

## What are Home Groups?

"Home Cell Groups", "Home Fellowship Groups", "Home Groups", "Prayer Groups" are all names that may variously be applied to the regular gathering in homes of small groups of church members for prayer, praise, fellowship and study. The analogy from biology, physics and political science, of the term "cell" used in connection with these gatherings, is rich and meaningful.

In political science, the term "cell" describes a small active (usually revolutionary) group functioning at a local level.

In biology, a cell is a smallest part of a greater, more complex body, which can function independently. Biological cells multiply by dividing in two, when appropriate growth and maturity is reached.

A cell in physics is a term used for an energy source and storage.

Applying these understandings of a "cell" to the Home Group helps to illustrate something of the dynamics and potential available through a Home Group program for a Christian church.

## ARE HOME GROUPS ANOTHER NEW FAD?

Home Groups are not just a new trendy idea for churches. In one form or another, they appear to be as old as the Christian church itself. The pattern is illustrated in the recorded examples of the early church (e.g. Acts 2:46; 5:42 12:12). The Apostle Paul was both involved in home meetings (Acts 20:20) and also addressed them in his letters (Col. 4:15, 1 Cor. 16:9; Philemon 2). Of course, Jesus

worked closely with a small group, and He was involved in home meetings (e.g. Mark 2:1-2; 9:33-37).

## THE VALUE OF HOME GROUPS

**Discipling:** Home groups provide a tremendous basis for the nurture and growth of Christian disciples. The small group allows for close and regular contact between Christians at various stages of their faith walk.

**Leadership & Church Growth:** The Home Group can provide a vital training ground for leadership. Each group should - in addition to the leader - have one or more leaders-in-training. The cell group also provides for the multiplication of the priest's pastoral ministry. Both these factors give scope for church growth.

**Body-Life Ministry:** Home Groups provide a structure in which the ministry of care, compassion, restoration and healing can be readily exercised. In the small group there is the opportunity to minister to one another, teach one another, pray for one another, and bear one another's burdens.

**Evangelism:** Every group should have evangelism as one of its goals. They may work towards this goal through reaching out to people around them, inviting inquirers to appropriate cell group activities, ministering Christ's love and compassion and being diligent in prayer. The Home Group can also be an equipping, encouragement and support base for members able to witness in their work, home and social environment.

**Ministering to Ministers:** Those involved consistently in ministry - both clergy and laity - need a secure and reliable base where they can receive the ministry of prayer, encouragement and support. A Home Group can effectively meet that need.

## ESTABLISHING HOME CELL GROUPS

In setting out to establish a Home Group program, Parish leadership must first of all determine the goals for the program. What should Home Groups achieve in the corporate life of the parish, as well as in the individual lives of members?

Determining this enables decisions to be made concerning:

- the constitution of groups;
- meeting times and places;
- selection of leaders;
- administrative requirements;
- individual group programs.

The following comments address each of these issues:

### Constitution of Groups

The formation and membership of groups within a parish can be mixed and varied. For example, the membership of a group may be determined on the basis of geographic location, life stage (e.g. young marrieds, retirees), age, gender, ministry area, etc. The manner in which this is determined depends very much upon the goals and expectations for the program. Similarly, it may be appropriate for membership to be by self-selection, or people may be allocated to groups by the leadership - or indeed, by a combination of both.

### Meeting Times and Places

It may be decided that all Home Groups meet on the one night - or there may be variations, including the provision of day groups. Length of meetings should be kept within mutually agreed limits. It is usually preferable for meetings to be in private homes, rather than church property. The homes chosen should be ones where meetings can progress without undue disturbance and where there would not be a sense of intrusion.

## Selection of Leaders

The selection of leaders depends in part upon the goals of the program. However, in general, leaders should be people who are:

- mature & consistent in their Christian walk;
- in submission to the priest & enjoying the priest's confidence;
- of integrity and good reputation;
- committed to the unity of the fellowship;
- patient and tolerant towards others;
- available and prepared to commit personal resources.

## Administrative Requirements

A parish Home Group program requires administration and maintenance, which should be well planned and coordinated. **It is vital that groups be an integrated part of the wider fellowship.** To facilitate this, it is important that group leaders meet regularly with the designated parish leadership. Additional to this, it may be deemed appropriate for the group leaders to report regularly in a designated format concerning the membership, ministry and other dynamics of the group. The parish office will retain a register of groups, venues and membership, which will require regular updating.

## Individual Group Programs

The reading of Acts 2:42:47 reveals to us a vibrant growing church where the following elements were evident:

- Teaching (v. 42)
- Prayer (v. 42)
- Sharing (v. 44, 45)
- Fellowshiping (v. 42, 46)
- Mutual Ministry (v. 45)
- Praise/Worship (v. 47)
- Exercise of Spiritual Gifts (v. 43)

Many have found it useful to develop their home group on this pattern, where each of these elements

may be included. The balance at each meeting should depend upon the leading of the Holy Spirit. **Beware of establishing your own stagnant ritual!**

The stage of the group's life can, in part, determine the balance. For example, when a group is in its formative stages, more time usually needs to be devoted to the fellowshiping and sharing. When it has reached a stage of mutual trust and affection, then mutual ministry tends to become of greater importance.

## GROUP DIVISION

Ideally, Home Groups should have a constant outlook and expectation for growth. They are not simply a holy "bless me" group. A process for division should be developed within the parish program with which all groups are acquainted. It would normally be supervised by the Parish leadership.

Division should be anticipated when optimum numbers of members is exceeded - usually somewhere between 12 and 20 - but is dependent upon the goals and structure of the program.

**Finally**, be assured that a Home Group program has a tremendous potential as a means of discipleship, growth, vitality and ministry. However, their full potential will be attained only as they are effectively developed and administered as an integrated part of the whole program of the local church.

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