

A few weeks ago someone in our church told me about a training program at work on communications and marketing. The communications expert said people have to hear things 17 different times before it sinks in. Maybe it was 16 times; I'm not sure. The person in our church only told me once.

For about one year, we have been talking about small groups and our church. Prior to that, Pastor Chris and I started talking to each other and to anybody else who knew anything about small groups. What we quickly discovered is that no church like ours saw small groups as a ministry pillar like we envisioned. On the rare occasion where some church had something that resembled what we envisioned, the practice of that particular church was more in line with our previous 5th Sundays. We want more than that for our church because we believe the New Testament calls for a greater level of commitment among the people of a local church.

Throughout 2011 we communicated that the move to a church of small groups was the biggest change in the history of our church. We continue today the process of that change. We are turning a large ship, and anyone who has watched a ship in Duluth or Two Harbors knows that takes a while. While most of us meet regularly in our small groups, many of us are still learning what it means for small groups to be a core value at our church.

Small groups are about discipleship. Our Lord gave us the responsibility of making disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:18-20). We are to teach new disciples everything that Jesus taught, and that cycle is to continue from one generation to the next (2 Timothy 2:2). Should you wonder or should you find yourself engaged in a conversation with someone else answering the question why we would make such a big change or why we are doing what we are doing, the answer is discipleship. We are trying to do what Jesus commands us to do – make disciples.

Since Acts 2 and the formation of the church, disciples of Jesus Christ do the same things through the centuries. Some people call those timeless activities one thing, while another person calls them something else. We call them the 4 C's. For the last 2,000 years, true disciples of Jesus Christ **CONNECT**, **CARE**, **CONVERSE**, and **CHASE**. Those words guide us as we pursue discipleship, and those words evaluate our attempts to produce disciples.

Those four words teach you what should occur in your small groups, both at your weekly small group meeting and after your meeting ends until it begins one week later. You will know if your small group is producing disciples if the members of

your small group **CONNECT** with each other, **CARE** for each other, **CONVERSE** with each other, and **CHASE** after others.

Do the members of your small group know each other's names, histories, strengths, gifts, weaknesses, passions, struggles, dreams, and fears? If so, you are **CONNECTING** with each other. As I said recently, Christianity is personal, but Christianity is not private. When we **CONNECT** with other disciples, we move into the realm of contributing to and receiving from other disciples. Contributing to and receiving from is the meaning of the body, building, and family word pictures in the New Testament that describe the community of Christians in a local church.

Do the members of your small group provide the front line for physical and spiritual **CARE** of each other? Do you turn to each other for spiritual help? Do you seek out another in your small group when you need spiritual help? Have you requested accountability? Do you view the members of your small group as those who will help you become more like Christ? Do you view yourself as a necessary part of the spiritual growth of all the others in your group? Disciples **CARE** for each other.

Do the members of your group **CONVERSE** with each other about God and His Word, and do they **CONVERSE** together with God in prayer? Some of that conversation happens in your small group meetings, but not all of it. What happens throughout the week with the other members of your small group? Do you **CONVERSE** with someone else about God's working through His Word in your life? Do you **CONVERSE** together in prayer at times other than your weekly small group meeting? Disciples **CONVERSE** with each other about God and His Word and together with God in prayer as often as they possibly can.

Do the members of your group **CHASE** each other? We **CHASE** the lost, the fringe, and the wandering. **CHASE** means we pursue people. Disciples **CHASE** those who do not know God through Jesus Christ, beginning with those in their own web of relationships. Disciples **CHASE** those in our church who are on the fringe. Disciples **CHASE** other disciples who have wandered from the Lord. Do the members of your small group **CHASE** unsaved people? Do you talk about that? Do you pray about that? Are you encouraging that in each other? When someone in your small group misses a small group meeting, does your small group make efforts to find out the reason? When someone in your small group misses a Sunday morning worship service or the education hour, does your small group recognize this and do something about it? Is there a text, a phone call, an email, or a contact made to that person to find out what was the cause for that

person's absence? Maybe it's a simple matter like bad roads. Maybe it's a more significant matter like hiding from the body. Whatever the reason, faithful disciples of Jesus Christ **CHASE** each other.

To make the change we made in our church ministry was a big risk. However, staying a group of people with minimal intentional connecting, caring, conversing, and chasing was not an option. We had to change, and we had to change toward Christlikeness. That's a change every disciple should seek.

9, 10, 11, 12, ...

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