

Small Group “Churches”

Acts Groups

Often in church history small groups have become popular during times of spiritual awakening. This was true of the early Reformation and continued in the persecuted “Radical Reformation” with groups such as the Anabaptists in the 16th century. This interest was rekindled during the Pietist movement in Europe and Great Awakening in America of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Sadly, the birth of America as a nation seemed to stifle personal spirituality¹ until something known as the Laymen’s Prayer Revival in the mid 19th century began a reawakening that has gradually developed into modern evangelicalism. We’ve certainly seen a rebirth or rediscovery of the value of small groups since, perhaps, the Jesus Movement of the early 1970’s.

A strong small group system is now seen to be a necessity for a spiritually healthy and growing church in the 1990’s and beyond. After noting the high priority given to small groups by high quality churches, Christian Schwarz says, “If we were to identify any one principle as the “most important” . . . then without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups.”² Schwarz made “holistic small groups” one of the eight essential quality characteristics of a growing, healthy church. Aubrey Malphurs makes a “robust network of small groups” one of his seven principles of church planting.³ Rick Warren says, “Small groups are the most effective way of closing the back door of your church. We never worry about losing people who are connected to a small group. We know that those people have been effectively assimilated.”⁴

A dynamic and healthy small group system is essential to a dynamic and healthy church. It’s where the real day in and day out care giving goes on, much like the family is where people learn and are cared for as they grow up. I know I’m preaching to the choir but wanted to lay a little groundwork to think about small groups.

Introduction

There are many kinds of small groups populating the contemporary Church. Two of these kinds of groups may have a good purpose, depending on the circumstances and the needs of the particular local body concerned. The short term and special needs groups are these two and have their place.

The kind of small group we’ll look at here is a completely different kind of group, different in purpose, function and leadership. They would be the kind of groups that a church could build itself around and use to become its major long-term care giving and leadership development tool. I would characterize them as general growth and long term in emphasis, compared to the current more specialized and crisis care emphasis. They would provide for the long term character and numerical growth of the church, the structural framework to build it around, a spinal column for the local body of Christ.

To begin with, we’ll take a look at the biblical basis for these kinds of groups. That’s where this all started in my mind many years ago. In reading the New Testament, some basic principles stood out from the practices of the early church and I began to seek the Lord about how to apply those principles in a contemporary setting. I’ve learned a lot from watching others and have been able to put some of these ideas to work over the years.

¹ The emphasis here is on spirituality. The Methodists, Baptists and others were very active in the early to mid nineteenth century, especially in what has come to be called the Second Great Awakening. Much of this activity was either mechanical/legalistic or/and emotional/humanistic. Good things happened but of a different nature.

² Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 33.

³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century*, 227 (ch 13).

⁴ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 327.

Next, we'll look at some ideas about application in our real world warfare of the twenty-first century, following up with the advantages of this type of system and some of the difficulties and solutions.

Biblical Basis

INTRODUCTION. The book of Acts recounts an exciting time in world history. God had devised a plan to redeem man since before He created the universe. Going in He realized the risk in creating man as a moral creature that could respond freely to Him. This must have been very important to Him, knowing the pain and evil that would ensue if man rebelled. In an incredible act of love He decided to go ahead, the final outcome being worth everything that could happen. Having made the commitment to create, the future unfolded before Him, all the ugly evil and all the beautiful glory that would come. Somehow as the future unfolded, before time began, God made a plan to fix what He saw happening as his beloved creation, the human being, turned on Him defiantly.

All of human history had been leading up to the provision of a Savior for humanity. Then the time came, "the fullness of time" arrived and "God sent forth His Son," mysteriously, wonderfully, "born of a woman." No wonder there appeared "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God." It had finally begun, after all the centuries of preparation. God had come to earth to fix and heal man's greatest need. He had come to die so His creatures could live and love Him and each other.

As it finally dawned on His disciples and a few other Jews what had happened, they began to meet together to express their joy at the coming of the Savior and their love for one another, which He had given them. The account of the life of the early church in Jerusalem given in Acts chapter two is exciting and powerful. The most outstanding thing about them was their spirit of joy and love, not their methodology. We need to learn from this today.

However, there were a few simple principles that can be gleaned from the way they went about the Lord's business during this pure time of first-love. They were fresh from having walked with Jesus Himself and were experiencing, without history or preconceptions, the dynamic life and direction of His current presence within them in the person of the Holy Spirit. We need to pay attention to what was going on and how it was done. Let's take three areas, how they gathered together, what they did when they gathered, and how they were led.

MEETINGS. We see a balance in their meeting style. In Acts 5:42, we find that they had been and continued to meet, "in the temple and from house to house." Both in large group mass meetings and in small groups they carried out the various aspects of their corporate life. Some aspects of the early life of the church were discontinued with time but this general principle is repeated in chapter 20:20. Paul carried out his work among the Gentiles, "publicly and from house to house." The large group times were held in the temple in early Acts and "publicly" later in Ephesus, which 20:20 refers to. "Publicly" refers, presumably, to the School of Tyrannus, from our information in chapter 19 of Acts, but we are not told this, specifically, in chapter 20. The place changed but the size principle stayed the same. The meeting place of the small groups, however, did not change, though presumably it could have. Private homes seemed to be preferred. It might be noted here that both mentions, in chapter 5 and chapter 20, were at times when the church was free of persecution so the choice of private homes seems voluntary, not of necessity. We only see two levels mentioned, so I think that is something to keep in mind, as well. Keep it simple. The time span involved and the cultural crossover indicates that this two-fold balance in meeting style is a legitimate principle to emulate.

MEETING FUNCTIONS. The inside look, given in Acts 2:43-47, at the early fellowship of the church is heart warming and exciting. The same spirit is possible today, although we do

not often appreciate simplicity and are hard pressed to pay the price or set our priorities where the Lord directs. I've seen God produce this kind of spirit, at various times, and it is infectious and hard to forget. My own heart and the hearts of many long for this kind of united, simple, and joyous spirit. They were together "with one mind" and experienced "gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God" (Acts 2:46-47).

The verse just before this inside look, verse 42, gives us the simple blueprint for this dynamic, spiritually focused kind of corporate life. We find the church involved in four things, when together corporately. These are teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread (Lord's Supper), and prayer. We never find the church doing anything else anywhere in the book of Acts or the New Testament, everything falls under these basic functions.

The first point in 42 is that they were "continually devoting themselves." This, obviously, speaks of the level of commitment in the early church. We can, of course, rationalize that those were simpler days or that they had actually seen Jesus or that it was all so new and these things made such commitment easier for them than it is for us. These things are factors to consider, especially in light of the fact that this level of intensity apparently did not continue. They were scattered, even the leaders began to travel more as time went on, and there were financial hardships and a serious famine as well as political tensions that eventually led to the destruction of Jerusalem. The intensity of activity and frequency of meeting among the Gentiles also "normalized" after Paul and his team left. Still there was a spirit and level of commitment that must be cultivated for simple, joyful Christian living to be a reality. Without it the natural tendency is to try to compensate for the emptiness by complicating, ritualizing, and intellectualizing the life of the individual and the church. The four major functions of 2:42, mentioned above, will not seem to be enough. Surely, these four areas were not all that was going on but they are given as a simple summary and it is clear from the commitment language in the verse that these four functions were the "majors" the church focused on.

The "*apostle's teaching*" referred to the authoritative instruction given. The emphasis is on the authority not on the content. We don't know what they were teaching, specifically, except the summary characterization was "Jesus as the Christ."⁵ It focused on, explained and everything, in the end, added up to Him, the person of Christ. Surely there was discussion among the saints but the function was that of authoritative teaching from leaders. This took place publicly in the large group setting and specific mention is made of the apostles' presence in the smaller meetings in the homes, as well (Acts 5:42 and of Paul's practice in 20:20).

"*Fellowship*" in verse 42 is the second major function of the early church. At least one aspect of this was the financial cooperation that was practiced.⁶ This was intensive in the early days in Jerusalem but was encouraged later, by Paul, from Antioch for the Jerusalem church (11:27-30), and on a larger scale, again, even later, by a collection from the Gentiles, for the impoverished church in Judea (2 Cor 8-9; Rom 15:31). This type of "fellowship" was always administered by the leaders, apostles or elders (Acts 4:35, 37; 5:2; 11:30; 2 Cor 8:16-24). Though not mentioned, specifically, the details of this financial fellowship were probably worked out in the home churches.

"*Breaking of the bread*" refers to the practice of taking the Lord's Supper, or Communion. This and the final item of prayer are found taking place exclusively in the smaller home groups (verse 46; 20:7-8, 11; of prayer, 12:12). Here, as well, much is left unsaid. We know it happened, we do not know how it happened.

"*Prayer*," literally, "the prayers" is the final major function of the early church. As the small early core was "continually devoting themselves to prayer" (Acts 1:14 NASB), they passed this spirit on to the whole church, as well. Again, we see this taking place only in the smaller

⁵ Acts 5:42 NASB95.

⁶ A Greek search on koinonia in Acts will reveal the emphasis on financial fellowship there.

home groups.⁷ Of course, prayer and dependence on God need to be stronger habits for us all and for our churches.

LEADERSHIP. There is a lot we don't know about the leadership of the early church but we know all we need to. Three things stand out.

First there was always plurality. The Twelve (after selecting a replacement for Judas) were the core with evidence that the Three, Peter, James and John, were prominent as leaders of the Twelve. It seems appropriate that these three would have continued to hold the influential places they held during Jesus' ministry. James seems to have been singled out and martyred early while John is seen accompanying Peter to the Temple and prison in Acts 3-4 and to Samaria in Acts 8, continuing their close association, and, also, both writing prominently, later. Peter, of course, was prominent at important turning points and served as spokesman for the others. That would be the *second* point, that there was special leadership exercised within plurality, though only as the Spirit used some in special ways, not by way of a different designation or title. It was still a one man, one vote type of arrangement even at the highest level, such as apostles and, later, elders.

Thirdly, authoritative teaching and personal example was always associated with leaders in the New Testament. These cannot really be separated since example lends credibility and motivation to teaching and teaching gives vision to and explains the example the teacher sets as they live in association with others in the real world. 1 Tim 3:2, Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Peter 5:3 with Heb 13:7 speak to this aspect of leadership.

Of course, this is a large subject but these aspects of leadership pertain to our subject of caring for God's people in general growth groups or home churches.

CONCLUSION. The biblical basis for general growth groups/home churches is fairly straightforward and is even fairly widely acknowledged by most who have read the New Testament in even a superficial way. The challenge is to apply these principles in a contemporary setting without altering their important aspects or intended goals. Sometimes it is only after obedient application that the benefits can be seen and, certainly, experienced in a fulfilling and satisfying way. We must be careful to preserve the practice of these things in a way that's as true as possible to the New Testament example and not allow our 21st century pride to delude us into thinking we can do it better. Let's not add to nor take from what God has seen fit to reveal to us. "Simplicity and purity" are essential to experiencing the wonderful life the Savior has provided for us in "devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3 NASB).

Application

The first and rather obvious point of application is that there should be a balance in our 21st century meeting structure, as there was in that of our early counterparts. Specifically, a two tiered structure, in principle, consisting of large and small groups. There are always those on the extremes of any issue and so here as well. Usually one of these two tiers is emphasized over the other. We need the balance in our lives of the advantages provided by both large group meetings and small group meetings. Encouragement and access to gifted leaders, among other features make large group meetings essential opportunities that should not be missed or neglected. Intimacy and attention to the small things are among the opportunities provided by small groups.

In our time there is a penchant for specialization and the prevalence of sin has provided many opportunities in the church to specialize the function of our small groups. This is good and from the popularity of these "special need" groups, they definitely seem to meet important needs.

⁷ A notation like this doesn't mean something was not done in other ways, as well, it is only that specific mention is made to a particular practice and this should be noted and remembered.

These should not be discontinued. However, it is noticed that in the New Testament, we see the example of groups that provided a more general atmosphere of growth where the common identity was not a problem but the common relationship of all involved with Jesus Christ. This focus provides a more spiritual atmosphere where horizontal relationships with others can flourish. The security of dependence primarily on Christ can not be replaced with anything else and forms the most conducive possible atmosphere for quality, long-term, fulfilling relationships with other sinners. This kind of group can meet many of the “life-hazard” needs that arise in a fallen world and can assist indispensably in “normalizing” things for others that need the care of a “special need” group for a while.⁸

A general growth/home church should function just like a larger church in miniature, performing the same functions as outlined in Acts 2:42. As we noticed, the four functions mentioned were those being performed by the whole church. Some are performed better by the larger aspect of the church, but all can be practiced by a home church and were in the early days recorded in Acts. The specifics of these functions will be discussed later but it should be noted how much is not said in Scripture, encouraging a lot of flexibility within the general principles given, which are: teaching, fellowship (things in common), breaking bread (simple Lord’s Supper) and prayer (see, Appendix A for more).

Leadership should also follow normal principles, with flexibility depending on the specific circumstances. Plurality within the home church is recommended but the principle of plurality could be achieved by the equality among leaders of several home churches within the larger church context. As the group grows, other leaders will become necessary, as assistants, to care for the increasing numbers and to provide the means for subdividing the home church into smaller “fellowship groups” in the interest of preserving and promoting intimacy and individual attention, as much as possible (see Appendix B). These assistants will gain invaluable experience with their “fellowship group” under the guidance and safety of the home church leaders, with the opportunity to become home church leaders themselves as they grow and the Lord leads. Home church leaders themselves will be gaining experience and skill as they shepherd their home church, working with the “fellowship group” leaders and individual saints under the guidance and safety of the pastors/elders of the church. It is the ultimate responsibility of the pastors/elders before God (Heb 13:17) to care for the church. This, however, becomes many times easier and more efficient and effective by working through the home church leaders and the home church system as it provides the opportunities for everyone to serve each other and meet needs according to the variety of gifts and talents so many will bring to the table.

General growth focus, Acts 2:42 functions, leadership principles such as plurality, purpose, qualifications, etc. are some of the church principles that would also apply to general growth groups. Specific details, such as meeting time and frequency, child care, and how to initiate the groups, will vary according to situation and will need to be discussed under a different venue.

Advantages

A number of advantages can be listed for using small groups as they were practiced in the New Testament. I will only try to list a few and detailed discussion of even these will need to be deferred to another time. Three categories will be used to list these advantages: 1) Needs are met, 2) Leaders are developed, and, 3) structural and strategic unity and focus are accomplished.

⁸ What this means is that after the special needs group has done all it can, there still remains the need for a person to normalize and move on with their life, fitting their special need into the perspective of a healthy, well rounded life. Too often we perpetuate the trauma, creating victims, or overemphasize concepts, creating imbalanced, distorted lives that are obese in one area and anorexic in others.

NEEDS MET. Again, specific crisis needs may need to be met for a period of time by the “special need” groups followed by transition to the general growth/home church groups. However, it may prove surprising how many even of crisis needs will be met by those in relationship with the effected person in the home church, especially for those already established in one. But the main focus of the general growth group would be the equipping and experiential growth emphasis of the New Testament with the result of regular communication of the gospel to non-believers and their salvation. This evangelistic result of personal growth should be communicated as the ultimate purpose of all our work and service for Christ, since, not only is this biblical, but it provides the most satisfying unifying principle for the functions/activities of the church, keeps the edge on our relationship with the world and provides the most exciting motivation for personal growth. Personal growth and development must not be allowed to become self-centered but must be accomplished in an atmosphere of service to others and must be seen as essential to being truly effective in our service to others. If allowed to become self-centered, personal growth will certainly cease being real personal growth (personal degeneration might be a better description). Part of the real genius of the biblical approach to the church with this kind of small group is the ever-present opportunity to serve others. These opportunities run parallel to the growth taking place in individual lives.

The close relationships and friendships that develop over time provide these opportunities as well as the need for various gifts and abilities to operate the group effectively. The teaching that is provided finds many outlets for experience this way, as meetings are planned and run and social times are planned and accomplished. These common projects, and others, with the whole or partial group participating, are learning times as home church members and guests rub elbows and work through friction, learn to cooperate and share, learn to respect others, as well as, discover their own importance and place in the accepting and loving atmosphere that will itself be tested. In all these things the individuals and as the group as a whole will alternately be found lacking and in need of grace, as well as, found adequate and a source of joy and thanksgiving. It will get messy at times but overall there will be a growing together in love and cooperation that is the goal of the instruction given by the leaders (1 Tim 1:5).

LEADERS DEVELOPED. Real world leadership development may be the greatest genius of these general growth groups, certainly one of their most important aspects. Leaders have opportunity to exercise their gifts and talents, as do the other members of the group, in an atmosphere of growth and apprenticeship/oversight, as well as, that of responsibility and need, sometimes actual crisis. Plurality of leadership is the best rule to follow, if at all possible. Groups can be allowed to get larger and new groups postponed in favor of developing multiple leadership. Sharing of the burden and variety of gifts, leadership style and skill are just some of the advantages of intentionally developing this leadership culture. This learning of the principles of plurality is itself valuable training for the leaders involved, whether or not they aspire to or ever function as church-wide pastors. In fact this principle of plurality is valuable enough to be encouraged at all levels in the church and home churches, from planning an overnight outing to teaching the word or running a ministry. This is difficult and counter-intuitive to do.

Leaders would need to be accurately assessed by the pastors of the church as to their gifts but also as to their maturity level. Some can handle a large group, for others a small group is best, at first. Perhaps the wisest course is to relax and let the formation of groups and assignment of leaders flow naturally out of established relationships whenever possible. This is most natural when new groups start from within already established home churches. Here the smaller “fellowship groups” and their leaders are a natural way to branch out as the Lord leads and the leaders involved (at all three levels of “fellowship group,” home church and church-wide leadership [see Appendix B]) concur. One or two of these “fellowship groups” could band together to start a new home church, at the same time continuing their relationship with the former home church leadership as counsel and encouragement.

A critical aspect of the leadership development of home church leaders is regular time with the church-wide leadership. These church-wide pastors should consider the development of and time with the home church leaders as perhaps their top priority or one of their top priorities, at least. The quality of these times is critical. It is not so essential to discuss all the problems in the home churches as it is to give attention to the home church leaders themselves and seek to build them personally. If they are growing in a healthy way in their own lives, they will handle the problems God gives them just fine, with some occasional special help. It is important for us all to operate under the banner principle that we are more important to God than our work is. This must be a constant matter of vigilance to avoid “burn-out” and, more importantly, to supply our ministry with freshness, power and creativity. This way we will turn the eyes of those to whom we minister to the true image of God, to Whom they will be able to respond more freely and willingly. Quality time with home church leaders would include some social times of relaxation and getaways for the weekend, both with and without an agenda. Without an agenda for flexible time (“that they might be with Him,” Mark 3:14 NASB) and with an agenda to accomplish specific goals. A firm grounding in the Scriptures should be at the top of the list for pastors to give to their proteges and future colleagues.

STRUCTURAL AND STRATEGIC UNITY. By this is meant that general growth groups can be the means of carrying out the Purpose Statement of the church. Care and equipping, as well as, multiplication of small groups and leaders should be some of the consistent results of a general growth/home church system. As the church grows, a means of caring for and building those who entrust themselves to Eden Road is needed. A general growth/home church system can provide a spinal column for the church around which other ministries and small groups can orbit, feeding into the home church system and being fed by it. The system being discussed briefly in this paper can give individual committed saints a tangible way to plug in and serve, as well as, advance in their service to the Lord and His people as they grow in maturity. Clear steps can be established toward full-time service, if that is an individual’s leading from God. The steps and opportunities provided by a home church can be as small or large as appropriate for the individual’s maturity. Unique and temporary needs may surface in particular home churches, also, to provide special opportunities. There is enough flexibility in the biblical system to meet needs and provide for the unique individuals God has created and gifted among His people.

The general growth/home church system can provide an entryway for nonbelievers, especially those in relationship with home church members, and a place to go immediately, for newcomers to larger group meetings, if that is their entry point. Evangelism projects can be carried out by individual home churches, especially those where gifts of evangelism are present. These may develop a special emphasis of evangelism for their group. Other groups may have other emphases, depending on the gift mix that God brings together. In special well-developed home churches, God may lead, in time, to start new churches separate from the mother church, in this way accomplishing the church’s goal of starting new church congregations. United leadership philosophy should guide these advanced initiatives. Individual home churches could also take on special mission or outreach projects abroad or right in the neighborhood. There are as many possibilities as there are committed and obedient hearts to carry them out, as the Lord leads and provides.

Overall, the system being discussed here can give the pastors of the church a simple, effective way to manage their responsibilities to God to shepherd His people, “the sheep of His pasture.”

Problems and Solutions

Only a few initial questions will be handled here since there will be numerous obstacles to overcome, as in any venture that deals with human nature, the will and plan of God, and

spiritual warfare. Most of these things are best dealt with as they arise, not trying to anticipate too much, since fears can be self-fulfilling and problems created where they might not otherwise exist. Cautious boldness and faith should be the prevailing attitude.

However there are a few concerns that it might be helpful to address at this point. How to start general growth groups, how to select leaders, and what should be used for teaching resources are among major initial concerns.

There is a lot to be said for a gradual startup. This keeps the initial expectations reasonable, initial fears and uncertainties to a minimum, and allows the use of some small group mechanisms and relationships already in place to be used to transition into general growth groups. After an initial period of “warming up,” a special promotion could be used with some special emphasis to attract more people to what by then would be already functioning groups where some confidence had been built up. Even at this point some care should be exercised not to over-sell what the groups are trying to do, since unrealistic expectations could lead to disappointment when reality sets in. It takes time for a realistic fellowship to develop and there are plenty of difficulties in learning real-life Christianity. At the same time, full faith should be placed in the Lord Jesus Christ and the leading of the Spirit, knowing that “what He has promised He is able also to perform.” The encouragement of small steps will be contagious and build into a steady and sustainable positive expectation of God’s working.

Leaders should be selected by the pastors/elders, for the most part, and not come from a pool of volunteers. However, some who are selected this way may not really want to do this and others may rise from the crowd by the Spirit in some way, so we should never be so locked in that we cannot be flexible and see what God is doing. But in general the pastors/elders will have a good feel for who would have the *maturity* to lead a group like this and a lot of awkwardness can be avoided. The pastors/elders have the final say, at any rate. These groups are a tool to help them manage the church. Leadership selection should be among the first steps taken, along with geographical consideration, since the groups will tend to form naturally along those two lines, gravitation to leaders and by geographical proximity. Existing relationships would be a third way (see, Addendum, below).

Of important concern to the leaders will be what to teach. Heb 13:7 indicates that a large part of spiritual leadership has to do with sharing the word of God with the sheep. This is how they are fed. Of course there are other things, but the construction in Heb 13:7 is appositional, indicating by equality a tight linkage between leading and teaching the word of God. Gifting will effect this some but it is how the people of God are fed spiritually. However, this teaching does not have to be complicated or difficult or time consuming. One of the important principles to govern these groups is simplicity and the same applies to the teaching ministry. Simple reading of the Scripture can have powerful results and meets a need that most people don’t have or take the time to do on their own. Often a healthy discussion will result, based on needs the Lord exposes as His word is read publicly. Also, a leader’s teaching that is done in a simple way about the things he has learned as he has grown is powerful and the sheep will follow his voice (Jn 10:4-5). Outside material can be used by leaders as long as they personalize it (they are the shepherd that the sheep will follow, not others). Other arrangements can be made, as well, depending on the wisdom of the pastors/elders or the one (or several) to whom they may delegate the home church ministry.

Conclusion

Biblical church principles should guide the church at all levels. We must be careful not to discount the effectiveness of simple biblical principles in a day of complexity and high expectations. We are not greater than they were, nor are our needs as special as we might think. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Heb 13:8 NASB). People of our time

long for greater simplicity and a more low-keyed and personal approach to life. We often lament our times and the absence of these things. Now is our chance to do something about it.

The groups we have proposed here are general growth groups, not specialized by need or function and are patterned after New Testament church principles, such as contained in Acts 2:42 and other leadership and body life principles. Practically all these principles can be practiced in small groups, but large church congregational meetings are still vital. A broad range of needs can be met by the biblical model, especially personal growth needs leading to the biblical goal of Christ-likeness, the character of love. Leadership training and strategic focus in accomplishing the church's purpose are two other advantages of the home church model for small groups. There will be challenges and problems but the leadership of the Holy Spirit guiding through the word of God in open and willing human hearts can accomplish anything God desires.

I look forward to more discussion and prayer about implementing a home church system in the wisdom of the pastors/elders as they are led by God's Spirit and God's word.

Addendum

Composition of the churches. The composition of the home churches, to follow the biblical pattern, should be of a natural mixture, resembling the general makeup of the whole church. The churches should not be "specialty groups," comprised of only, or mostly, one age group, sex, race, crisis experience, etc. If a group like this is a need, it can be accomplished at the ministry and special needs group level. Maximum growth will come from the experience of having a variety of input and challenges from a variety of different kinds and maturities of people. This is the power and uniqueness of the church that Christ died to unite. Unity/love is our goal, not sameness. Anyone can do that. The three major criteria, again, for deciding the composition of churches would be geography, relationships, and leadership affinity.

Appendix A

Small Group Church Concept

Simplicity/Liberty

- Important references: Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 5:41-42; 6:1-6; 20:7, 20
- Acts 2:42- focus on fundamentals: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer

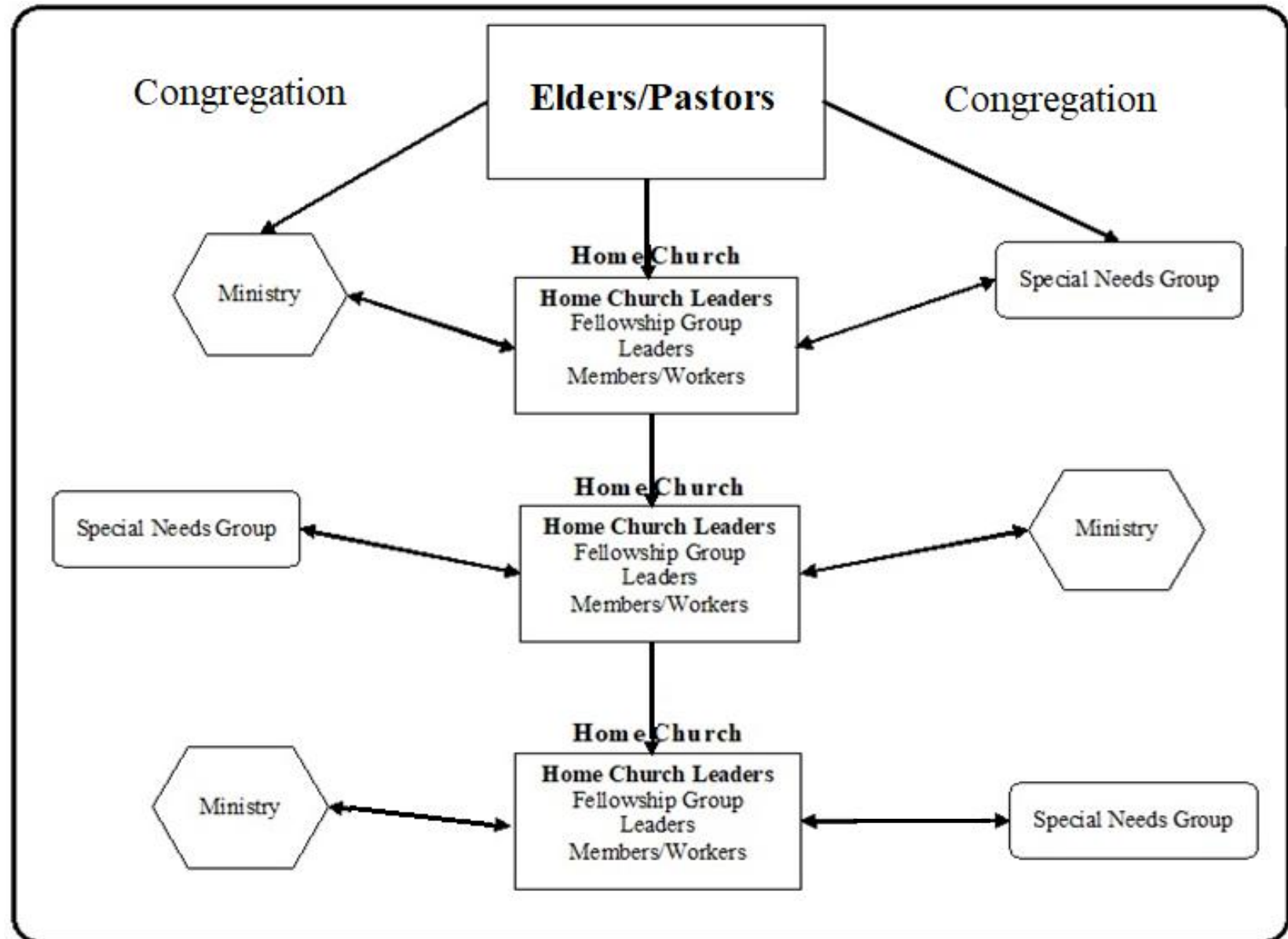
Definitions:

- fellowship- sharing in common, together; opposite of Old Testament concept of separation; “koinonia” financial in Acts
- breaking bread, Lord’s supper, communion- v.46; 20:7, 11⁹
- Two-fold balance of settings for meetings-2:46; 5:42; 20:20; Romans 16:3-5- “publicly and from house to house”
- What should we do in each setting? - All four fundamentals were probably done in both settings, but there are some distinctions.
 - teaching- done in both settings: chapter 2; 5:20, 21; 5:42; 20:20
 - fellowship (financial)- only in larger setting: 4:34, 35; 5:1-11; 6:1-6 (probably administered in smaller setting)
 - breaking bread- homes only- 2:46; 20:7
 - prayer- homes only- 4:23, 24, 31; 12:5, 12 (probably done publicly, also)
- ☞ none of the four are forbidden in either setting
- ☞ practical considerations are important
- ☞ important thing is to incorporate the four fundamentals for balanced group life
- Romans 12:3-8- balance in personal relationships, also: **unity/diversity**- this balance is appreciated more fully in a smaller group setting
 - ☞ more practical opportunities to learn love and forbearance/tolerance
 - ☞ more practical opportunities to discover and exercise spiritual gifts
 - ☞ more practical opportunities to learn leadership skills

“This I command you, that you love one another.” John 15:17

⁹ Indicated by Acts 2:46.

Appendix B
Church Structural Diagram
Central Home Church System



Appendix C Leadership/Authority

