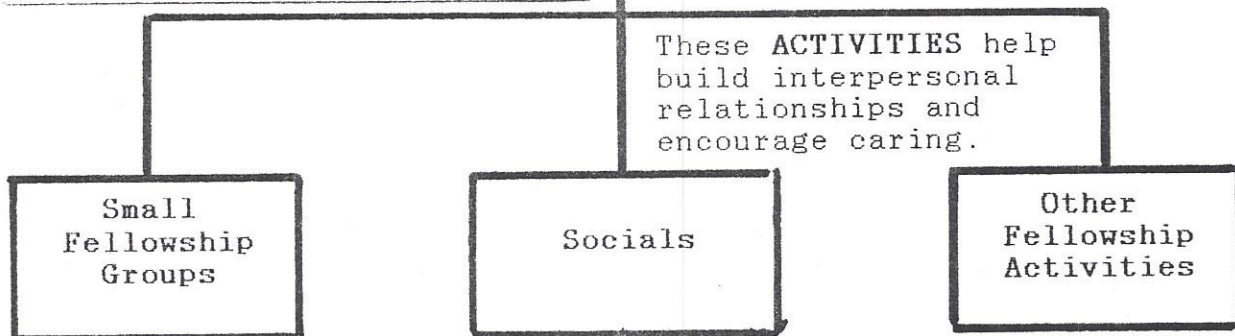
Worship

The second goal is to focus people's attention on God and His word.

Teaching

The third goal is to promote personal application of God's word and to motivate people to study it on their own.

PERIODIC FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES:

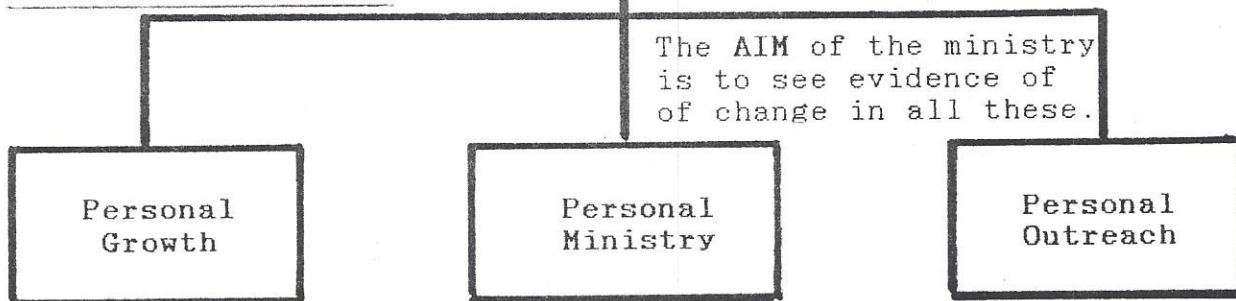


WEEKLY "GROWTH" GROUPS:

Care Units
and
Small Group
Studies

This is the **HEART** of the ministry. It is where much personal growth occurs.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:



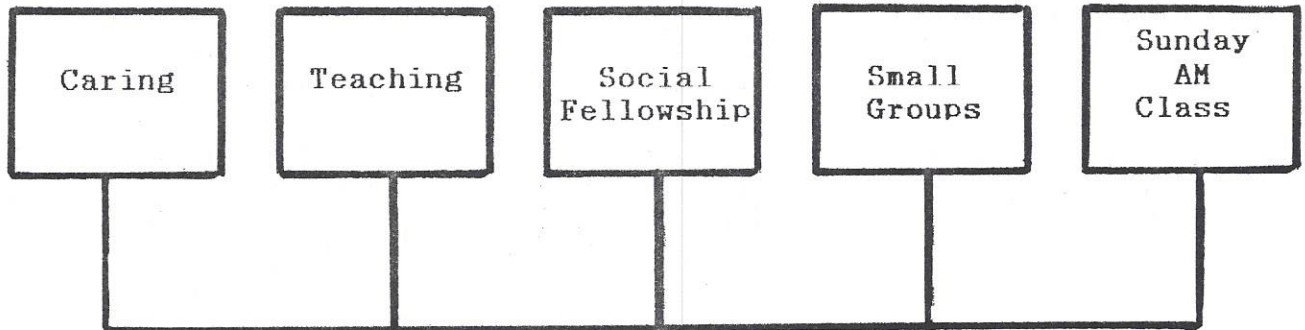
Other Notes:

1. The pastor/teacher sets the direction of the ministry.
2. The class coordinator directs the various ministries.
3. The newsletter acts as a communication link that ties
4. Followup helps people move from one level to another.

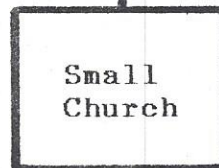
PHILOSOPHY OF SMALL CHURCHES

This diagram shows how a small church also serves as a means to facilitate, coordinate, or funnel ministries so that the goals of the small church can be attained.

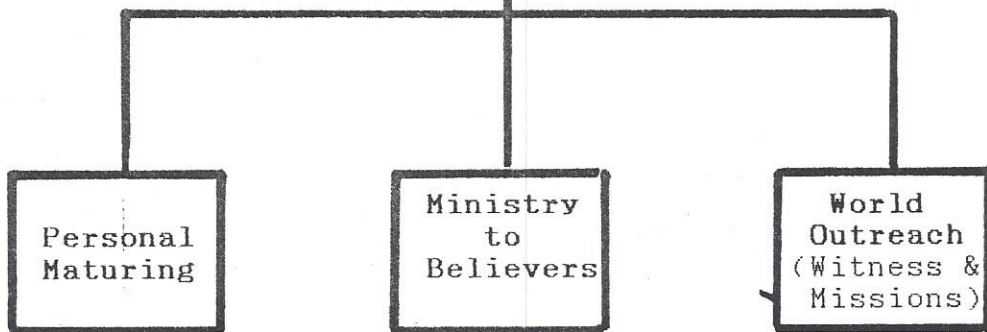
INPUT REQUIREMENTS:



CHANNEL:



OUTPUT RESULTS:



The Means

There are various components to the means by which the purpose and goals of a small church can be achieved. The following are some of them:

1. Ownership of Goals
Each small church needs to accept the basic philosophy, purpose, and goals outlined previously. Using these as a basis, they should then develop a list of specific goals relevant to their own group.
2. Identification of Needs
Each small church must understand the specific needs of their particular group. They should then determine what activities or ministries are required to meet these needs.
3. Tapping Resources
The main resources for ministry within a small church are the members of that group. Therefore, as a small church plans for ministry, it needs to develop a system for determining each member's specific gifts, abilities, and desires. Each member should then be encouraged to become involved either in a small church or large church ministry.
4. Training Leaders
All leaders within a small church should seek to develop and improve their skills by taking advantage of training offered by the large church. Each small church should also have its own program for developing leaders. They can do this by offering a variety of areas for service or leadership, delegating responsibility in these areas, and helping leaders grow in their skills as they assume this responsibility.
5. Communication
Leaders within a small church need to communicate their philosophy, purpose, goals, and plans with the members of their group. They should also provide a means for members to evaluate and respond to their leadership.
6. Monitoring and Evaluation
All small church ministries need to be accountable to the the Board of Elders through the Small Church Leadership Council. This will help ensure that the ministry of each small church is consistent with the philosophy outlined above. It also provides a means for small churches to learn from each other as they develop their plans for ministry.

Measures

All small churches need to periodically evaluate how successful they are in achieving the goals and purpose of their group. The following are some measures that can be used to evaluate their progress.

1. Objective Measures:

The following are some things that can be measured quantitatively or in some other objective way:

- a. What is the average attendance on Sunday mornings? What portion of these are regular attenders (those who come more than twice a month)? Is the average attendance increasing or decreasing? How does the change in this average compare with what is happening in the rest of the adult small churches?
- b. How many people are involved in Bible studies? How many of them attend Sunday evening services? How many of them are involved in a Christian ministry? How many of them are members of the large church?
- c. How many visitors does the class receive on a monthly basis? How many of these become regular attenders? What portion of these are new believers? How many of these later become members of the church or get involved in other ministries in the church?
- d. How frequently does the class plan outside social activities? What is the average attendance at these events?
- e. How many people from the small church attend large church functions such as business meetings, prayer services, or socials?
- f. During Sunday morning class, how much time is spent on the various activities such as fellowship, prayer, and Bible study? At what time do most people arrive?

2. Subjective Measures:

The following are some things that leaders may be able to evaluate through observation:

- a. Do members of the group identify and share areas where they need to grow spiritually? Do they show they want to learn what God's word has to say about their lives? Do they express specific ways they can apply God's word to their lives?
- b. Do members of the group show a tolerance for differences of opinion about the meaning of God's word and how it is to be applied to the lives of believers? Do they evidence open-mindedness when confronted with views that differ from their own? Are they willing to expose their own personal views to what others have to say about

God's word?

- c. Do the members of the group have a burden for the unsaved? Do they share a desire to share their faith with specific individuals they encounter on a regular basis? Are they actively sharing their faith with others?
- d. Are the leaders of the group spending time getting to know the members of the group on a personal basis? Do they readily identify specific spiritual and personal needs among their members? Are they designing small church ministries to meet these needs?
- e. Do students readily share the spiritual struggles in their lives, or do they just share their knowledge of the scripture?
- f. Do students regularly pray for the needs of others or for unsaved family and friends?
- h. Do students express a desire to get to know others within the body, or do they prefer being by themselves?
- i. Does the majority of the class do some sharing during class time, or does the same few share?
- j. Are students concerned about what that Bible has to say about an issue, or are they more interested in voicing their own opinion?
- k. Do leaders feel comfortable sharing their own struggles and weaknesses with those to whom they minister?
- l. Are members of the group friendly towards outsiders or new people? Do they enthusiastically welcome these people and accept them into the group?

Conclusion

In order to make the small church concept work, leaders need to be committed to the goals and purpose outlined above. They also need to exemplify by their attitudes, actions, and words, the type of person they are trying to help others become.

A commitment to the small church concept may include the following:

As a leader, I can do the following to help our group achieve these goals:

- a. When teaching, I teach for growth, not just for knowledge. To do this, it is essential to know in what areas my people are struggling and what God has to say about these struggles.
- b. I need to take the responsibility to equip the members of our small church for service within the body. This means knowing enough about the individuals within the group to recognize in what areas they are gifted. It also means encouraging them to serve, finding ways to train them if needed, and providing opportunities for service where appropriate.
- c. I can be an example in our small church on how to be a witness to others by sharing successes and failures so that others can learn from my experience. This encourages others to share their struggles in this area. It also encourages individuals to take advantage of opportunities they have to share their faith.

This philosophy of the small church is made available to assist the growth of these groups at Fair Oaks Baptist Church. It is understood that small groups are always changing and that any philosophy may change accordingly with new approaches.