



Heart to Heart

A quarterly newsletter of Open Hearts Ministry

Fall 2003

Launching a Successful Small Group Ministry

by Mark Bonham, Executive Director

*Our Mission:
"Ministering
to the
abused
through the
love of Christ
and
equipping
others to do
the same."*

It's that time of the year when many of the leaders we have trained at SALTS plan to kick off their local small group. A successful launch requires some important preparation. In this issue of our newsletter we offer help from those who, for some years now, have not only led groups, but also have seen their small group ministry grow. I have made some observations about those who have made the transition from their first group to multiple groups.

First, these groups have a strong support system. The leaders have done the work of communicating well with their church or sponsoring organization. The small group ministry is seen as an integral part of the church's mission, and there is strong support for ministry to the wounded. This frequently includes being part of the budget for outreach. With funding, leaders can continue training and development and be well cared for. If you need help in explaining the concept to your ministry leadership, I recommend that you contact our office for a copy of "Restore to Me", an overview of Open Hearts Ministry to the wounded. This is a 50 page booklet for those who want the details: what small group ministry to the wounded is, why it is important, how this ministry is done and what it will require of those who do it. It is designed for those who want to seriously examine the ministry and it's approach. I am also very willing to respond to the questions of pastors and ministry leaders who are considering a launch.

Second, the leaders have realized that leadership and not participants is the greater issue. They have focused on their own recovery and made sure that they have strong support with a solid team of co-leaders. Time spent developing a team that is well trained, unified in their approach to ministry, and have good rapport with one another determines whether the ministry lasts a season, or for years to come. In each place where the ministry has succeeded a team has formed around passionate leadership. They meet together regularly, go on retreats together, hone presentation and small group skills, process the group experience with one another and stay in learning mode. They stay connected to one of our mentors (frequently one of their SALTS leaders) by phone and email. These are the same people that eventually become leaders at SALTS.

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Preparation of Leaders for Local Ministry

by Sandy Burdick, Ministry Director

A vital part of small group ministry is the preparation of the leaders' hearts and minds before each session. Plan to arrive at your meeting place at least an hour before the scheduled teaching time. Whether there are two leaders or twelve, someone needs to be responsible for preparing and leading this time. Insist on promptness. Use the time well and leaders will be glad they were there.

Here are some ideas of things to cover in a pre-group time with leaders:

1. Prayer for the one who will be doing the teaching, for other leaders and participants.
2. Discussion concerning the teaching time and how it applies to the leaders lives. Use the questions in the manual.
3. Get a quick summary of how each group is doing: i.e. struggles that are coming up that perhaps other leaders can process together.
4. How about the leaders? Are they experiencing resistance, denial, too much talking, in the group? How does that affect them personally? How are the co-leaders experiencing each other? Let them have time to talk to each other about that.
5. Plan to hear a 10 minute story from each leader each week. The leader's time is their small group. Encourage processing the here and now just as you do in group. But beware of spending too much time on personal issues with a leader during this meeting. This could upset and derail a leader's heart for the small group that evening.
6. Plan other times for leaders to get together to share; do fun things like a good movie and food; or to go more deeply into personal issues.
7. Sometimes group leaders profit from reading a good book together. For example: "The Sacred Romance" by Curtis and Eldredge, or "Connecting" by Larry Crabb. Questions can be provided for discussion by any leader who will read ahead and prepare.
8. A 10 minute devotional will help prepare hearts for the evening of ministry.

This is a time to encourage one another, pursue one another, respond well to one another and pray for one another. You are about to enter the battle for the hearts and souls of the wounded who have come to you to experience compassion and help.

Small Groups Impact a Mega Church

by Jan Terpstra, SALTS Leader and Small Group Coordinator

"My clients are moving forward by leaps and bounds since they've joined this small group ministry. I'm thrilled with their progress!"

"We need to find a way for more people to experience small group this way."

"Everyone is so excited about what God is doing in this ministry!"

"How can we incorporate this curriculum and small group model for our teens?"

These are just a few of the comments we've heard from the staff

at our church, Mars Hill Bible Church of Grandville, Michigan. Counselors and Community Life staff alike are thankful for the impact of this small group ministry based on the Open Hearts Ministry material. We're calling it *Retelling God's Story for Our Lives*.

Why that title? Well, our pastor, Rob Bell, inspired us by his sermon two years ago about how God is retelling (redeeming) everything

through Christ. It doesn't matter what we've been through or what we've done, there's nothing beyond Christ's redeeming power. In fact, our story is key to coming alive to God's call on our lives. At Mars Hill, we've been blessed to have leadership that leads us by their own example and gives us permission to focus on our story and to tell that story without holding back. It's in that context that we enter into the healing journey in relationship with God, ourselves, and others. With a congregation of 10,000, you can imagine the impact of this leadership!

So how did we establish this small group ministry in a mega church? Well, we started small. Two years ago Sandy Burdick and Linda Lyzenga started with two women's groups and one men's group. Out of that year, one key person on the Community Life staff, Kathy Christensen, attended SALTS. Kathy caught the vision for what this healing community could mean to our congregation and that sparked huge growth to the point of doubling the number of our small groups last year to four women's groups and two men's groups. I'm convinced God used her leadership and enthusiasm to catapult us to the next level. So many wanted to sign up that we ended up with eight and nine participants in each women's group! Something we

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What to do when kicking-off the first group session...

by Mary Jane Hamilton, SALTS trainer and OHM mentor.

Here are some important steps to remember to make sure your group gets off to a good start. This first session may seem academic, but the steps are an intentional part of promoting safety and clarity for your group. It is important that leaders model vulnerability and compassion when inviting others to journey down this road of recovery that can prove to be long and burdensome. Following are the steps to consider: (Note: **All materials to be introduced at this session are in Session 1 of your notebook.**)

1. Leaders introduce themselves. (Leaders decide who will go first before group actually starts so that there is a smooth transition.)
2. Get acquainted. Create your own questions or use the Warm-Up Activities, Get Acquainted Questions. Reminder: These questions may appear simplistic, yet they will reveal to you who are the talkers, who is in touch with their preferences and a little about the personalities present in your group.
3. Ask each one (including yourself) to answer, "What do you hope or expect to happen for yourself throughout the course of this group?" The answers to this question will reveal to you the vision/hope members may or may not have for themselves.
4. Ask for comments on the teaching they just heard from Session 1. It is best if you have a specific question to ask to jump-start this process.
5. Read through "A Safe Group Member's Agreement". This agreement is vital for the functioning and personal commitment level of each group member. Spend as much time as you need here...time spent now may save you grief in the long haul.
6. Introduce the hearts/rocks/driftwood (if you use them).
7. Read the definitions of sexual, emotional, spousal, physical abuses. Be ready to answer any questions they may have about these definitions. Be sensitive to what may "bubble-up" from your group.
8. Make members aware of all that is available for them from Session 1 as to journaling, feeling words, etc.
9. Go through "Common Patterns of Abuse Victims". Note: These may trigger some memories and begin the process of telling their story.
10. Explain to them the short version of our stories. Have them look ahead to Session 2 at "Questions To Consider" to help formulate the telling of their story.
11. Leaders be ready to tell the short version of your story.

As you can see there is a lot here to be covered. Keep this list handy and be sure to decide ahead of time who will lead on each step. Don't worry if you don't cover all the steps. Pick up where you left off next week. Set an easy and steady pace through this lesson and be sensitive to where you need to pause. Remember: People are more important than tasks. Somehow the process will happen as we come along side and love the ones we are inviting to journey with us.

Small Groups Impact a Mega Church (cont. from p. 2)

don't advocate, by the way. But that gives you an idea of the interest level. What a great time of learning and stretching and sharing for us all!

There's so much support for this ministry at Mars Hill that funds were made available to pay half of the fee for twelve people to attend SALTS! We're excited about this fall because we're sensing that God wants to double our attendance again! And the leaders are stepping up to the challenge. We all know that while we're on this healing journey, it's also our privilege to give back by sharing our lives with others as small group leaders. We haven't "arrived."



"God has invited us to the party - what does it now mean to dance with people?"

On the contrary, we're more alert to our strengths and weaknesses than ever ~ and God is using us to further His Kingdom at Mars Hill. It's an incredible, scary, exciting, and gloriously challenging opportunity to live in healing community with our fellow man, and dependent on our God who is always good!

Dan Allender challenged me with this thought in a message on "The Healing Path." He said, "God has invited us to the party - what does it now mean to dance with people?" I don't have it all figured out yet, but I'm challenged by that thought and I'm committed to the party *and* the dance.

In this Issue:

How to Start a Small Group Ministry in a Church.

Launching a Successful Small Group Ministry (cont. from p. 1)

not the problem of a few. They have made it safe for men and women to examine their hearts and explore what's there, how it is impacting their relationships, and to look at change together. They prepare brochures and explain the ministry well. They carefully plan the details from location, registration and communications to how they will bring closure at week twelve, what they will do as follow-up, and whether there will be a second twelve weeks.

Finally, these leaders pray together. They recognize that they do not heal anyone. Only the Lord Jesus does that. They operate interdependently with one another and dependently on God. The ministry and the lives involved are His, and they see themselves as facilitators of a process that God directs, as well as shepherds that keep the environment safe and conducive for growth.

Every year is not the same. I have had great experiences where groups really work, and not great experiences where I felt I was doing all the work. When I am working too hard, I know something is wrong, and I need to take a hard look at the group dynamics and my motivation. One year I took some time off and joined a group as a participant, so I could focus on me. My point is, take care of yourself. Even as a small group leader, God's primary focus is on you, not on what is happening in your ministry.

Important Dates to Remember

September 13, 2003 - Cleburne, Texas, Grace for the Wounded workshop.

September 13, 2003 - Grand Rapids, MI, See us at "Time out for Women".

October 13-18, 2003 - SALTS Maranatha, Muskegon, MI.

November 8, 2003 - Detroit, Michigan Area, Grace for the Wounded workshop.

January 19-24, 2004 - SALTS, Anchorage, Alaska.

April 26-May 1, 2004 - SALTS, Maranatha, Muskegon, MI.

October 11-16, 2004 - SALTS, Maranatha, Muskegon, MI.

Extra brochures and details are available. Contact us!

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