

DISCIPLESHIP & SMALL GROUPS

Teaching, Mentoring & Training





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INTRODUCTION

We are so excited to offer to you a NEW Resource that will help you and your lay leaders in a tremendous way! The Church Ministries Department works hard to have our “ear to the ground” by having many conversations with volunteers and leaders in the local church to understand what the needs, questions and challenges they are facing really are. It’s our heart to craft specific resources to answers those questions, help overcome those challenges and assist in meeting the needs.

We have partnered with key leaders all across Colorado and Utah in this collaboration resource. Leaders just like you have written the content with a hands on approach to help others in the trenches with them.

This resource is all about SMALL GROUPS. Whether you achieve this through Sunday School, in peoples homes, through affinity groups or a Bible Study another night of the week, gathering together in SMALL GROUPS is key to health and growth and discipleship within the local church.

In this resource we will cover:

- Becoming a Church of Small Groups
- Best Practices to Recruit & Train Small Group Leaders
- Shepherding Your Sheep as a Member of the Flock
- Inspiration for Leaders of Leaders - Hope Groups
- Life Group Recruiting 101

We hope you enjoy this collaboration resource and if there is a question, topic or challenge you are facing that we can help with, please reach out to our team at cmd@rmdc.org.



Shawn Reine
Church Ministries Director



BECOMING A CHURCH OF SMALL GROUPS

by Juanita Blevins

As a newly appointed small groups pastor I found myself feeling the weight of not being able to meet together early during the pandemic I pleaded, almost in desperation “God how am I to lead your people during this time?” The thought instantly came to my mind to change my prayer to “Lord, I will lead your people, show me how”. It was a total change of heart.

At the end of 2020 Praise Church started to look seriously at becoming a church of Small Groups rather than a church with Small Groups in the desire to create a healthy small group environment. Getting Small Groups up and running had been something that had been tried many times in the History of Praise Church, but it had never “caught on”. After visiting True North in Alaska, one of the fastest growing Assemblies in the nation, Pastor Steve Chavez came back inspired to try again. True North advised getting the book *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* by Nelson Searcy and implementing its practices.

My stomach turned as I read the first few pages... Could this really work? Are they crazy? Our people will never go for this. This was obviously a completely a different concept than we had tried before. It would require a change of heart. Pastor Steve lead the team in seeking the Lord if this was indeed the time and the way we should go. God brought the following verses and quote across my path as both a challenge and comfort to follow His leading.

“Discerning the voice of God is the result of a deliberate choice that doesn’t depend on what you’ve done or haven’t done for Him, but rather on what He has done and still longs to do in you. As you seek to hear His voice, expect to hear it. Wake up expecting. Arrive expecting. Come expecting. Live expecting. Never stop ... expecting.” Shirer, Priscilla. *Discerning the Voice of God*

**"If your Presence does not go with us,
do not lead us up from here."
Exodus 33:15**

**"The vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens
toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries,
wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay"
Habakkuk 2:3**

GREATER EXPECTATIONS

**"Wait and hope for and expect the Lord; be brave and of good courage and let your heart be stout
and enduring. Yes, wait for and hope for and expect the Lord". Psalm 27:14 AMP**

The Goals of the Activate System is a Biblical based model

- To create maximum life-change, with 100% adult participation
- The church body would be outwardly focused and encourage friendships
- Use a simple sign-up system working with the natural flow of the church calendar
- Reproduce new group leaders without requiring overwhelming training
- Follow the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) Grow with the church, Evangelize Community & World.

The Activate system is based on 12 **Big ideas**, I will list a few here:

Big Idea #1: Think from the Outside In, Not from the inside Out

Small Groups are a way to reach out beyond our church walls, letting people be involved before they believe. For many people, it's a lot easier to feel comfortable in a small group meeting outside the church building, then to walk inside a church building. Once the friendships are formed and foundations built, it is quite natural for them to find their way into the church family.

Big Idea #3: Think Friends, Not Intimacy

There are four interrelated and connected spaces that people grow spiritually and connect with others: Public Space, Social Space, Personal Space, Intimate Space
After High School graduation it is difficult to find a safe Social Space.

Big Idea #4: Think Short Term, Not Long Term

People grow when they are exposed to periods of stress followed by periods of release. This increases participation, raises excitement & passion and avoids leader burnout.

7 Advantages of Time-Bound Groups

- 1) Groups have clear beginning & end date.
- 2) Easier for people to make short-term commitment
- 3) Concentrated promotion & sign-ups.
- 4) Easier for new people to join when everyone is starting at same time.
- 5) More group options - new topics offered each semester.
- 6) Groups match rhythm of academic calendar.



The next 3 Big ideas are the most daring and most difficult to implement, they are also the most critical in developing a church culture of thriving Small Groups and required a change of heart.

Big Idea #6: Think Church of Small Groups, Not Church With Small Groups

This idea pointed out that church culture sabotages itself with too many competing ministries. People only have so much time. Typically the same 150 people attend the middle of the week service, hardly seeing any growth year after year. We must “eliminate the drag” and become a lean machine, being more effective at reaching people outside our church walls and then bringing them in for the weekend service.

Big Idea #9: Think Full Staff Participation, Not Staff Specialist

The lead pastor must be ecstatic about and fully participate in a small group, as well as every member of the church staff. Period. Small groups are a team effort. Even with a specialized staff person in place, the pastor and every member of the staff should still spend 5 -10 % of his or her time and energy on groups. Yes, administrators must put in the work behind the scenes so it is easy for the unbeliever to join. But soon the groups become the culture of your church they grow organically. At every weekend service you should hear staff say things like “Hey Joe. How are you? So you’ve been at the church for 3 weeks now? Have you heard about small groups. Let me introduce you to Ed. He’s leading a great group.”

Big Idea #10: Think Apprentice, Not Expert

Church leaders tend to be control freaks. :) Group leaders do not have to be longtime Christians to qualify to lead a group. Teaching your current leaders to grow new leaders through 4 step process:

1. I do and you watch.
2. I do and you help.
3. You do and I help.
4. You do and I applaud.

Diversity Encourages Growth. Let people belong before they believe. Multiply groups by identifying potential leaders from existing groups. Praise Church went from ministering to 150 on a Wednesday night to reaching well over 400 a week in small groups meeting throughout the week and throughout the city. We grew from a handful of groups to now more than 100 thriving small groups.

SHEPHERING YOUR SHEEP AS A MEMBER OF THE FLOCK

by Christy Ballinger

What did Jesus really mean when he asked Simon Peter to 'take care of my sheep?' In a broader view most people think of this directive as exclusively relegated to a pastoral role. Peter never went to a seminary; he was called to follow Jesus just like you and me. Like Peter, we are called to take care of other people and it involves the process of accountability. How does this play out? Life groups is one way but when it comes to facilitating a life group, how does a leader navigate the challenges of connecting and loving their group while simultaneously being a member of the flock? After all, isn't a life group setting the way a church was originally designed before the advent of institutionalized gatherings were even a thing?

To answer these questions, we first have to answer the basic question of what is the purpose of life groups? In Galatians 6:2 Paul instructs Christians to "carry each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." In essence, it's doing life together and this is done through evangelism, discipleship, accountability, fellowship, friendship, encouragement, raising up leaders, supporting those who are suffering and to hopefully ignite the passions of others who are needing a place to feel as if they can use their talents and abilities. This may seem like a laundry list, but it really boils down to loving others and being loved by those you lead. If you can do this, you've got what it takes to be a life group leader! The rest should evolve organically as you get to know your group.

Now that you understand the purpose, you may ask, how is it fulfilled? The role of a life group leader should never be complicated. Staying organized and setting realistic expectations (of yourself and others) can prevent burnout. Let's face it: investing in others can take a spiritual and emotional toll. Leaders can avoid this by focusing on the most important components of shepherding a group. Here are a few basic things to consider as your primary responsibilities:





1. Encourage strong marriages, families and single adults.
2. Lead your group into spiritual maturity.
3. Foster close-knit community and ownership within your group.
4. Be accessible for counsel, prayer, encouragement, support etc, (be sure to use church resources/pastoral support).
5. Pray consistently for your group. If your members are comfortable, set up a prayer chain/group text and encourage members to pray for each other's needs.
6. Ensure tangible needs are met within the group such as organizing meal trains/hospital visitation, wedding showers, baby showers etc. Delegation is crucial to ensure needs are met within the group.
7. Communicate effectively.
8. Plan ahead what you will be studying and pray for God to lead you to a study that will bless and encourage people in your group.
9. Try to coordinate a community outreach (get out of those four walls and do something fun like volunteering in a soup kitchen!).
10. Self-care: delegate and don't be afraid to ask for help.

Leading a life group is a serious commitment. Jeremiah 23:4 says, "then I will appoint responsible shepherds who will care for them, and they will never be afraid again. Not a single one will be lost or missing. I, the Lord, have spoken!" Notice this key word here is 'responsible.' You don't have to be the most charismatic or talented or educated person to lead a group you just have to be a responsible shepherd!

Once you have started a group and have nailed down a time and place to meet up and a resource to use, you'll want to think about setting the right atmosphere in the host home or classroom setting. Ideally, six to fifteen people is a good number for a life group. Church studies indicate this is the sweet spot for quality growth. If your group becomes too large, you risk losing people and breaking into separate groups detracts from the tribalism concept. If your group meets in a home, be mindful and respect pre-set times. Try to keep the meeting between 2-2.5 hours to eat, study and pray. Eating is definitely a nonessential but it's always fun to break bread together! Ensure the environment is clean and inviting, and remember, if hosting in a home, not everyone is a pet lover so be sensitive to that as well. An ideal scenario is to have one couple or individual host and the other teach/facilitate discussion. Consider how childcare will be provided (if needed), and determine what compensation is expected of the babysitter.

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Jeremiah 23:4



Once all the logistics are in place, the next thing you'll want to consider is how to handle sticky situations should they arise. Let's face it: people are people and conflict just happens. Here are some things to consider when handling friction in the group:

- Set healthy boundaries, this may mean having difficult conversations with a member that's acting/speaking inappropriately. ALWAYS speak the truth in love.
- God's model is Matthew 18:15-21
- Saying something along the lines of, "I appreciate your perspective, but let's hear what others think about _" can deter dominant personalities or discussion hijackers. Be consistent in this.

Think of conflict as an opportunity to adopt humility, empathy and compassion. The goal is not so much to place the offender on trial, but to gently persuade the offender to see the wrong and be reconciled. If this fails, continue to love this person and reach out for help within your church community.

So, you want to lead a life group, but is your skill set enough to meet the challenge? The answer is a resounding YES! The majority of personal issues can be met within a group. Second Corinthians 1:4 says, "He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort

God has given us." The idea is that we, as the body of believers provide ministry in an intimate setting that life groups provide. Don't assume others in your group cannot help someone in need. Due diligence of biblical application and praying over a person in need allows the Holy Spirit to bring comfort. If the situation is such that a person's needs are more than what the group can provide, then it's appropriate to defer to pastoral resources within the church such as marital counseling, money management counseling, etc. but don't ever shortchange the group's ability to minister.

Finally, consider the words of Francis Chan when he states, "none of us could deny the benefit of having Jesus here physically, guiding and enabling us every step of the way. Yet why do we assume that this would be any better than the literal presence of the Holy Spirit?" Pray for wisdom, direction and discernment as you lead, because with God's help, you can have a thriving life group and shepherd your sheep as a member of the flock.

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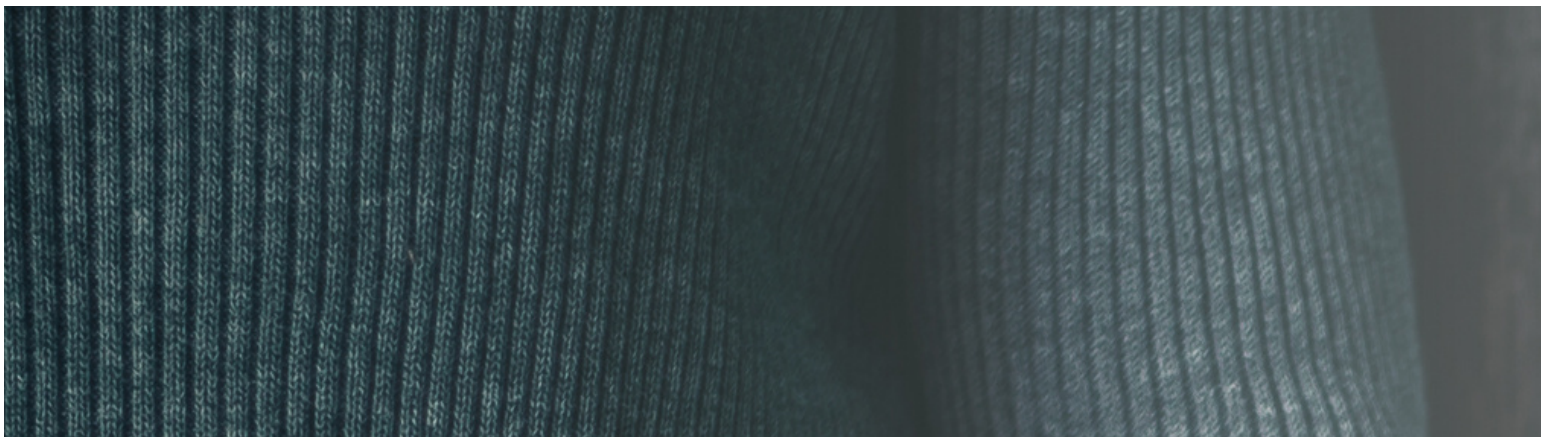
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INSPIRATION FOR LEADERS OF LEADERS

HOPE GROUPS AKA SMALL GROUPS

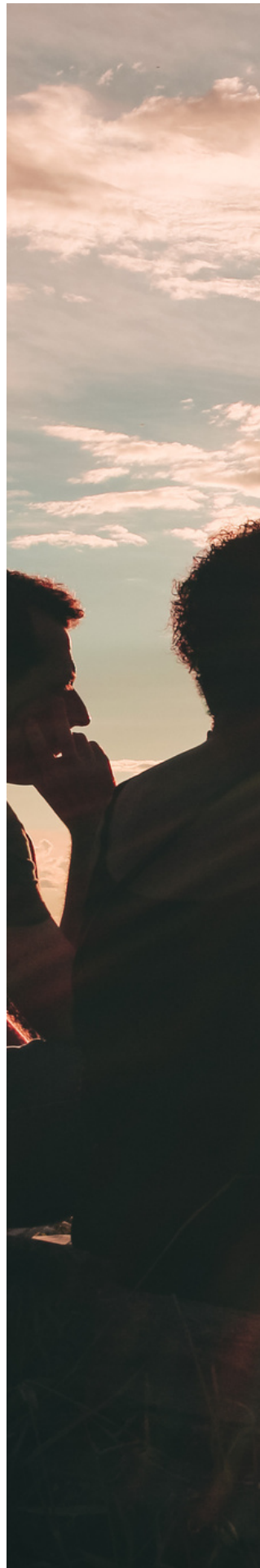
by Santos DeLaCruz Jr

We're do we begin: well the place to start is where is your relationship with GOD? It all starts with Him. We want big results but don't want leap off the cliff of life. First get on your face and submit to GOD everything, this is easy and difficult at the same time. Follow the guidelines others set before you for The Church and your Groups and serve people, accommodating people, and making a way for people to lead groups . Always pray with potential leaders, ask what their subject matter is, make sure the Holy Spirit is leading, set boundaries and guidelines, always and continually learning from your mistakes and listening to others around you, being humble to their criticism.

Growth comes when we become willing to look at the vision GOD has set before us (without vision we die) and always be willing to serve ("wash others Feet"). For example when you have a leader that needs 30 copies and their class starts in 5 minutes and the class your leading started 5 minutes ago, you set yourself aside and make copies for them (wash the feet). We have a set time (40hr week) for every duty we are assigned and we must be willing to be flexible but also know boundaries and have a day of rest like our GOD has instructed.

As Leaders, we must always operate in humility. You may have the worlds greatest ideas and you present these ideas to your Pastor and he tells you something entirely different. What do you do? You leave that meeting and run with what they have instructed you to do. Obedience to the ordained chain of command is vital and if you disagree, then you may need to get on your face and REPENT. The harsh reality is that ministry is not easy and if your feelings and emotions get in the way then you can find yourself wishing instead of serving. There are so many impossible tasks behind the scenes for small groups, "BUT GOD" is the only way.

The church is essentially a hospital for wounded souls, gaping wounds, guts on the floor, head injuries, trauma from collisions of soul. Transfusions are required and you need to get in the mix by being the best student you can be. Everything we do is equally proportionate to the work you put in, HE OUR GOD is always with you, turn to Him , listen to Him, serve Him, be obedient and love like JESUS no really! Dig down and study the gospels and serve like Jesus, this cannot be emphasized enough.



So when you wake up, (first breath and conscious) thank GOD, your feet hit the ground thank GOD, use the restroom and then hit your knees and pray, make some coffee and get in your Word (scripture is enough to defend but read a minimum of 1 hr), be so full of JESUS that your soul won't want what the evil one serves up. Imagine someone has discontent in the line at the pharmacy and you are to do what Jesus would've done because JESUS is in you and instructs you to pray instead playing the same o'l evil tune. When you slam your hand in the door by accident all that comes out of you is JESUS. Be that example, not you but JESUS in you. There must be a sense of urgency in the calmness of what our tasks are for the Kingdom of GOD (be instructed by the Holy Spirit), this life (pre rapture) is almost done and we must spread the Gospels as instructed. I want to wash feet, some day JESUS's feet.





LIFE GROUP RECRUITING 101

by Christy Ballinger

How many times have we rehearsed what we would ask a potential life group leader only to not follow through because of our fear of rejection? Life group coordinators have a formidable task recruiting lay leaders. Let's face it: people are extremely busy and inundated with appeals to serve because it never seems like there's never enough help to go around. The whole "20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work" rule weighs heavily on church leaders who are trying to avoid burning out the faithful. So what's the best strategy to recruit life group leaders?

Here are some things to consider:

1. Pray for Direction & Wisdom

You never know who the Holy Spirit is shaping, don't assume a person cannot lead or is unwilling to lead. For example, let's say you are praying over your life group ministry, and a certain couple comes to mind. Write down their names and list the reasons why you think they would be good candidates to lead a certain type of group. Plan what you are going to say and then just approach them! Follow the Lord's leading and don't procrastinate.

2. Ask in Person

Rather than emailing or texting people, make your approach more personable. Offer to meet up for coffee or lunch. Another option is to offer to meet a person in their home. Make it as easy and convenient as possible and allow the potential leader decide where to meet up to discuss the life group. Stay flexible!

3. Dream Big and Have a Vision

Leaders can envision what they'd like people to do, but need to tailor their vision to fit each person's spiritual gifts and passions. Go on a "fishing expedition" of sorts and find out what makes a person tick. Do they enjoy crafting? Are they passionate about fitness? Do they love reading historical fiction? Do they love entertaining? In what are they gifted? Once you know the basics, galvanize them to share their passions and gifts to minister to people. Help your potential leader to dream big.

4. Share Your Toolbox

Provide resources and training. Do you have a budget to purchase materials? Are you willing to provide training sessions? Make a point to speak to your church leadership about providing funds to get life groups what they need like videos, steaming services, study guides, babysitters etc.

5. Shepherd Your Sheep

This is not a "set it and forget it" situation. Talk to them on a regular basis and keep tabs on the pulse of your life groups. Are there any potential challenges or issues your leaders are dealing with? Don't micromanage, but do offer to help and do all you can to make sure the engine is running smoothly!

6. Network and Listen

This means truly connecting with people. Try using Stephen Covey's technique that states, " Seek first to understand, then to be understood." Be an empathetic listener so that you can help a person express their ministry goals and in turn fulfill the vision.



Recruiting can be a daunting task,
so take it one step at a time!

Be a committed leader,
you can do this!

BEST PRACTICES TO RECRUIT & TRAIN SMALL GROUP LEADERS

by Johanna Bartsch

Most everyone involved in church ministry agrees that small groups are integral to building community and discipleship within the church. Church staff and members know that meaningful relationships are hard to find. Small groups help people find new friendships that will help them grow spiritually. It is safe to assume that most churches want small groups and believe in their effectiveness. However, small groups cannot exist without leaders. And not just any leader, but equipped and passionate individuals who are excited and ready to pastor a small group.

Finding and training people to lead a small group can be a challenge that may cause church staff to give up too soon. However, some valuable practices help ease the struggle to find and train leaders.

Helpful practices to recruit leaders:

Implement Growth Track at Your Church

Growth Track is an excellent avenue to finding competent people interested and willing to lead a group. Growth Track encourages members to explore their God-given talents and unique personality and find a place to serve in the church. At Northview Church, we have recruited multiple small group leaders through Growth Track. If your church is not ready to implement Growth Track, offer a class that lets people take a spiritual gifts assessment to find potential group leaders. Follow up with individuals who score high in leadership and encourage them to start a group.

Creating a Culture of Small Groups at Your Church

Talk about small groups all the time. Incorporate them into your Sunday services. Integrate small group stories into your sermons. Have group leaders or members share a personal testimony about how their group helped them. Make it easy for individuals interested in becoming a group leader to know how to become one through online interest forms or a sign-up station in your lobby. Assign someone in your church, whether in a paid position or volunteer, to oversee the small group ministry. Be sure to let the church know who they are to talk to if they are interested in leading a group.



Personally Invite Someone to Become a Group Leader

As you build relationships with the people in your church, you will notice potential leaders. Keep your eyes and ears open to those who are already influencing others. Take the time to personally invest in them and encourage them to lead a small group. A lady at Northview Church was going on hikes every Sunday afternoon with a few friends. I approached her and asked her if she would be willing to open it up to others and make it a small group in the church. She was excited and thrilled. Sometimes, it just takes a personal invitation. People may not realize they will become great group leaders until someone inspires them.

Once small group leaders are in place and their groups meet regularly, it is essential to continue investing in them through coaching and training. Sometimes, it takes a while for a group to take off, or maybe they start strong, and then the numbers start dropping. Discouragement creeps in, and small group leaders take it personally and give up too soon. Do not abandon your group leaders. Be sure to invest in them so that they will succeed.

Helpful practices to train small group leaders:

Offer Small Group Coaching Sessions

At Northview Church, we coordinate our small groups on a semester system. Before each semester begins, we offer a small group coaching class for all our existing group leaders and those interested in starting a group. During these coaching sessions, we provide helpful tips to make their group healthy and thriving. We allow seasoned group leaders to share their “wins” and offer advice. Our goal for each session is to equip the leaders and allow discussion and connection among them. We want to create a community among the leaders so they do not feel isolated and discouraged.



Check In Often with Your Leaders

Contact your group leaders regularly to see how they are doing. Send an encouraging text letting them know you are praying for them. Give them a phone call to see if they need anything. Ask them for coffee or lunch, hear about their experiences, and offer advice. Show appreciation to them with a small gift or letter of encouragement. Leading a small group is much like pastoring a church; it involves time, commitment, prayer, and self-sacrifice. Letting your leaders know you support and pray for them goes a long way.

Utilize Outside Existing Sources

Do not hesitate to use existing sources to train your leaders. There is a wealth of resources available for equipping small group leaders. Northview Church has taken advantage of RightNow Media and its library of video teachings on small groups. They not only have small group studies for leaders to teach and use in their groups. But they also have training videos to help leaders make their groups more effective. Contact your Network for valuable resources or ask other churches for guidance and information. Talk about what works for them and see how you can implement their practices into your program. Collaboration with others leads to more innovation and increases success.



In your quest to find and train small group leaders, do not forget the most essential practice: prayer. Pray to God for direction and discernment. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire individuals to obey His promptings to lead a small group. Be patient and trust the Lord; soon, your church will have a thriving small-group ministry.



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Juanita Blevins

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Santos DeLaCruz Jr.

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Pueblo, Colorado



Johanna Bartsch

Connections/Kids Pastor at Northview Church
Farr West, Utah

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups**
by Nelson Searcy (book found on Amazon)
- Small Groups PDF by RMMN <https://www.rmdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Small-Groups-Final.pdf>

