



Connecting New Comers

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How to Use This Resource

We believe in the ministry of small groups and we want everyone to experience them—but it can be difficult to connect newcomers. This resource will train you on becoming a welcoming church and how to connect newcomers to your small groups. Be sure to check out the Retreat Plan at the end to learn how to use this resource at your next leader training event.

Devotionals

These two devotionals will help remind you of the importance of connecting newcomers to your church and small-group ministry.

Assessments

"Welcome Check Up" will help you assess how welcoming your church is. Then use "How Welcoming Is Your Group?"

Welcome People to Your Church

Learn how to become a more welcoming church that regularly sees newcomers. "Willing to Commit," our interview with Reggie McNeal, is an especially good read.

Welcome People to Your Groups

Once you have newcomers at your church, it's an entirely different thing to connect them into small groups. Learn how to funnel people into your groups and successfully sign them up. Plus, learn how to make your groups welcoming to guests.

Need more material or training on another small-group ministry topic?
See our website at www.SmallGroups.com.

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No Charter for Comfort

Jesus commissioned the church to shake up the world.

By James D. Berkley

Read Philippians 2:3–4.

Is there anything simpler or more natural than members of a church looking out for their own interests? We like to park conveniently. We want our pew available each week. We expect our kind of music to be sung—not that other ungodly stuff! We like things our way, to our convenience and taste.

How easy it is to make church nice and comfortable for us! And how wrong!

Why? Because church isn't meant to be comfortable. No pioneering, radical, countercultural organization has the leisure to be comfortable. A country club can be comfortable. A golfing foursome can be comfortable. A family gathering can be comfortable. But a church—that culture-shaking, eternity-changing band Jesus commissioned to turn the world upside down—doesn't have the charter to be comfortable. It's commissioned as activist for the kingdom of God!

My pleasure, my ease, my way are really not important. God's glory, God's tasks, others' benefit—that's the reason for the church. The apostle Paul makes clear that Christians must treat one another as more important than themselves. They are to be "put out" by the interests of others. The church is not my personal vending machine. Instead it is a lifesaving station to reach out to those in peril needing to be made safe.

How does that happen? When leaders decide their responsibility is to follow seriously the One who came to seek and save the lost.

That, however, gets expensive, when the church has to add parking and pews and programs for those not yet in the church. That becomes difficult when the comfortable become discomfited by change. That becomes messy when the sacred mixes with the profane. Granted.

But Jesus emptied himself, humbled himself, and died on a cross for us—and that is to be our mindset (Philippians 2:5–11). As leaders we must proclaim to the comfortable the message of Christ. And then refocus our thinking and strategy on the outsider, so that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

—JAMES D. BERKLEY; copyright 2000 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Many outsiders are people who attend only sporadically. How does your church intentionally reach out to people on the fringe?
2. Respond to this statement: The church should focus first on growing people deeper in the faith; then outreach will be a natural extension of their spiritual life.
3. What approach does your church use for helping newcomers become insiders?

From Outsiders to Insiders

The basis is our common bond in Christ.

By Steven D. Matthewson

Read Romans 12:9–10.

Forming a clique seems like a strange strategy for connecting newcomers to the church, but it's precisely what the apostle Paul prescribes. In his culture, the expression "brotherly love" referred to the affection exchanged between persons belonging to an "in-group"—what we would call "a clique." In fact, in the original Greek language in which he wrote, Paul put the expression "in brotherly love" at the beginning of the sentence to give it emphasis.

Cliques get bad press because they often exclude people. Christian writer Philip Yancey admits: "Given a choice, I tend to hang out with folks like me: people who have college degrees, drink only Starbucks dark roast coffee, listen to classical music, and buy their cars based on EPA gas mileage ratings." But the "in-group" or clique that Paul describes is supposed to be inclusive of those whose common bond is Christ (Romans 12:5), not income, not hobbies, and not musical tastes.

But how do you create a clique that includes people?

The second part of verse 10 provides the answer: "Honor one another above yourselves." Sometimes, competition hurts relationships. But here's one place where you have the Bible's permission to try to outdo other Christians. The idea is to put their needs ahead of yours.

Applied to newcomers, this means taking the initiative to introduce yourself to them, to ask how you can pray for them, to invite them into your home, to include them in your next outing to the lake. Bring them into the clique of Christ by turning them from being outsiders into being insiders.

—STEVEN D. MATHEWSON; copyright 2000 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. What many newcomers want are friends and a sense of belonging. What does your church provide to make that happen?
2. How does a church move from simply being friendly to outsiders to connecting them into the life of the church?

3. Some churches employ a “three-minute rule”—regular attenders and members spend the first three minutes after a worship service visiting with someone they don’t know. Would this work in your setting? Why or why not?
4. What are you personally doing to help newcomers feel welcome and find a place of belonging?

Welcome Check Up

How does your church measure up?

By Stephen C. Butler

Every church wants to welcome and nurture new people. Here are 5 categories to help you assess how your church is doing:

1. Visibility. Newcomers to our community can easily find out about our church through our website, community listings, online ads, brochures, and more. Our building is easy to find. If yours is not, make sure visible signs clearly point the way. We have a prominent sign listing our church name and times of services, and the information is up to date.

2. First Impressions. People measure us by what they see: Our grounds are well maintained. We have adequate parking, and our lot does not have major problems. Our building is accessible to those with physical impairments. Friendly members greet people at each major entrance. Bulletin boards or other displays inside the church are attractive and up to date. Childcare is available. Room numbers and directions are clearly visible. We offer coffee, juice, or other refreshments for people to enjoy.

3. Worship Experience. The bulletin is easy to read. It lists the church’s name, address, phone number, and web address. The words to hymns or songs, whether printed or displayed, are easy to read. Directions are given for all portions of the service in which people participate, such as prayers and responsive readings. During the service, traditions or approaches that might be unfamiliar to people, such as the way Communion is handled, are explained. Children are welcomed through special music or children’s sermons, or are provided with a children’s service.

4. Reinforcement. Visitors need reminders that someone cares about them. The newcomers may be long-time members of the community, but when they attend a church worship service, they need to be reassured their attendance was noticed and appreciated. Each visitor is provided a welcome gift when they attend, and someone follows up with them as soon as possible through a letter, call, or other form of communication.

5. Nurture. We offer small groups that are appropriate for newer Christians, whether they're mixed maturity groups, special study groups, or discipleship classes. We also offer several short-term groups or activities that allow an easy entry point for newcomers. (When small groups have met together for more than 12 weeks, newcomers may find it more difficult to break in to the established relationships.) If we offer membership classes, we invite every non-member who has recently attended the church to attend. If we don't offer membership classes, we offer classes or groups for newcomers to learn more about our church.

—STEPHEN C. BUTLER; copyright 2000 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Which of the above areas are you strong in? Where do you need improvement?
2. On a scale from 1 to 10 (high), how much do you truly value bringing new people into your church family? How does what you say you value correspond to reality?
3. What one change would you like to see your church make in order to welcome people better?

How Welcoming Is Your Group?

10 questions to rate your group

By the editors of SmallGroups.com

1. How often do you pray for your group members and the group as a whole?

- I pray for our group every day
- I pray sporadically for our group
- I don't pray for our group outside of our regular meetings

It's important to pray for your group and your group members—including any prospective group members you may have. Ask that you will experience the Spirit's leading in your group and that God will bond you together.

2. Are you able to consistently greet your group members as they come through the door each week?

- Yes, someone greets all of our guests each week as soon as they come through the door.
- There might be 1 or 2 people each week who enter without receiving a greeting.
- There are several people who come through the door and find a seat each week without a specific greeting.

Greeting people makes them feel welcome and valued. Plus, if this is a regular practice for you, you'll easily be able to greet newcomers when they arrive, putting them at ease.

3. Do your group meetings include a time when food and beverages are served?

- Yes
- No

Food has a way of making people feel more comfortable. Even if it's a simple snack like popcorn and punch, everyone will feel more at ease with something to do with their hands. Plus, it's amazing how much bonding happens over food.

4. Do your group members share the common value of welcoming newcomers to the group?

- Yes
- No

If your group members don't share this value, it will be difficult to be a very welcoming group. Help your group members understand the importance of welcoming new people. Ask them to recall the first time they visited a small group.

5. How often do you and your group members invite guests to visit your group?

- We invite guests nearly every meeting.
- We invite guests a few times a month.
- We invite guests a few times a year.
- We rarely invite guests.

Even if your group members say they value adding new members to your group, they don't really hold this value if they never invite anyone. Model this to your group by inviting people on a regular basis.

6. When guests visit your group, do you introduce them in a way that is warm but does not place too much focus on them?

- Yes
- No

Introduce your guests with their names and some basic information that will help break the ice and start natural conversations, but don't focus too long on them in a way that singles them out.

7. Do you intentionally connect guests with group members?

- Yes
- No

Connecting newcomers with group members can really help them feel part of the conversation and take away the intimidating task of striking up conversation. If guests have children, consider connecting them with other parents. If they work, consider connecting them with someone in a similar career. Use the details you know about your guests to connect them to group members and start natural conversations.

8. When guests visit your group, do you explain things that may be confusing (such as inside jokes, theological terms, or conversations that have continued from previous meetings)?

- Yes, we always explain things.
- Yes, we occasionally explain things.
- No, we never explain things.

There's no need to constantly explain every aspect of your meeting. This can actually make guests feel uncomfortable with too much focus on them. It is a good idea, however, to explain things that need some context. To do this in a less apparent way, explain things to the guest in a quiet side conversation or ask the person sitting next to the guest to do this.

9. Do you thank guests for visiting and give them your contact information before they leave the meeting?

- Yes
- No

Rather than ask guests for all of their information, give out your contact information. This puts the ball in their court and allows them to contact you if they want to return to the group. It gives them the opportunity to think about the group and make a decision about joining once they've left the meeting.

10. Do you follow up with guests in appropriate ways such as a note thanking them for visiting or saying hello after the weekend worship service?

- Yes
- No

There's a balance between making guests feel valued and making them feel like they have to join your group. Be warm but not overbearing. Don't ask them if they'll be returning or if they'd like to join. Instead, thank them for visiting and let them know you'd love to see them again.

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Discuss

1. In what ways can your group improve to be more welcoming?
2. What is one thing you as the leader can do to make your group more welcoming?
3. What do you need to communicate to your group members to help make your group more welcoming?

Willing to Commit

How to tap into the needs of newcomers

Interview with Reggie McNeal

How do leaders connect visitors into the life of the church? In this interview, Reggie McNeal, director of the leadership development team for the South Carolina Baptist Convention, says the place to begin is with your assumptions.

In an era in which institutional commitment and loyalty seem thin, how does a church motivate people to connect deeper into its body life?

Reggie McNeal: It's ludicrous to say people aren't willing to make commitments. The trick is tapping into their motivations. However, people are no longer willing to the old paradigm of church membership— "Come help us build a great church."

People are desperate for some kind of spiritual experience and encounter and are vitally intrigued by folks willing to commit to them. In the past, commitment was defined as getting people to commit to you as a church—how can we get these people committed to us or even church members committed to show up. But now commitment is defined by the people: "We want a church that will commit to us."

That sounds pretty consumer-driven. Why shouldn't people commit to our church?

A lot of what has passed for Christianity in our culture has been "Churchianity." I'm not the first to say that. But now the church culture has collapsed. Some people, though, don't know that yet. Many still think church is one of the options of how folks spend their time. It's not. Church is not on the radar of most nonchurched people. Even if you build the perfect church, nonchurched people are not going to come.

So how does a church commit to people and thus connect them into the church?

Churches committed to people have a passion for people because its leaders have a passion for Jesus. That sounds simple, but it's the first piece. The second piece is that passion has to get translated into action.

This may be somewhat a stereotype, but if you join most churches you get a packet of envelopes, a calendar, a directory—what I call "club-member stuff." The assumption is these people have come to the church to make it a better church.

But now let's reverse that: A person joins the church and instead of a packet of information about what the church has to offer, she meets with someone who says, "What would you like to see happen in your life over the next 12 months in a spiritual way?" Everyone has an

aspiration like that.

Do you see the difference? This approach says to newcomers: “We’re not trying to fit you into our culture here, our club. We are here for you.” It convinces people that the church is vitally interested in their personal spiritual growth.

Let’s assume our church is passionate about serving the spiritual needs of newcomers. What’s the next step?

Every church ought to know what folks want to learn spiritually at church. How do you find that out? Ask them what they’d like to see happen in their lives, spiritually. You may discover what God’s really up to! You don’t start your planning with calendars and budgets; you start with people..

But any shift in the way your church serves newcomers requires a sort of conversion in the church leadership, how the group views the mission of the church.

What’s a specific example of how a church could change its approach?

Shift the focus of your membership process, change the focus of your classes. Turn the entire process into a coaching session to help newcomers identify their learning goals. The wrong question is “How do we get our church to grow?” To tap into what God is doing, figure out ways to get out of the church. Connect with people who have a heart hunger for God and then provide them with what they need to develop into followers of Christ. Don’t begin with what you have to offer; start with what people want to learn.

—REGGIE MCNEAL is author of several books including *The Present Future* and *Missional Renaissance*; copyright 2000 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How do you feel about “starting with what people want to learn”?
2. In Philippians 2:7 it says that Jesus took the “very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” How does his model form the biblical basis for meeting the needs of those seeking God?
3. What process do you currently use to connect people into the church? How can you improve that process?

Culture of Hospitality

Four ways to welcome visitors

By Merle Mees

For a church to be intentional about welcoming visitors, people have to be equipped and involved at all levels. Here's what one congregation does:

1. Encourage a hospitality mindset. About four times a year I give a "manners talk" to the congregation. I encourage them to invite visitors to sit with them, introduce them to others, offer directions, and ask them to lunch. I remind the church what it's like to visit a church for the first time, and I give examples of how to meet people without embarrassing them.

2. Create an atmosphere of easy friendliness. We tried a hospitality room where we invited guests to come and meet the staff following the service. It didn't work, because the room was hard to find and visitors were reluctant to walk into the "showroom" to be pounced upon by the clergy. Now staff members mingle with worshipers before and after the services. Ushers and greeters don't wear nametags because we want guests to feel that people aren't being nice just because it's part of their official duties; rather, it's part of our culture.

We have a "Welcome New Members" board in the lobby. For each person, there is a picture and a brief bio: where they are from, how long they've attended the church, their family, hobbies, and so on.

3. Write a "welcome script." We carefully compose what is said during the welcoming portion of our worship service. For example: "Welcome to this time of worship. To the guests among us, we know there are a number of good churches you could have driven to, and we are honored you came here. You'll find the order of worship on the front of the worship folder and the words to our songs on the inside. If you like to write things you don't want to forget, you'll find a listening guide on the back of the worship folder. And if you'd like some information about the church or answers to some of your spiritual questions, simply fill out the welcome form and drop it in the offering plate when it comes your way. I'm glad we're here together."

4. Follow up immediately. We have a Rapid Response Team that delivers to a visitor's door a personal note and some cookies immediately following the morning worship. We try to drop this off before they arrive home.

Along with the usual letter from the pastor, we enclose a First Impression Survey on a postage-paid, self-addressed card. The card states, "Western Hills wants to serve you better, so would you please give us your opinion? What did you notice first? What did you like best? What did you like least? Thanks for your input!"

—MERLE MEES; copyright 2000 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. What are examples of the difference between welcoming visitors and pouncing on them?
2. What do you think is the single most important factor that makes a visitor come back?
3. What is one step your church could take to improve your follow-up process?

Who Is Our Target?

Three questions to match your church strengths with the needs of visitors

By Wayne Schmidt

Here is a simple activity to improve the process for connecting newcomers into the life of your church. Simply spend the first 10 minutes writing your answers to the three questions, and then spend the next 10 to 15 minutes discussing them with the team.

1. What does our church offer newcomers?

First, list at least three key strengths of your church. For example, you may write, "Our church provides effective, fun-filled children's programs." Try not to write general items such as "Our church is friendly." Be specific.

Second, list how some of the strengths you identified could be communicated to visitors. For example, you may write, "We can use letters and e-mail announcements to visitors about our children's programs."

Third, based on your strengths, what type of newcomers may likely connect with your church? For example, if your strength is a well-organized children's program, your church may connect best with young adults with children. If your strength is traditional worship, you may connect with a specific cluster of young and older adults who value historic forms of worship.

2. Who is our audience?

First, focus on the spiritual condition of the person with whom you believe the church needs to connect. Is it the "shuffling saint" coming from another congregation? A pre-Christian with little church background? A de-churched person disillusioned by past church experience?

Second, put yourself in his or her shoes. The greater the difference between that person and those in your church, the more effort it will require in order to view your church from his or her perspective. (Another way to do this is to interview people similar to those God is calling you to reach.) How will he or she fit in with the social culture of your church? Is she a white-collar person and your church more blue-collar? Is this person younger and is the average age in your church more than 50?

3. What is our process for drawing them in?

Draw a simple flow-chart for how you think newcomers connect into the church. For example, in our church, reaching primarily de-churched people, we follow up with a visitor only if they sign our Friendship Folder, which is passed in every service. "Signing in" is the way people step beyond anonymity at our church, so our follow-up process is based on the times they sign in. Do you track guests in a way that provides anonymity but also the opportunity to step forward? What are appropriate ways for you to seek to make a connection with them, and when?

—WAYNE SCHMIDT; copyright 2000 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Do we generally agree on our church's strengths? Why or why not?
2. Do we generally agree on who is likely to connect with our church? Should churches even think about newcomers in this way?
3. How do our flow charts vary? How can we monitor the connecting process of newcomers more closely?

From Anonymity to Intimacy

How to make the intimacy of small groups less threatening to those looking for anonymity

By Len Woods

It's a universal dilemma. You have far more people attending Sunday worship services than you have participating in small groups. Why? Is it a flawed ministry structure? Is it a failure of leadership? Most likely, it's just another reminder of the Fall. Remember Genesis 3? The first thing Adam and Eve did after they rejected God's rule was to dive into the nearest clump of bushes! They hid from God and from each other. Self-absorbed, afraid, and filled with shame, that famous first couple scrambled to cover up. And we inherited those same traits. How tragic! God designed our souls for rich intimacy, yet we cling desperately and stubbornly to anonymity.

This is the phenomenon at work in your church and mine. Add the sobering reality that all of us have experienced pain and disappointment in relationships, and it's no wonder people are leery of more intimate relational settings. Let's face it: if anonymity is a person's goal, big groups are less threatening than small groups. There is safety and security in numbers. Conversations before and after Sunday morning services, if they happen at all, tend to be short and superficial. In such large group settings, I can put on a front and schmooze or I can blend discreetly into the woodwork. Either way, as long I don't let anyone get too close, I can keep people from knowing what a mess my life is. By maintaining a safe distance, I can avoid the pain of failed relationships.

But this common approach is a double-edged sword. Steering clear of intimacy might spare me from possible rejection, but it also assures me a lonely existence. Distant acquaintances can never satisfy the deep longings of the human soul for meaningful relationship.

How can we help people overcome the natural aversion they feel about leaving the comfort zone of large group anonymity and taking the risk of small-group intimacy? Here are some practical suggestions:

Make prayer a priority. This sounds trite, but remember, we're in a spiritual battle. Jesus wants his followers unified and living in close-knit community where we can strengthen each other with grace and truth. At the same time, the enemy wants us living as isolated individuals, where we will be weak and vulnerable, so that he can pick us off one by one. We need to pray fervently and continuously for those frightened and confused souls who are unwittingly playing into the hands of the devil by resisting life in the body of Christ. Ask

God to give them insight into their need and to help them find the courage they need to take the scary, big step into true community.

Make "safety" a leading value. If your small groups aren't widely known as safe places where privacy is protected, then you'll have a hard time getting skittish individuals to sign on. Let it be known that gossip absolutely is not tolerated. Make it a clear rule that those who refuse to keep confidences are disqualified from group involvement. Communicate further that small groups are *not* gatherings of people who "have it all together" (an intimidating prospect), but rather gatherings of broken and messed up people who accept one another as they try to help each other understand and experience the love of Christ (an inviting prospect).

Make friendship a goal. The same guy who is leery of meeting with a group of strangers for small-group Bible study probably *will* be comfortable eating pizza and watching Monday Night Football with those same men. So start where people are. Focus on building relationships.

We know from experience that friendships exert a natural pull. In the church we can (and should) use this positive friendship pressure to overcome the natural reluctance so many feel regarding small group involvement. I was at a small group catfish fry at the lake this past weekend. Among the folks in attendance was an unchurched couple. My guess is that this couple will eventually be plugged into our church community. Why? Because they got to see firsthand that we are normal, real people, and more importantly, they really seemed to enjoy being with us. A simple social gathering seemed to go a long way in enlarging this couple's comfort zone.

Make information available. Many people have no clue about what takes place in a small group, or worse, they have misconceptions—assuming the experience is the spiritual equivalent of what happens when space aliens take some poor, unsuspecting soul aboard their UFO to poke, prod, and probe! In light of this, perhaps during your Sunday morning services, you could show periodic 60 second "infomercials" of what being in a small group entails. Use testimonies and success stories. Have former "resisters" share briefly how they moved from small group skeptics to small group believers.

Keep an updated list of groups, leaders, and topics in your church foyer (you might even consider inserting this into the bulletin once a month). Doing so takes away many of the excuses people have for not participating. "Well I'll be! Look here, Martha. There's a group that meets every Tuesday night *right around the corner from us*—and they even have childcare!"

Make inviting a habit. Research shows that a large number of people never go to church simply because their church-going neighbors never ask. Similarly, a good percentage of people don't participate in small groups because they've never received a warm invitation from a friendly group leader or member. Not everyone will accept. And some people will never choose to be part of a small group. Others will resist your first 10 invitations. But who knows what might happen if you ask an eleventh time? Keep including these people in your life and inviting them to join you in your small group.

—LEN WOODS; copyright 2002 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How do you currently talk about small groups in your church? Is the value of safety clear? Why or why not?
2. How often do you pray for the unconnected people in your church? How can you and your coaches and group leaders pray more regularly for these people?
3. In what ways might you leverage current relationships to move people into small groups? For instance, what relationship-building events does your church already host?

How to Funnel People into Your Groups

Move people from large group settings into small groups.

By Dan Lentz

I refer to the process by which people get into small groups as "the funnel." A funnel is a device which has a wide opening at one end and a small opening at the other end. Funnels help get things into small, hard-to-access openings.

The idea here is that small groups form and grow as people are drawn to do life together out of larger groups of people. How people get from the larger group to the smaller group is the funnel used to bring people into community. I have personally experienced the use of three different funnels in church small-group ministries. While I have developed some biases about which funnel works best, I will share some observations along with some ups and downs I have experienced with each strategy. The bottom line is that regardless of which funnel you use, the long-term results of your small-group ministry will depend on the core values instilled as people travel through the funnel into small-group communities.

Silo Funnel

Every church has "small groups" whether they try to or not. Every church has relational clusters that exist. Those clusters may exist in small Sunday school classes or music choirs or even what some people might call cliques. One way to form small groups where spiritual development is a core value is to utilize the relationships that are already there, the "groups" that already exist. All you really have to do is add some intentionality to it—train a

leader, recommend a meeting schedule, provide an agenda, and have a church leader draw a circle around them and call them a group. Obviously, healthy disciple-making groups do not always self-initiate, so the silo funnel can help it happen. Many times a special catalytic event or campaign is used to help launch new groups to help people embrace the new values of group life, however, new groups can be established whenever existing relational connections can be identified, a leader and host can be established, and some basic training is done.

My observation has been that small groups that are formed through the Silo Funnel are very strong and sustainable for long periods of time. These groups also have great discipleship potential initially as existing relationships flourish from the added injection of intentional Bible study, consistent purposeful fellowship, service, and accountability. When these groups form and are continually ingrained with strong values of outreach, service, and multiplication, they can become consistent disciple-making communities. My experience, however, has been that these groups easily drift toward non-reproducibility and, in the worst cases, become unproductive holding tanks. Many times what happens is good friends form a small group to do Bible study and service, the community is rich, and the group instinctively protects the safety of the environment by either subtly discouraging new members from joining or turning down new opportunities for mission that might disrupt the group life. The result is that new people and ideas come and go, but the inner circle remains strong and resistant to change.

My experience has been that the Silo Funnel can establish several stable groups, but many pre-existing relational clusters will never embrace the change in group dynamics and thus only a relatively small percentage of the whole church congregation becomes connected to an intentional small group focused on spiritual development. The groups that remain tend to have intrinsically low motivation for outreach and multiplication over time.

Fishing Pond Funnel

This strategy involves raising up and training small-group leaders. These leaders then "fish" for their own group members in different "ponds" of people already connected to the church. The ponds are near the large end of the funnel and are generally made up of people who have been drawn to the church through other activities like worship services. These ponds may include first time worship service visitors, new members, singles, sports ministries, or the infamous "those not in a group" list. Building and growing groups revolves around personal invitation with some help from church leadership to direct leaders toward the ponds.

The Fishing Pond Funnel works best in church situations where new people are consistently drawn to large group events like worship services and where there is a mechanism to continually raise up new leaders. In many cases, the bigger the pond, the easier it is to find

both new leaders and potential group members. This funnel can lead many into groups and has the potential to capture new people in groups on an ongoing basis. The effectiveness of this funnel is really dependent on new leader development, ongoing leadership support, and the curriculum or "recipe" used to help the group through the phases of community development because leaders and group members don't often have prior relational connections.

While the potential to connect a larger percentage of the congregation is increased with the Fishing Pond Funnel, I have found these groups tend to be less sustainable because they don't typically form around pre-existing relationships or geography. Many times individual ministries of the church (men's, women's, greeters, music, youth, etc.) develop their own way to funnel people into groups which can lead to confusion of values and even competition. Also, leadership development and leader coaching is critically important because many group leaders have had few previous small-group experiences. Without leader support, many groups tend to end prematurely, become less purposeful, or eventually become holding tanks rather than disciple-producers.

My experience is that when using the Fishing Pond Funnel, the more leadership support and leader coaching there is and the more effective group and leader multiplication tends to be, the higher the percentage of the congregation can be involved in small groups.

Farm-System Funnel

The first two strategies involve some centralized feeder system where the larger church becomes the main feeder into the small groups. In the Farm-System Funnel groups develop their own outreach prospects. Each group's spiritual cultivation, seed sowing, and sometimes even harvest is mostly decentralized from the larger congregation. The Farm-System Funnel focuses on establishing relationships and inviting people to their group from their sphere of influence, whether family, school, neighborhood, or workplace.

What seems to make this strategy work is that the focus is on developing relationships with those in your "neighborhoods" prior to inviting them to your group. This funnel will reach people the large group gathering might never reach. However, the Farm-System Funnel requires a different paradigm that allows individuals in the group to see outreach and service as their job and not the church's job. Because of that difficult paradigm shift, the Farm-System Funnel is less effective in church situations where established members have their whole relational network within the church congregation itself. Establishing relationships with unchurched people is time-intensive, and a heavy church activity calendar can actually be a barrier to establishing these relationships. Strong ongoing leadership support is also vitally important in this funnel.

My experience is that if the value of small-group outreach beyond the walls of the congregation really takes hold, there will actually be significantly more people in small groups than there are in worship services. In fact, I have found that getting new small-group members to attend large group worship services in a decentralized paradigm sometimes becomes as much of a challenge as getting large group worship service attenders to connect to small groups in a centralized paradigm.

Choosing a Funnel

As you evaluate which funnel to use in your church, the reality is that you're likely going to have some of all three strategies (and more) going on in your church simultaneously. Depending on the size of your small-group ministry, it may be strategic to have all three funnels in use.

When establishing or transitioning a small-group ministry, however, my experience has shown me that you need to have a clear vision. Make sure you and your leadership are as clear as possible on which funnel you are using to grow and reproduce your groups. Then teach and demonstrate those values from the top down in your leadership structure. Also, select your funnel in the beginning with the end in mind. If you start small groups congregation-wide with the Silo Funnel approach and then a year later want your groups to start reaching out to the neighborhoods where they meet, this will become a hard sell for most of your groups. Whatever funnel you choose, promote and train your leaders to have a long-term vision and strategy for keeping groups healthy and growing. Otherwise, there will be the potential for groups to become holding tanks rather than disciple-making vehicles.

The more restricted the large end of your funnel is, the more difficult it is to maintain group health and group growth over the long haul. A funnel with a narrow opening (Silo Funnel) can produce an incredible small group initially, but the longer-term prospect of keeping this group embracing mission and multiplication can be a more difficult process from my experience. On the other hand, groups that are formed from the Farm-System Funnel tend to be less cohesive and stable initially but, with good relational leadership, come to function as dynamic Christian communities and tend to have values of outreach and multiplication more ingrained in their DNA.

Regardless of which funnel you're using, the most important thing is that what comes out of your funnel are small groups that have core values that can be sustained over the long haul. From my experience, the best way to do that is to select a funnel that has the widest opening! Leaving our funnel open to those outside the walls of the defined church, including our neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and others is critical to our own mission and growth as Christ-followers.

—DAN LENTZ; copyright 2005 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Which funnel does your church currently use? How well is it working?
2. Which funnel best fits your church values and structures? Are you using the best funnel?
3. How might your church be able to employ multiple funnels to move people into groups?

The Crack in Your Small-Group Ministry

8 tips to ensure that everyone who signs up for small groups gets connected

By Tony Hill

“I guess they couldn't care less if I was really in a small group or not.”

Michael signed up for a small group at his church several weeks ago and he has yet to hear anything—from anyone.

After two years of wrestling with the idea of joining a small group, Michael finally had the courage to take this step of faith. Now—after no response from his church—he's either at a point of frustration or he's simply forgotten all about it and moved on with his life.

What Does The Crack In Your Ministry Look Like?

I've encountered this story countless times in my chats with over 100 small-group ministry leaders across America.

I've come to refer to these people as the ones that “fall through the cracks.”

The people who fall through the cracks are those who sign up for a small group through weekend services, e-mails, phone calls, the church website, or at group launch events. And then, for one reason or another, they were never followed up with, and never ended up joining a group.

The reality is that while this isn't going to happen to everybody, it is going to happen to somebody.

It's even happened to me.

Almost every ministry leader I spoke with admitted that they too have this crack in their ministry.

How about yours?

When talking about this challenge with ministry leaders, I asked what they thought contributed to the cracks. Two main reasons stuck out:

1. My group leaders often forget to follow up.

2. I have limited [staff/resources/time] and a lot of groups and people, and I simply can't keep up with all them all.

These seem more like excuses, right?

What We Should Remember About Every Small Group

From my perspective, one of the most important things a group ministry leader does is get people successfully connected to small groups, not just lead them to a group.

Like you, I have a passion for small groups. I've been a group member, leader, and coach over the last nine years, and here's one thing I've learned: Every small group has the potential to change the course of someone's entire life.

My first small group changed mine: I met my wife through that group.

As group leaders, pastors, and coaches, the last thing you and I want to see is someone missing out on a life-changing, faith-changing opportunity simply because we never followed up with them.

How to Help Everyone Who Signs Up Connect to a Group

So how can you prevent this crack in your ministry from getting worse, and maybe even help seal it up? I'd like to share with you some ways to solve this problem.

1. Make it easy for people to sign up.

The lower the hurdle you set, the more likely people are to sign up. Try asking for just their name and e-mail up front. It only takes a minute. Once they're in and have made that small commitment to show their interest, they'll be more likely to give you more information. This creates momentum for them to join a group.

2. Don't manage the group placement process alone.

Delegate some of it to other staff if you can. If not, recruit a volunteer to help. Sharing the responsibility will immediately take the pressure off and help you not feel so overwhelmed.

3. Track unconnected people separately.

Keep a separate list of people who are interested in a group, but aren't connected yet. I like to call them "prospects." Put them on index cards, in a spreadsheet, Evernote, etc.—whatever works for you. It's important to keep them in a separate place from your list of groups and people. This way, you can reference them more quickly and treat them differently, like you should.

4. Watch the number of days that pass.

The longer someone has to wait to get connected to a group, the more likely they'll change their mind or find something else to fill in that empty time slot. So act quickly. Aim for getting people connected within the first two weeks after they sign up, while it's still fresh on their mind.

5. Make it easy and clear for your group leaders.

It's common to pass a new signup over to a leader. When you do, be very clear on what you want the leader to say and do, and when you'd like them to do it. For example, you can say something like: "Hey, I've got a young couple that I think would be a great fit for your small group. Can you contact them and say a quick hello and invite them to your next meeting? Can you do this by the end of the week? If it isn't a good time to add them to your group, let me know."

Tip: If you decide to include the prospect in that e-mail, put the leader's e-mail in the To: field and the prospect in the CC: field. [Recent research by Yesware.com](#) showed that when you do this, the leader is more likely to open and respond to your e-mail.

6. Follow up with each signup immediately.

People will want to know if you ever got their sign up request and if you're working on finding them a group. For each signup you get, take just a minute to e-mail or call them back and say something simple like: "Hey Michael, I got your group sign up request. I'll make sure you get connected soon. Stay tuned." That simple confirmation will go a long way to put people at ease. It has for me.

7. Schedule the group leader follow-up.

Put it on the calendar to follow up with the leader of the group to which you connected your prospect. This is a huge drop-off point for many group ministries. Leaders will often forget to follow up, or they unsuccessfully try to follow up once and move on. So plan on this happening by following up with the leader a week or so later. Just send the leader a quick e-mail or text, or give the leader a call. Ask how things went contacting the prospect and if there's anything you can do to help. It's ultimately your responsibility as the ministry leader to make sure prospects are contacted by group leaders.

8. Schedule the post-placement follow-up.

This is another big drop-off point, and it's one that many ministry leaders don't even think about. Once you know a person has been connected to a group, put it on the calendar to follow up with him or her a week or so later. Just send them a quick e-mail or text, and give them a quick call. Ask prospects if they went to the group and, if so, how it went. This can

lead to some really great insights for group members' first group experiences, and it will show them that you really do care.

Take Action: Implement a System

I realize this can be a little overwhelming. It seems like a lot to do. You and I both know how important it is to make sure people get plugged in. Be intentional and come up with a system for this—a way of efficiently and consistently handling people who want to join a small group—so that they are successfully placed into one every time. Then if people aren't connected into a group, it's because they didn't want to be in one—not because you didn't place them in one.

Without a simple system, chaos ensues, and people inevitably fall through the cracks. And when people fall through the cracks, there's a good chance they'll never join a group at your church.

This is why I created a completely free tool for small-group ministries called [GroupForms](#). It's a [kanban board](#) style of visually tracking each person through the entire group placement process: from sign up to getting connected. It will automatically remind you to make those follow-ups, as well as let you know when someone has been waiting for too long.

I urge you to set aside a few hours to come up with an intentional system of handling small-group signups. Explore tools like [GroupForms](#), [Evernote](#), Google Calendar, Google Docs, or software that your church is already using. The most important thing is that you find one that works for you and your ministry.

Whether you know it or not, you already have a system for handling small-group signups. It's either going to be an intentionally good one or an unintentionally bad one. The choice is up to you.

—TONY HILL is a tech entrepreneur outside of Nashville, Tennessee, with a heart for small-group ministry, and the creator of [Huddle](#), [GroupForms](#), and [GroupVitals](#); copyright 2014 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. What is the current sign-up process you're currently using? How well is it working?
2. How often do people fall through the cracks in your ministry? Why do they fall through the cracks?
3. What system do you believe would work best for you and your ministry? Why? When will you implement it?

Adding New People to Existing Groups

Why you should consider this tactic

By Carolyn Taketa

It has become an accepted premise in small-group ministry that it's easier (and perhaps more desirable) to form a new group from unconnected people than to add them to established groups. A key reason for this proposition is that in a new group, everyone starts on the same page relationally and are more likely to connect and stick together. A fresh group is motivated to start new friendships, invest and collaborate on the group's purpose, define roles, and build shared experiences.

In contrast, an existing group already has established friendships, shared history, common language, group dynamics, set roles, and inside jokes. To successfully match new people

into existing groups requires the church to keep accurate data about the current groups and their cultures, a difficult task. Also, the longer a group has been together, the more challenging it can be for new people to feel like they belong and to get them to keep coming back.

However, these hurdles can be overcome with planning, intentionality, and hospitality. And there's benefit to the existing group as well. Newcomers can bring fresh perspective and momentum to an existing group and help the group move past a complacent status quo. Accommodating someone new often requires an infusion of God's grace and compels the group to clarify its missional purpose and grow in love.

There are several reasons you might add new people into existing groups. Here are a few to consider.

Not Enough New Leaders

As is often the case, the supply of leaders does not match the demand of people who want to be connected into groups. So when you lack the sufficient number of qualified leaders to form new groups, you may have to add new people to existing groups. Of course there are other methods and strategies for forming new groups to avoid this alternative. The reality, though, is that most churches need to do a hybrid connection strategy that consists of both starting new groups and adding people to existing groups.

Outreach Invitations

It's exciting when group members invite unconnected people into the group (e.g., neighbors, friends, church acquaintances, or co-workers). Spiritually healthy groups extend themselves and invite people within their spheres of influence. If the group has been praying for someone and that person joins the group, there is already a relational connection with someone in the group. It only makes sense to add the person to the group where they have connections. These personal, relational invitations are the best way to add people into existing groups.

Rebuilding a Small Group

Some groups have become too small to be effective because people have transitioned out, moved away, left the church, or started new groups. So the church may promote the group online or in the bulletin to add new folks to the group. Be wary, however, of groups that seem to have a pattern of dwindling attendance. If the church keeps sending new people to the group, but the group seems unable to retain them, there may be issues within the group or with the leader. You don't want to keep sacrificing new people into a group with an unhealthy history, ineffective leadership, or problematic group dynamic. When you see

this type of dwindling attendance, it's a good opportunity to have a coaching conversation with the leader or to visit the group to identify problems and pursue solutions.

Catalyst for Growth

Assimilating newcomers, especially those from different spiritual backgrounds, socioeconomic status, age, race, or stage of life, forces group members to stretch themselves past their comfort zones. Jesus' twelve disciples were a motley crew of diverse backgrounds, political persuasions, and personalities. Yet one of the incredible markers of the early church was its radical inclusivity of all types of people from all walks of life. When our groups reflect the diversity within the communities where we live, we learn to become more inclusive, others-focused, and compassionate toward those different from us. Diversity is so spiritually formative that when we see groups that are in danger of becoming insular, complacent, and self-focused at our church, we sometimes ask them to allow new people to join. The natural disruption that newcomers bring can expose unhealthy dynamics and lead to greater openness, grace, and growth.

Once you've decided to add new people into existing groups, it's critical that you train your leaders on how to best welcome visitors and integrate them into the life of the group. Simple tips like greeting them at the door, cluing them in to inside jokes, and explaining the purpose and expectations of the group can go a long way in making newcomers feel welcome.

—CAROLYN TAKETA is Small Groups Director at Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, California; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. In what ways would this tactic be helpful for your church? In what ways would it be unhelpful?
2. Do you currently have groups that could use the energy of a few new group members? How might you move a few new people into that group?
3. What should you do to train leaders to welcome new people into existing groups?

Help Guests Feel Warm and Welcome

These helpful hints are useful for any small group.

By Reid Smith

When people visit your small group for the first time, they come with all sorts of questions. "Will we like it?" "Will we connect with the people there?" "Will this be helpful for us?" Just showing up can be intimidating because they don't know how they'll be received, if they'll feel like they "fit," and if they'll want to return.

And that's human nature, of course—most people feel less than relaxed entering a new social situation with new people in a new place. But there are things you can do as the small-group leader to help ease any tension that guests may be feeling. Here are some tips to help your guests feel more comfortable, received, and accepted in your small group.

As Group Members Arrive

Greet your guests as soon as they come in. Introduce yourself and let them know it's great to have them at your group. Next, try to learn a little about them (this will help you with introducing them later). Limit your first round of questions to between three and six so that the guests don't feel interrogated, but try to find out:

- Their names
- If they live nearby or have attended your church before
- If they have kids (If so, ask for the names and ages of their children)
- How they heard about your group

Be sure to introduce them to at least two other group members using the information you just learned. And before you return to greeting the other arriving group members, ignite a conversation between the guests and other group members, or offer to get them something to drink.

After Everyone Has Arrived

When everyone has gathered in one room, try to acknowledge the presence of new guests without making them feel awkward—meaning, don't make them feel like too much attention is being placed on them for too long. To avoid this *faux pas* in welcoming guests, introduce your new guests to the whole group immediately. Don't leave it up to them to introduce themselves; rather, get the process started for them based on details you learned as they arrived.

For example, "Hey everyone, I'd like to introduce a couple who is visiting our group for the first time. This is John and Jane and they live in Wilsonville. They learned about our group from our church's website and have two kids, Jack & Jill. [Looking at the guests] It's great to have you here with us tonight. Is there anything else you'd like to add?"

Notice several things that were done in this introduction:

- You got everyone's attention and immediately introduced your guests, which extinguishes feelings of intrusiveness they might have felt if they hadn't been recognized early on.
- You said they were "visiting" versus "joining," which relieves any pressure of commitment they might have.
- You broke the ice for them by providing just enough background, but not too much.
- You used their names and their kids' names, which makes the introduction more personal and warm.

Again, make sure to keep it brief. If you focus too much or too long on your new guests, they might feel like a spotlight is on them and become uncomfortable.

When It's Time to Leave

Thank your guests for being with you at the end of your group's study and discussion time. Again, let them know it was great having them. If they participated in the conversation, tell them you appreciated their input and insights.

Try to introduce your new guests to two more group members before they leave, unless you sense they're eager to make an exit. Make it a goal to encourage face to face conversations with at least half of your group by the end of their first visit. This will make their reflections on their group experience more personable and warm, which will encourage their return.

Finally, as your guests are leaving, give them your contact info (versus asking for theirs) and include specific details about your next meeting. Let them know you'd love to have them come back and to contact you if they have any questions.

—REID SMITH is the Community Life pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, and the founder of the 2orMore small-group leadership training and resource ministry; copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Think back to your first time visiting a small group. What did the leader do to make you feel welcome?
2. What new practices will you start in order to make guests feel more welcome?
3. What practices will you stop in order to make guests feel more welcome?

Making Room for New Members

How to really help people feel welcome

By Peri Gilbert

It's happened to me, and I'll bet it's happened to you. You walk into a room filled with laughter and conversation. You have a smile on your face, ready to embark on the journey of relationships—except when you try to join in, all you hear are crickets.

When we promote small groups at The Simple Church, we constantly tell potential group members that "there is a chair for you." And we tell our small-group leaders that we always want to make room for one more. That's a core element of our small-group ministry: making room for newcomers.

That's why I was surprised one Sunday when a woman approached me and asked if we had any life groups where she could meet people. I thought to myself: *Well, that's what happens in all of our life groups.*

I asked her if she had been to one of our groups, and she stated that she had—but no one talked to her. My mind ran through a number of scenarios about how that could happen, but they all tilted toward blaming this woman. Maybe she came in late or was shy. Maybe she didn't really engage in the conversations, and that's why she was unable to meet anyone.

Then a week later, I went to an event early to see if people needed help. I am no stranger to this crowd. But when I walked into the room, only 1 out of about 15 people even acknowledged me with a brief smile. "Chirp, chirp, chirp" was all I heard. Everyone was engaged in their own conversations and fun, and I was an afterthought.

I felt like God had given me a real-life illustration of the feelings of that young woman. In that instant, I realized what she meant. All of our mottos didn't matter. There had been

room for her in the small group she attended, but there had been no effort made to include her in relationships.

Relationships Matter

That's an important word: *relationships*. Small groups are designed to build relationships. We make room for people so we can invest in them through relationships. Or at least, we are supposed to.

Oftentimes people come to our groups with broken hearts and lives. They come wanting to receive something: emotional, spiritual, or mental support. In some realm, whether in the church or secular world, they've become disenchanted with the relationships in their lives. When they enter a small group, they're looking for something different—something better.

The question is: Will they find it?

As small-group leaders, it's easy to become comfortable with the regular members of our group. We essentially form a miniature family. We create room in our home and lives so that we can invest in this family every week, which is good.

Still, we must always be aware of the new person in the room—of the chair now occupied, and the life now eager to change.

Rather than hash out who is responsible for what in relationships, let's consider Jesus' words: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and "Whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40). It's up to us to welcome and comfort the new people in our small group.

Practical Steps

Here are a few steps to ensure that no person is left out of your small group:

Don't forget to see. As people arrive at the group and conversations begin, we tend to become engrossed in our circle of dialogue and forget to monitor who is around us. We can become blind to anyone else who comes through the door because we are so focused within our conversations. But rather than wait for the newcomer to engage us when they arrive, we need to engage them. If you have a large group, consider enlisting the help of a few members to be greeters and to help new people feel welcome.

It takes more than an acknowledgement. A smile can be a wonderful tool of welcome; however, it's not enough for someone who is new to your group. They need to be engaged in conversation and introduced to other members of the group. These are the building blocks that form relationships.

Give them some context. Remember that a newcomer will not have access to the backstory of the different participants in your group. That means they may not be able to jump into an existing conversation without a bit of help from you. Therefore, give them context for the questions or ideas that come up or have been key topics lately.

Provide a guide. If someone has never attended a small group or knows little of small-group life, he or she may not understand how the group meeting will work. This tension can be relieved by inviting newcomers to sit with a guide that will be with them throughout the different activities of the group. This guide can be you, or it can be someone that you know will do a good job of welcoming and easing fears for the new attendee.

These steps are simple, but they also can be overlooked as we grow more comfortable with the people in our group. It's important to keep these steps in the forefront of our minds as leaders so that room is always available for newcomers, and new relationships are always possible.

—PERI GILBERT is the Small-Group Coordinator at The Simple Church in Bossier City, Louisiana; copyright 2011 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Think back on the last time your group had a newcomer. How well did the group welcome him or her?
2. How can you model proper welcoming of newcomers to your group members?
3. Who in your group can you enlist to help you welcome newcomers?

Further Exploration

Resources to help you . . .

SmallGroups.com. We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples through life-changing community.

BuildingChurchLeaders.com. A website with practical training tools for various church leadership roles.

CTPastors.com. A website offering practical advice and articles for church leaders in pastoral roles.

WomenLeaders.com. A website ministering to women leaders in the church.

Building a Life-Changing Small Group Ministry

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson

Zondervan, 2012

Learn how to create a great small-group ministry in your

Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture

Andy Stanley and Bill Willits

Multnomah, 2004

The authors describe how they established a small-group culture at North Point Community Church

Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition

James Emery White

Baker Books, 2003

Work through questions to consider the purpose of the

The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry

Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson

Zondervan, 2005

Learn how to troubleshoot common issues

Retreat plan

How to create a one-day retreat on the theme of "Connecting Newcomers"

SMALLGROUPS.COM training themes expand easily into one-day (or even weekend) training events. Here is a sample schedule you may follow for the theme of connecting newcomers. The purpose of this event is to help your small-group leaders begin exploring ways to ensure that your church and your small groups are always welcoming newcomers.

Morning

- ♦ 9:00–10:15 A.M. **Opening Session:** Begin by breaking up into groups of five or six. Hand out copies of "No Charter for Comfort." Allow the groups to read the devotional and discuss the questions. Then hand out copies of "Willing to Commit,"

and allow time for each person to read it. Then have each group discuss the questions at the end of the article.

- ♦ 10:15–11:45 A.M. **Second Session:** Hand out copies of "Culture of Hospitality" and "Who Is Our Target?" Allow time for each person to read them. Form groups of five or six and discuss the questions at the end of the articles. Then have groups brainstorm ideas for making your church a more welcoming place. Allow at least 30 minutes at the end to bring all the groups back together to discuss their ideas.
- ♦ 12:00 P.M. **Lunch**

Afternoon

- ♦ 1:00–1:30 P.M. **Icebreaker:** Break into groups of five or six and have everyone share about their first time in a small group. What was it like? How did you feel about the experience?
- ♦ 1:30–2:30 P.M. **Third Session:** Hand out copies of "From Anonymity to Intimacy" and "How to Funnel People into Your Groups" and allow time for everyone to read the articles and answer the questions. Then break into groups of five or six to discuss how well your church is communicating about small groups and moving people into groups. Have leaders brainstorm effective ways of communicating about small groups and connecting people into groups.
- ♦ 2:30–3:00 P.M. **Stretch Break**
- ♦ 3:00–4:30 P.M. **Fourth Session:** Hand out copies of "How Welcoming Is Your Group?" and allow time for everyone to answer the questions. Then break into groups of five or six to discuss the results. Then hand out copies of "Help Guests Feel Warm and Welcome" and "Making Room for New Members" for leaders to read and discuss. Ask leaders to pick out the top three things they want to implement to make their group more welcoming. For the final 30 minutes, reconvene as a large group to share your findings.

You can create similar retreat plans for any of the other SMALLGROUPS.COM themes. Simply determine what you want to accomplish and select the handouts that support your objectives.