

Sierra Leadership Network Curriculum: Month 11, Year 3

Participation in the Sierra Leadership Network (SLN) is a process of adult learning. It is the responsibility of the participant to do their assignments and seek out the necessary accountability. It is the responsibility of the participant to schedule time with their mentor, not the other way around. Here is a checklist of this month's exercises and space for comments. All useful generated materials should be placed in your Sierra Leadership Network binder. The mentor will look over the exercises and be given opportunity to add their own comments. Be sure you take your binder to the meetings at Granite Springs Church to also be available to the SLN directors.

Month 11, Year 3

Date Completed

____/____/____ Small Groups Content [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments:

____/____/____ Small Groups Competency [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments

____/____/____ Small Groups Character [Estimated time: _____]

Mentor Comments

Participant Signature

Mentor Signature

I. Small Groups (Content)

1. Small Group ministry is an essential component of church ministry in our world today
 - a. Churches have recognized that small groups are not an additional function or a church “add-on”, they are often the most essential organized level of community life the church has. Someone who isn’t in a small group isn’t really in the church in many churches.
 - b. Most cutting edge churches have seen that they cannot be a church with small groups, they need to be a church of small groups
 - c. Much literature has been written over the last 20 years about these principles. Reference Carl George along with materials from Saddleback, Willow, etc. regarding what has become standard ministry in most high impact churches today.
 - d. Small groups often impact people’s lives in a more significant way than the main weekly worship/teaching event.
 - e. Most of the common, individual ministry no longer happens by a pastor doing rounds or elders making calls but rather in the context of small groups.
 - f. Small groups in many churches are the main vehicle the church has for basic life-applied discipleship, fellowship, community, prayer, pastoral care, church discipline, Bible study. A highly functional small group quickly becomes the active church within the broader church.
2. The need for small group ministry is very much a part of changes in suburban North American society:
 - a. Many people are disconnected geographically from familial networks or those networks are so dysfunctional that they do more harm than good.
 - b. Churches used to be able to assume that family relationships would provide members with discipling, discipline, community, fellowship, prayer, etc. Those relationships are in most cases not available to individuals and people now look to have these needs met through other avenues.
 - c. Relationships within churches through small groups often become the surrogate family network for Christians.
3. As the small group movement has matured the manner and means of doing small group ministry and managing small groups have diversified
 - a. There are many fine programs and books that dictate a rigid regime for how to lead a successful small group ministry. Most involve rules about leadership, succession, multiplication, who to balance content and sharing in the group, how to manage discipleship, etc. Many of these programs are fine but over time churches have seen that the realities are far more diverse leading to a more pragmatic understanding where wise leaders consider what is actually happening before imposing guidelines or alien forms on groups.
 - b. Different kinds of groups meet different kinds of needs for different groups of people at different times. Some groups may do no study but major in community and relationship development, opening the doors later for more intentional discipleship or education.

Other plans have specific and structured programs to achieve very specific concrete goals. The issue is not one being better than the other, the question the leader has to work through is which is most appropriate for a given person or time.

4. Certain key and nearly universal aspects of small group have emerged:
 - a. A small group is usually a self-aware group (they understand themselves as having something and being something) of between 3 and 15 people. As numbers get above 12 dynamics start to change and the groups usually become a different kind of thing.
 - b. There is a leadership function within a group. Whether it is intentional or unintentional there will be some leadership exerted by someone in the group to create the thing and sustain the thing. There may be one leader or there may be different ones functioning in different ways but generally speaking there is no small group without leadership.
 - c. Small groups meet, and at least for the first years of the group the more they meet the sooner intimacy will develop. Intimacy is really the key element of small groups that cannot be achieved when numbers get larger. It is the way people open their hearts to let new things in. Intimacy can take different shapes and forms. It can be spoken or assumed, obvious or quiet but intimacy is key.

II. Small Groups Competency

1. Make a list of all of the small groups that you can find in your church. They may be formal or informal. They may be programmed and initiated by the church or they may have developed organically.
2. Create a chart categorizing these groups. Find categories that are helpful for you in getting a picture of how these groups start, what needs they fill, how they sustain themselves and what role they play in the life of the church. Some categories might be formal vs. informal, programmed vs. spontaneous, affinity based vs. Bible study, high commitment vs. low commitment, frequency of meetings, diverse membership vs. specifically targeted (retired women, MOPS, basketball players, etc.)
3. Take a look at your chart and make some observations about your church through this chart. What percentage of your church's core is involved in a small group? Is there a correlation between people staying or leaving your church in terms of small group participation? Are small groups helping your church grow or helping enfold new people into the life of the church? Are your small groups generating more church leadership?
4. Share what you learn with your mentor or senior pastor. Where appropriate you might make some recommendations.

III. Small Groups Character

1. Where are you at in terms of small group ministry in your church.
 - a. Do you have at least one small group that you are faithful with?
 - b. Have you started a small group in your church?
 - c. Have you lead a small group in your church?

2. If you can't answer "yes" to any of the questions above you are probably not ready to lead a church because of the importance of small group ministry for the church today.

3. What do you need to do to get up to speed?
 - a. Start a group?
 - b. Read some good books on small group leadership?
 - c. Help start a small group movement within your church?