

The LCF Connection

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October 2010

Small Group Expectations

By Andrew Sharp

With all the new small groups running around LCF these days, it seems like a good time to ask what small groups are supposed to be. What should we get out of them? What should they look like? How can we make them more financially profitable? (Oops, I slipped into a different article there. I'll write that another time).



To examine some of these questions, I'd like to suggest a few ideas about what small groups are, and what they aren't. When it comes to small groups, opinions follow their usual pattern of varying widely, so if you don't agree with all of these ideas maybe they'll at least get you thinking.

Small groups are: a great place for fellowship

"Fellowship" has become a little bit cliché, sort of a holy word for hanging out, but what I mean by it here is interaction, becoming part of each other's lives. Getting to know more about each other than the way we dress, what jobs we have, and what sports teams we follow. Caring about each other. While some of this goes on in a Sunday morning service, there's not time for more than a handshake and a hello with most people. And even the longer conversations are more like the kind you'd have in the grocery store—"What have you been up to these days? Keeping busy?

Glad to hear it." These are not the relationships we want and need, but sadly our calendars are too crammed to let people into our lives unless we add people to the calendar. Which is where small groups come in.

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"Remember Us" Some More

A mostly-LCF cast performed Vicki Sairs' drama "Remember Us" at Shiloh Mennonite Church October 3. The drama was originally written for Conservative Mennonite Conference's 100-year celebration, as an exploration of the conference's history and identity. In it, Ryan Freed, Elizabeth and Preston Yoder, Stephanie Sharp, Becky Hostetler, and Molly Rosati portrayed an encounter between CMC members of today and Amish Mennonite members from years past. John Shenk, from United Bethel Mennonite Church, was also part of the cast.

The well-attended drama took a sometimes serious, sometimes humorous look at the differences between the more conservative conference of the early years and the one that exists today, while emphasizing the common beliefs that bind the two eras together.



The production benefited the LCF building fund, raising \$1,095.59 from an offering taken afterward.



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Uncle Alvin

A Message from the Pastor

By Rob Swartz



Years ago when I was a teenager, I remember attending a Sunday evening meeting at Riverside Mennonite, my home church. I don't know how the meeting originated, but I recall some frustrated people calling for our congregation to make some changes. As is common with many teenagers, I thought this rebellious meeting was kind of cool. It reminded me of a somewhat contentious town meeting. The funny thing is, I can't remember what ground-breaking decisions were made that evening. All I vaguely remember is someone proposing we rip out the grass in the front of the church and replace it with gravel.

One picture, however, remains fixed in my memory as I reflect on that meeting, and that is of my Uncle Alvin. As the evening wore on and various ideas were proposed about how to "fix" the church, my uncle finally got up from the pew where he always sat. He had a gentle but booming voice and he spoke with a tinge of sadness and concern. I wish I could remember the exact words he said, but his basic message was for us to keep teaching God's word and keep following Jesus.

His comments stood in sharp contrast to the other opinions and ideas that had been expressed. I remember thinking, "Uncle Alvin, it's not that simple! You're behind the times! We need some new ideas! We need practical solutions! The church has problems and we need to figure out how to fix them!"

I don't remember anyone paying much attention to Uncle Alvin's comments that evening, but now, almost 30 years later, I see his wisdom and I understand his sadness. I have seen ideas come and go. Some of them have been God-inspired but some have simply been man's ideas, my own ideas, and they have done little to change me or the world.

The prophet Jeremiah puts it this way:

*My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

Uncle Alvin was right, and I want to follow his simple yet profound advice. As we encounter Jesus through the Gospel of John these next few weeks, may we drink deeply from the Living Water, and may that water cascade out from us, bringing life to the world.

Looking Ahead...

Oct. 24 - Communion, Sunday morning
Oct. 30 - Fall Harvest Party at Kelvin Snider's, 4 p.m.

Elders' Notes

Ideas and thoughts from recent meetings

Overseer Roger Hazen encouraged the elders' team to consider a sabbatical policy for the lead pastor.

The team affirmed a next step of getting more accurate building cost estimates to help determine if the church is in position to move ahead with breaking ground on the new building by the end of the year.

Junior Youth leaders are still needed. The leadership team would like to hear from any who may have interest. Reuben mentioned the possibility of having RBC students help out by doing a lot of the actual teaching and planning.

The elders want to have a scheduled time during the year to get congregational reviews and then follow that up with a leadership retreat. They are considering making January the month for reviews.

The leadership team is praying specifically for the following people this month:

- John McConnell (Ryan and Kris)
- Keith and Lisa Miller (Richard and Robin)
- Kimberly Miller (Reuben and Vicki)
- Levi and Cora Miller (Keith and Shannon)
- Todd and DeAnn Miller (Rob and Doris)

Congratulations!



Korban Marcus was born to Ryan & Kris Freed on August 26, 2010. He weighed 8 lbs. and 1 oz.



Eric and Brittany Parsons were married on August 29, 2010.



Twila Snider and Brad Maust have announced their engagement and are busy planing their wedding.

His Hands and Feet

What people in the church are doing in the community

Featured this month: Levi and Cora Miller, who volunteer at Meals On Wheels in London. Meals On Wheels delivers meals to seniors who might otherwise go hungry or who have trouble cooking on their own.

What does working with Meals On Wheels involve?

Levi: We usually go in about 10 a.m. and they have the meals delivered from LifeCare Alliance out at Columbus. We have both hot and cold meals, most people take just hot meals, some people take hot and cold meals, and then others just take cold meals. We deliver about 17, and it takes us about one hour to do it. Our route is just in London, there are four different routes all over London. It's the same group every day, although we had a new customer today.

Is it volunteer?

Levi: They pay mileage. We put on four miles. And then we get to eat, that's the big benefit.

How long have you been doing this?

Levi: I think we've been doing it two or three years.

What led you to start?

Levi: Well, Lloyd Gingerich suggested it, he said "You ought to check into it, they're always looking for more people to do Meals On Wheels." I think he gave me a phone number too. And then we had to go in and fill out an application. They sent a couple with us the first day that, to show us how it's done. So we'll do it about one day a week; once in a while we'll get called in a second time, but if it doesn't suit us we just call in and say we can't make it, and that's fine.

What's your motivation for it?

Levi: It's a service. Some of the people are pretty much contained, mostly older people. We have some interesting people. We have an old lady who always doesn't want me to go until she says "I thank you a whole big bushel." And then most of the time she has a bag of garbage there and she wants me to pitch it out in the dumpster.

So you get to know these people a little bit?

Cora: He does, he goes in there alone; I sit there and put in a box for him to take, and write it down. You have to write down what time you stopped there. He went the first time by himself, he didn't get home for a long time.

So why is something like this is important to do?

Levi: It give us something to do, plus it does provide a service to some of these people; they're not all homebound but some of them are.

Cora: They want somebody to cook for them once a day.

Levi: Sometimes there are people who just plug in for a short time. For example, we had this one couple, they were 95 and 97 years old, and she broke her arm, so she was unable to cook, and he was legally blind. And so for a period of time until she was on the mend, they took Meals On Wheels.

So what kind of people do you deliver to?

Levi: I would say most of them would be lower-income people. Sometimes they are husband and wife, and one or the other of them gets around with a walker.

What do you enjoy about it?

Cora: There are a lot of people there at noontime that we get to know.

Levi: I just enjoy meeting a lot of these folks. Relating to other drivers, other couples, it's been an enjoyable experience.





Small groups are not: a Garden of Eden version of church

Trying to escape the conflicts, challenges, and obstacles in church life is not a good reason for joining a small group. For lo and behold, people can still disagree with you and frustrate you when there aren't as many of them. In fact, the deeper relationships get, the more opportunity there is for people to discover things about each other they don't like. This does not mean that small groups are a bad idea. What it does mean is that if you can't overcome your differences with people and love them in church, you won't be able to do so in a small group

either. What a small group actually does is give you a chance to learn to love people on a small scale, so you'll be better at it on a larger scale. This is a wonderful thing, if you're expecting it. On a related note...

Small groups are: an opportunity to learn more

Listening to pastors talk is (or can be) a great way to learn about God, especially if they spend a lot of time researching a topic. But letting someone else do all the work can also keep us from learning as much as we could by personally examining a topic and coming up with questions and answers. Our adult Sunday school class at LCF is one way we try to address this, by allowing for more questions and interaction. But a small group allows for a unique level of participation. There is time for everyone to speak up, weigh in on discussions, and wrestle with questions. People are comfortable being more honest about what they don't understand. Small groups may not provide everything we need spiritually, but most of us, if we were honest, would probably not argue that we are spending too much time learning and thinking about God. In a small group we schedule more time for that into our week, and it can't be a bad thing.

Small groups are not: accountability groups

I used to cringe when I heard James 5:16: "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." It seemed like God's way of torturing me for what I'd done wrong—to make me find someone and reveal my shame to them. The price to pay for being right with God. But I've learned that God is being kind when he tells us to do this. Confession of my failings to trustworthy people, shockingly, turned out to be just what I needed for freedom and encouragement. Small groups are a great place for some confession and honesty. But they do not replace complete, open confession of faults to a person worthy of trust. The darkest parts of our souls need light, but letting in that light is not always appropriate in a group setting. And if we convince ourselves that sharing a few of our faults in small group is enough, we're missing out on some freedom and happiness.

Interested in connecting with a small group at LCF? New participants are welcome!

Current small groups are led by:

- Keith and Shannon Scheffel
- Bob Zachrich and Marcus Freed
- Preston and Elizabeth Yoder
- Andrew and Stephanie Sharp (young adult groups)
- Dan Frederick (young adult groups)

Contact Rob at rswartz@lcfweb.org for more details, or get in touch with one of the group leaders directly. See the church directory for contact information.

Gigabytes of words have been typed about small groups, and I'm not going to explore all the questions here. These are just a few thoughts, and I haven't even touched on how to work from home using the explosive money-making potential of small groups. For that, you'll have to call me and ask for your free DVD.



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If you'd like to make comments on any of the stories or "LCF Connection" in general, email us at: connection@lcfweb.org.

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