

Riverview Baptist Church

Vision and Model for Small Group Ministry

VISION OF SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

In light of Riverview's mission, and given the Christian Life & Growth Department's purpose of enabling individuals to hear, understand, respond to, and apply the Word of God in accordance with a Biblical Worldview, the vision of a small group ministry at Riverview is to provide the people of Riverview with opportunities for spiritual growth and sanctification through fellowship.

CLARIFYING THE VISION

What is a small group?

A small group is a group of believers who live life together for the purpose of entering into the process of sanctification with one another while giving glory to God. It is a group of Christians who find their identity in Christ, who worship Jesus together, who care for one another and spur each other toward godliness. Small groups afford believers the opportunity to gather together in small groups with friends and neighbors to live life together and experience the gospel in ways they can't on their own.

Sanctification

Sanctification refers to the progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives. Or in other words, sanctification is the process whereby a person gains increasing freedom from sin, and increasing resemblance to Jesus. Sanctification is the end goal of small group ministry.

Fellowship

Fellowship is biblically defined as the participation of believers together in the life and truth made possible by the Holy Spirit through our union with Christ. It is sharing something in common on the deepest possible level of human relationship – our experience of God himself (*Acts 2.42, Phil. 2.1, Phi. 1.6*). Fellowship is a means by which the process of sanctification can take place.

The Means of Fellowship

There are several ways in which fellowship can and should take place amongst believers:

- 1. Worshiping God together.** Small groups exist to provide avenues of experiencing God together through studying and declaring truth about him and giving thanks to him. Since the Bible is our infallible standard for faith, doctrine, and practice, it stands alone as the foundation of our worship and instruction. People become free of sin and more like Christ (sanctified) when they study the word, and particularly when they study it together, so they can encourage one another in what they are studying.
- 2. Praying for one another.** Through prayer we can become an active participant in what God is doing in the lives of other people. We pray for our cares, concerns, and burdens, and for how God is molding and shaping us as individual believers. Through prayer, we can live spiritual life together. Praying together helps to deepen relationships as well, as we become aware of the specific details of the lives of those we live with. Each small group is to create time for prayer at each meeting.

3. Utilizing our spiritual gifts. God has given us gifts that we can use for the edification of the people in our group and for the benefit of the church at large. God gives spiritual gifts to all believers for ministry in the church and society. The Holy Spirit is the means by which these gifts exist and is the empowerment for their use in the world. The Small Group environment is an ideal one in which believers can practice, hone, and grow in their spiritual gifting.

4. Carrying one another's burdens. Believers engage in life together by helping one another in times of external trials, such as illness, job loss, death, financial difficulty, etc., and in times of internal trials, such as fear, doubt, questions, etc. By carrying one another's burdens, believers spur one another on to deeper levels of faith.

5. Sharing our spiritual experiences. In small groups we can share our spiritual triumphs and failures for the purpose of encouraging one another in the process of sanctification. We celebrate with each other – giving all glory to God – in times of spiritual victory, and we can encourage one another by sharing our struggles with sin and doubt.

6. Confessing our sins to one another. Biblical fellowship includes the confessing of our sins to one another. This confession promotes spiritual healing in those areas in which we need forgiveness and the grace of repentance, and helps us to conquer the sin in our lives through the accountability of those within the group.

7. Correcting one another. We correct one another in order to encourage each other toward godliness, the restoration of the erring brother or sister, and to promote openness and honesty among the group – both the small group and the church in general. Riverview currently has a template for resolving differences and a conflict resolution policy that should be adhered to.

8. Serving one another in practical ways. Small group members can and should serve one another in pastoral ways by meeting each other's physical and spiritual needs. This service is made possible by the depth of relationships that exist within a small group setting. That is, we become aware of needs as we come to know each other more intimately – we become aware of needs that we would not have otherwise known outside of community relationships.

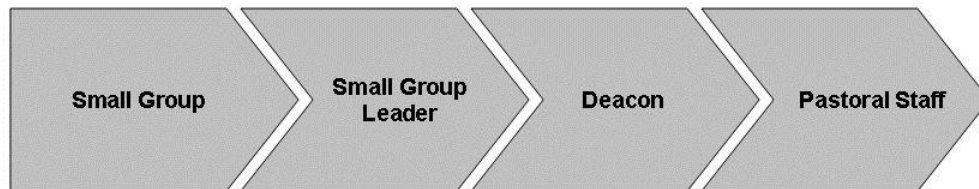
Each of these means of fellowship is in place for the purpose of the sanctification of believers. That is, we have fellowship with one another in order to increase our freedom from sin and increase our likeness to Christ.

Each of these means of fellowship is to be practiced and made evident in each small group at Riverview. This is not to say, however, that each small group must hold a time of correction or confession at each meeting. It is to say that elements of fellowship such as confession and correction are able to take place because of the depth of relationships formed between group members.

The only requirement for small group meetings is the necessity of group Bible study and prayer. It is assumed that, over time, the other six elements of fellowship will emerge as relationships are formed and deepened, trust is established, and spiritual growth is taking place amongst group members.

Pastoral Care

We propose a “bottom to top” system for pastoral care at Riverview, replacing the current “shepherd care” system, and beginning at the small group level, pictured below. In this model, pastoral care needs are presented within a small group by way of regular interaction between group members. These needs can be met by four different levels of pastoral care.



Level 1 – Small Group: Most needs for pastoral care presented by group members can be met by other group members (meals, prayer, accountability, sin issues, etc.). Group members are essentially responsible to each other for pastoral care needs.

Level 2 – Small Group Leader: The small group leader acts as the “shepherd” of the group. At each meeting the small group leader takes note of any prayer requests, pastoral care needs, etc. and facilitates the meeting of these needs either within the group or at a higher level of care. The small group leader is responsible to report monthly to his or her Deacon (Level 3) regarding the pastoral and spiritual needs of his or her group.

Level 3 – Deacon: Each Deacon sits over a small number of group leaders and facilitates pastoral care needs presented to him or her by group leaders. The Deacons are responsible to coordinate with group leaders regarding specific needs of particular groups and group members. Deacons are to field prayer requests of small groups by way of the group leaders and assist in the meeting of pastoral care needs of various groups. Any pastoral care needs that a Deacon is not able to meet or facilitate are to be brought to Deacon Board and/or the pastoral staff. Deacons are to coordinate with the small group leaders under their supervision on a monthly basis.

Level 4 – Pastoral Staff: The pastoral staff oversees the Deacons in their facilitation of small group pastoral care needs and prayer requests. The pastoral staff handles pastoral care needs that cannot be met by the small groups, small group leaders, or the Deacons (such as church discipline issues, counseling issues, etc.). The pastoral staff is to coordinate with the Deacons regarding pastoral and prayer concerns of small groups on a monthly basis.

In addition to pastoral care, this model facilitates effective communication throughout the church body. It provides channels for communicating vision and values as well as needs in an efficient and effective way. Moreover, this model can open up avenues of leadership development within the church, allowing members to rise to the level of their calling through a variety of places to serve, and allowing laypeople to have more of a “hands on” involvement in the operation of the church.

SMALL GROUP MODEL OF MINISTRY

Small groups will be the primary vehicle of adult discipleship for adults at Riverview Baptist Church. All other adult Christian Education ministries will be in supplement to these groups.

Structure

Each group will consist of 6-10 adult individuals as invited to participate by the group's primary leader. Leaders should try to incorporate a diversity of people (age, marital status, children, etc.) from the church into each group, taking into consideration the geographical location of potential group members and scheduling demands brought about by demographic differences (scheduling conflicts because of children, etc.). Each group is responsible to coordinate child care if so needed or desired.

Groups are to remain "open" in that people may join or leave the group as so desired, although groups should not exceed 10 adults. That is, once a group has accumulated 10 members, it is closed until a spot opens within it. There will always be at least one open group functioning within the church to accommodate those who have recently joined the church and would like to be a part of a group, or for those who have recently left a group and would like to join another one.

Groups are free to determine their own meeting schedule (day of the week, length of meeting, location, summer breaks, etc.). Groups are strongly encouraged to meet at least twice per month for a period of at least 90 minutes per meeting (this amount of time is most conducive for Bible study and prayer). Groups are encouraged to meet off the church campus (preferably in a home), and to meet outside of regularly scheduled church activities.

In our small groups we commit to the word of God as being central to our life, growth, and worship. Therefore, in order to foster community and spiritual growth, both in the small group and in the church in general, the Bible study portion of small groups follows the current sermon series. Study guides are produced and provided by the pastoral staff. Small group leaders will be trained in using these study guides as springboards for small group studies.

Leaders

Small group leaders will be recruited by the pastoral staff and the Deacon Board. Training for small group leaders on the vision and purpose of Riverview's small group ministry, as well as how to effectively conduct a small group meeting, will be provided. Small group leaders will be responsible to their Deacon representative, the Deacon Board in general, and the pastoral staff.

Leaders are responsible to coordinate the details of their group's structure and organization (meeting time, length, location, etc.) within the group. Group leaders should also be the principle Bible study leader as well, although there is flexibility in this (such as allowing others to develop gifts of teaching, etc.). Leaders are also responsible to field prayer and pastoral care requests from group members and communicate these to the group's Deacon on a monthly basis.

Deacons

The Deacon Board will oversee the small group ministry along with the pastoral staff. Each Deacon will be assigned a small group or groups to be under their care. Deacons are responsible to coordinate with each small group leader under their care on a monthly basis for the purpose of receiving prayer and pastoral care needs, and also for the purpose of general communication between the groups and the leadership structure of the church.

Deacons are to give a monthly report on the condition of the groups under their care at the Deacon meeting.

Promotion

Implementation of a small group ministry should be accompanied by a sermon series, literature, and special events that communicate the church's general conviction as to the priority of sanctification through fellowship, and particularly the means of addressing this conviction by way of small group ministry. A small groups fair is to be conducted at the end of each summer in order to encourage members and regular attendees of the church to become active in a small group, provide information about small group ministry, and to communicate openings in current groups.

Incorporating a small group ministry into Riverview's existing adult education ministries

There are currently several adult Christian education ministries that exist at Riverview, such as adult Sunday school, prayer meeting, and the men's and women's Bible studies. The scope and influence of these ministries should be adjusted in order to accentuate the church's emphasis on small group ministry. For example, for the purpose of accommodating visitors, incorporating new members, and offering areas of study not readily accessible in small group environments, adult Sunday school classes can remain as they currently exist. Wednesday evening studies could be adjusted, however, to offer one study/prayer meeting for all adults, allowing members of the men's and women's Bible studies to join small groups that meet at other times, thereby freeing them up for volunteer service in another church ministry. A comprehensive plan that includes changes and adaptations to current ministries would need to be developed.

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