



Community Groups in the Home - October 06

Is there a need for Home groups in a church with a strong Adult Bible Fellowships? We, The Chapel in Akron, said, "Yes." We had talked about the need for community groups outside of our walls for a number of years. We liked the idea of having different options for our people. This concept was agreed upon with our highest leadership. The difficulty became how we would do it. We needed to figure out our method for pulling it off.

As a bit of background our church has had a large focus on ABFs. Pastor Knute Larson brought them to The Chapel over 20 years ago. In fact, he even came up with the concept of turning Sunday schools into Community Groups back 1967. As a new pastor he needed a way to ensure that care, discipleship and service would happen more effectively.

So how do you launch a new community avenue when there is so much momentum and energy going to ABFs? Here's what we've done to start our 11 groups this fall.

1. Key staff meeting

June 12th we gathered a variety of our staff members to discuss this idea. Our top leadership of pastors and administrators came together for a long off site meeting to formulate our ideas. A number of us had liked the strategy before, but we hadn't been able to make it work. Our leadership was behind it and wanted to find a way to make it work.

From that meeting we set the vision of what we want these to look like. We set a goal to start six of these groups. Although some in our meeting wanted a lot more, it was urged to start slowly, to get it right from the start and then keep growing a bit each year.

We also came up with a name. We had called them Geographic Community Groups. Yet the idea took a bit of explaining what it meant to our people. Home ABF was suggested because everyone in our church knew what an ABF was about. By adding the "Home" it simply clarified it even more.

2. Preparation

After our meeting was when the real work started. With two and half months until launch date our work was cut out for us. We needed to find six people who would agree to lead. As hard as it is to find new ABF teachers where were we going to find six more? We began with contacts we already had. Some of these were from small group leaders. Some were name given at our June 12th meeting. We started sitting down individually for breakfast or lunch meetings with these potentials leaders. Slowly through the summer as we met leaders began to say, "Yes" The biggest hurdle seemed to be finding coaches who would follow up and help our individual Home ABFs. After a number of meetings first Janet and then Marlin agreed. We were ecstatic. Much to our surprise as we asked our staff for names we kept getting good leads. At the end of the summer we had eleven HABF leaders with five others wanting to start in January 07. Wow! We were floored.

The next area to work on was our guiding principles for our HABFs. Two of us met to work on the draft of what we wanted exactly for our groups. We wanted to spell it out completely for leaders, so that they knew how to succeed. Our drafts went through 10 revisions in July and August. Lots of clarifications, alterations and different eyes were needed.

The one idea that was the strongest was investment. Like 2Timothy 2.2 says we entrust to others what has been handed down to us. This is the cornerstone of our HABFs. We want people to disciple others so well that in two years they are ready to start another group with that leader. We

knew this would be absolutely critical to have this kind of equipping to grow our HABF and our church.

3. DVD lead groups

Another key component of our HABFs is the DVD curriculum featuring our pastors. The Achilles heel of growing our ABF has been finding new teachers. Good ones are hard to find and train. The advantage of doing DVD lead groups is that many who aren't ready or don't consider themselves a teacher can and will lead the discussion with a video teaching from a pastor. Others who don't feel like they have the time to prepare will also benefit from this curriculum. The idea is not new. Northpoint and Saddleback have used video driven lessons. We hoping more will take a chance on leading with the help of these DVDs.

4. Training Day

As we were racing to find coaches and leaders we worked to organize a time to train our leaders. As we planned our Saturday morning training we worked to finalize a number of things: our principles, our DVD curriculum and our coaching system. Because all of our work was through personal contacts we knew we would have success at getting our leaders to our training. In fact, only one of our leaders did not show. He was on vacation.

5. Launch Week

As our launch week approached we back to hit all the necessary promotional areas. We used the Pulpit, newsletters, all church emails, bulletin and announcements in church. Part of the excitement was generated from our HABF leaders. They were asking their friends to join them in their group. They were our best promoters of HABFs.

6. God Factor

Of course we need to say that God himself has made this all work, as He always does. This time it has been so obvious that His hand has been involved from so many ways. One of these is the fact that we attempted the previous year to start what we named then, "Geographic Community Groups." That year we had fifty names to ask to lead. The fruit of all that labor was one leader. This leader was a great one and has led the way for others to see how it works. Yet we did all that work for one. It certainly didn't seem like we had hit the mark. What a difference a year makes. We have eleven signed up for the fall with more coming this January! God moved these people. Another great story of God's work was our leader Joel who didn't know anyone from his part of town. We had our doubts whether this one would work. He and his wife wrote a letter to the people on our church mailing who lived in his town. When they started ten folks came out that first night! That's the last way we envisioned people being drawn into community.

We are so grateful for the journey that's just begun and how God continues to build His Church. Now we can see what we believed all along... ABFs can exist alongside Home Community Groups.

- Dane Allphin, Pastor of ABFs at The Chapel in Akron, Ohio