



Coordinating Small Groups and ABF Groups to Make Disciples – October 03

We are a “3C” church, using Celebration, Congregation, and Cell groups to carry out our ministry to adults. We have been working in the last couple of years to closely coordinate our congregation and cell ministries. We are training our ABF leaders to take over the responsibility of getting the people of our church into small groups. We want our ABF shepherds to see themselves as responsible for the oversight of the discipleship of the people in their group and to see the small group as a tool for the discipleship process in conjunction with their overall community relationships and in class teaching teams. The most effective disciple making comes from the coordination of all three settings – Celebration, Congregation, and Cell.

Recruitment

On the first Sunday in the September each ABF shepherd gives a presentation to his group about the disciple making mission of our church, the vision of the ABF’s, and a presentation of small groups. A hand out of small group offerings is presented with a sign up form. In this way most small groups have many people from the same ABF (although not entirely, we are not legalistic about this at all). Quantity and quality time together deepens the community the people in the ABF can develop. In the weeks ahead the ABF leader will seek to recruit people who do not sign up for small groups voluntarily. We don’t easily take no for an answer. ABF shepherds and their leadership teams are given oversight through a monthly Adult Ministry Community meeting. This is where training occurs for this task.

Small Groups

We use a segmented and sequential plan for small groups. There are different types of groups available for each phase of the discipleship path. (Win, Build, Equip, Send; 101,201,301,401; 1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base, home; or Come and See, Follow Me, Be With Me, Remain In Me ; we have used all of these terminologies at one time or another to define or discipleship path.)

Our discipleship path is as follows:

Alpha like Course to “win” and introduce to small group experience.

Basic Discipleship Course to “build” (2 year process on the basics of the Christian life, done in a closed group format with accountability, home work etc.)

Lifetime Accountability Groups (LAG) to provide an environment for ongoing accountability for the mature Christians who are serving in some ministry (“send”).

Other small groups use curriculum like Dad’s of Destiny, Crown Ministry, Beth Moore studies, Experiencing God etc.

“Equip” courses are also offered through the Adult Ministry Community and as small groups (We have just started using the Center for Church Based Training material).

The Philosophy

Disciple making is more than some small group curriculum. ABF shepherds need to see the small group structure and the various curriculums available as tools to bring their people to maturity while living out their Christian lives in community.

The larger ABF community with its variety of spiritual gifts and small groups with the intimacy and accountability they offer together create the ideal environment for Christian disciple making. We have raised the commitment culture in our church so that people accept small groups that meet weekly and require home work

Some lessons

In the past the pastoral staff did most of the recruitment of people into small groups. This became increasingly more difficult as we grew (now a church of about 500 ave. attendance with 8 ABF groups and numerous small groups.) There are skills that come second nature to the staff person and seem easy which in fact are difficult for some of the ABF shepherds. It will take time for them to get to where they can do this without close supervision, so far I am still the person driving this in most ABF's, but a couple of ABF's are doing it almost entirely on their own.

If you have questions or would like to share some thoughts about this I would love to hear from you.

Submitted by Pastor Ron Berget of Chisago Lakes Evangelical Free Church in Lindstrom, Minnesota.

Ron can be reached at (651) 257-2677 or rberget1@Juno.com.