



Midsize Groups in homes: Xenos Fellowship - January 04

I want to share with you about one of the most unique churches that I have ever had the privilege to witness. This church carries out core values that many pastors and churches can only dream about. The church is Xenos Fellowship in Columbus, Ohio. This church has been in existence for almost 30 years and has from the beginning been a church based in the community opposed to a centralized building philosophy. The main infrastructure of care, ministry, evangelism, discipleship, and leadership development and reproduction centers on their 120+ home groups, which are midsize gatherings of 12-50 led by trained volunteers. In addition to providing opportunities for in-depth Bible Study in a home setting, these groups provide a great atmosphere for developing deeper relationships. Each Home group also carries out other key ministry areas such as baptisms, counseling, weddings, funerals, etc. Home groups meet weekly or bi-weekly. Many of the bi-weekly groups have smaller mostly gender based men's and women's small groups that meet the alternate week for deeper study and accountability.

One of the many distinct features of Xenos home groups is the extent of training required of leaders, called deacons. These leaders have spent 3 to 6 years serving in a home church while being mentored and coached by more experienced leaders before leading their own group. They also complete a minimum of two years of weekly classes, each of 3 hours, with homework and tests. This training is well below seminary level, but far above what most groups provide their leaders. Since home churches are larger and constitute more responsibility than most typical small group or cell models, each home church is led by a team of leaders, rather than a single person or couple. Creating this level of leadership development has slowed down the rate of church planting at Xenos, but they believe the benefits have been worth the hassle.

If you are wondering about house sizes, those who aspire to be deacons, many times purchase homes that will have a room that will accommodate a midsize home group.

Other tidbits about Home Groups:

- Groups are more affinity based rather than geographical boundaries. People do travel to get to their groups.
- They strongly believe that midsize groups of 12-50 are much stronger and indestructible compared to cell or meta church groups of 6-12 people.
- Each Home Group is on its own for childcare. Some have kids in another room in the house, others have them in a nearby home. Still others leave each family responsible for their own childcare.
- Group members are strongly encouraged to invite others to these open groups.
- Home groups are started usually from existing groups that are "multiplying" but, only when leadership has been properly trained and prepared.

Other tidbits about Xenos Fellowship:

- Xenos does not have a traditional worship service approach, but they do "Central Teachings" where people gather for strong Bible teaching from their pastoral staff. Any worship experiences happen in individual Home Groups. They average about 4,000 in attendance in their six Central teachings (4 at their building and 2 around the Ohio State University campus)

- They have about 800-1,000 people in attendance at their Wednesday night classes that meet for 5 to 10 weeks each, throughout the year.
- They have created a strong culture of discipleship and disciple-making. They believe personal ministry for a believer begins with having a disciple to invest into, than other ministry opportunities are enjoyed through using spiritual gifts and talents.
- They are very open about sharing their beliefs, practices, and philosophies through their church website at www.xenos.org. There are hundreds and hundreds of pages of materials including powerpoint teaching notes of some of their various courses.

Most churches that have these strong discipleship and leadership development values usually struggle to grow beyond a hundred people. What has happened at Xenos Fellowship is unique and cannot be easily explained in my view. I had the privilege of interviewing one of their lead pastors, Dennis McCallum recently. I left not so much overwhelmed, but inspired that we as church leaders don't need to keep the bar down so low! Many churches and leaders have bought into the lie that people in today's society will only give us so much time so lets not expect much as far as attendance, leadership expectations, etc. I want to thank Xenos Fellowship for raising the bar and keeping it raised!

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