

PREPARING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FOR MINISTRY THROUGH SMALL GROUPS: A CASE STUDY OF VALLEY VIEW UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Equipping the laity for ministry is a biblical mandate of the minister (Eph 4:12-16). How to successfully mobilize and equip the laity for ministry, however, is a major challenge to ministry. One of the means to achieve this is through the small group ministry. Most of the literature on the small groups, however, concentrates on traditional church system. Institutional churches, especially, those in the universities are sidelined in most of the literature on small groups. This paper explores the how to prepare university students for ministry through the small group ministry at Valley View University. Other faith-based institutions will find this paper helpful on how best to in equipping university students for ministry through the small groups.

1. Introduction

Equipping the laity for ministry remains a major task and challenge to pastoral ministry (Eph 4:12-13). Most often, this is taken for granted. The small group ministry has proven to be an effective means to equip laity for ministry (Long, et al, 1995; Kwon, 2005; Peel & Larimore, 2010; Richardson, 2000; Knowles, 1997; Reisinger, 1982). A lot has been written on small groups, especially and its effectiveness in mobilizing and equipping the laity for ministry. Most of the literature on small groups, nevertheless, concentrates on the traditional church system (Dougherty & Whitehead 2011; Thumma & Bird 2009; Ellison et al 2009; Dougherty & Huyser 2008; Martin 2007; Easum & Atkinson 2007; Emerson 2006; Arnold 2004; Dougherty 2003; Dalton 2002; Neighbour 2000; Thomas & Jardine 1994; Wuthnow 1994a, 1994b, 1994c; Wilson et al. 1993; George 1992). Institutional churches, especially those in the tertiary institutions are neglected in the literature on small groups. Besides the Sabbath school units, the Valley View University has no other recognized small group ministry.

The need for small groups ministries at the institutional church of Valle View University is therefore pressing and appropriate.

The objective of this paper is to tackle small group ministry in the context of tertiary institutions. To do this, this paper discusses the following: biblical foundation of small groups, mission, spiritual formation, small group ministry in Valley View University. This paper also proposes some practical ways to equip university students for ministry through the small group model. Upon successful implementation of the strategies, other schools, and churches who want to ensure effective ministries of their laity may find it useful to adapt it to their own peculiar settings. The study employed a case study method, combining observation and archival methodologies (McBurney & White, 2007).

2. Concept Biblical Foundation of Small Group Ministry

This section analyses the biblical foundation of small group ministry in the church. The small group ministry has a solid biblical base. Genesis' creation account (Gen 1) portrays God in a small group setting (Gen 1:26). The Hebrew *Elohim* is plural and portrays the fact that God exists within the divine form of small group. The concept of the Trinity pictures a relationship within a group (McBride, 1990).

Exodus 18:21-26 records Jethro's advice to Moses concerning how he should lead the children of Israel during the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. He advised Moses to organize the people in small groups of ten, with a leader, for administrative purposes. These smallest groups formed group of fifty (five groups of tens), with a leader. They still formed a group of hundreds (two groups of fifties), with a leader. They formed another group of thousand (ten groups of hundreds), with a leader. Then, the nation formed one bigger group, with Moses as the human leader. In the view of Jethro, this makes for easier administration (Exod 18:22-23). It also ensures delegation and cooperate responsibility (Exod 18:21-22). Moreover, it serves as a remedy for burnout (Exod. 18:18). Moses heeded the advice and administered the children as such (Exod 18:24-26).

The Old Testament (OT) records of the Israelites also portray the notion and practice of groups of their individual and corporate identity. From national to family unit, large and small groups permeated the Jewish existence (Exod 18; Deut 49; Josh 7). The nation Israel was divided into twelve sub-groups (tribes) by virtue of their descent from the twelve sons of Jacob. The tribes constituted administrative units. These tribes were further divided into families or clans, which were also administrative

units. The various families were divided into households. A specific man, his wife and children was the smallest unit within the Jewish identity. A single family unit was the heart of the Jewish society- the primary small group. These identity groupings provided political, social, and administrative units in Israel (McBride, 1990).

The New Testament (NT) records some small groups as a key method of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus is portrayed as the greatest small group leader in history (McBride, 1990). Jesus' use of small group, therefore, becomes the rationale for local church's use of small groups as an integral part of its congregational life (McBride, 1990). Jesus began His ministry on earth by establishing disciples as a "small group" (Matt. 4:18-22; 10:2-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:13-16; John 1:37-49). Jesus used the small group context to teach and model spiritual knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. It was also His method for leadership training (McBride, 1990).

The early church also used small groups. Small groups were integral to the development and success of the NT church. The Jerusalem church was made up of household small groups (Acts 2:41-42; 5:42). The house church structure continued even in Gentile communities (Rom. 16:5; Philem. 2) until the time of Emperor Constantine, where church buildings, cathedrals, and basilicas began to displace the house churches (McBride, 1990). Ellen White (1946) stated: "The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented to me by One who cannot err" (Evangelism, p.115). Small group ministry, thus, has a divine endorsement.

2.1 Mission

Some people think that only the minister/pastor should bear the burden of ministry. This notion, however, should not be so. God's designed that every member of the congregation should bear his/her part of the work. If the pastor bears all the burden of ministry, he might be broken down and die earlier than he ought to. If the burden of ministry is shared by every member of the congregation, the pastor might live longer. Church members should be educated to emulate Christ's example and share the burden of the work. This education should be done by competent persons (E. White, 1948b; Knowles, 1997). E. White (1948b) added that no one should entertain the wrong notion that the ministry of the gospel should be solely done by the pastor/minister. God has given to every member some work to do with regards to the kingdom of God. Every Christian should work assiduously to advance God's cause and to share the gospel of Christ with the world. Every Christian should be a missionary and win souls for Christ (E. White, 1948b; Reisinger, 1982). It is easier agreeing with the above statements, than to put it into practice. How to get the

members equipped and motivated to minister remains the leader's burden (Knowles, 1997).

Moskala (2008a, 2008b) has explained that the main mission of God's people in the OT was to portray the correct picture of God to other nations where sin had tainted their view of God. He has pointed out that God's people could achieve their mission to the heathen nations if they had experienced God's selfless love towards them through their personal relationship with God. He emphasizes that "Personal relationship with God was basic to fulfilling their divine mission to the rest of the world" (p. 18-19). He continues thus: "When God calls His people into existence, He gives them a mission. There were no Old Testament people of God without a mission; there is no election without a commission. God's call presupposes a call for action" (Moskala, 2008b, 40). Weinrich (1981, Jan-Apr) agrees with Moskala when he explained that "the history and the nature of the Christians Church is intricate with the mission activity" (p. 61). The essence of the Church is mission (Weinrich, 1981, Jan-Apr).

Hassel (1983) highlights the importance of development the educational ministry that will empower church members to participate in future-responsive mission. Ortlund (1981, Jan-Mar) opines that "The problem most churches face is not that they do not do anything; they do plenty. The problem is that they are not doing the right things" (p. 3). Ortlund (1981, Jan-Mar) has emphasized the importance of doing the right thing in equipping the congregation for mission. The laity should be train to minister in their various capacities for the progress of the church (Knowles, 1997).

2.2 Spiritual Formation

A recent study (Dougherty & Whitehead, 2011) has discovered that small group involvement increases ones appreciation of acceptance, church attendance, and positively impacts member's contribution towards church work. Small group involvement has become a powerful means to advance member's vitality in both big and small churches (Dougherty & Whitehead, 2011).

Mark 3:13-14 and Luke 6:12-16 give the basic steps Jesus followed in growing people. These include praying, calling, appointing (communion), mentoring (community), and sending (commission). Jesus sought divine guidance through prayer (Luke 6: 12-16). He concentrated on growing the individual (Luke 13:21), and through the individual, reached many (E. White, 1948). E. White (1952) points out that Christ "came to show how men are to be trained as befits the sons of God; how on earth they are to practice the principles and to live the life of heaven" (Education, p. 74). E. White (1948) underscores the importance of working thoroughly for the individual, and the multiplying effects. E. White (1941) also states, "The

object of the Christian life is fruit bearing, the reproduction of Christ's character in the believer that it may be reproduced in others" (*Christ Object Lessons*, p. 67). Clouzet (2001, 1997) laments the seeming absence of character development of students in Christian institutions. He considers the example of Christian educators as a prime factor to influence the character development of their students. He explains that if the mentor's character is transformed; it positively influences the transformation of the student's character. He states that the challenge of leadership formation has to do with whether our students can see God in the mentor/instructor/teacher.

A recent study (Lau, 2012) has found that character development come first skill training in effective leadership development. It also reveals that "Christ-like character, spiritual maturity, and a willingness to serve are more important than a person's natural abilities and talents" (iii, iv). Smith (2007) stresses the need to transform Christian ministry of our time. He recommends the need to emphasize the spiritual formation of the character of lay leaders in order to sustain lay leaders in Christian ministry.

Berry (2009) has noted that the focus of the teachings of Jesus was on the spiritual preparation of the heart, to prepare the audience for eternal life. Banks (2002) has stressed that Christ's earthly devotional life had an influence on the spiritual development of the disciples. He has pointed out Jesus's prayer life and use of Scriptures were examples for the disciples. S. Smith (2013) has identified the effectiveness of lay witness at the workplace. Fully equipped, the lay person can reach people that church leaders alone may never reach (S. Smith, 2013; J. Smith, 2007).

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education fosters a balanced development of the whole person-spiritually, intellectually, physically and socially(*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education*, 2001). The education and training of the youth should focus on development of character. If ministers and teachers could appreciate their complete obligation, the world would be a better place today. E. White (1968) has stressed that the divine purpose for establishing Seventh-day Adventist universities and colleges is to save souls. Seventh-day Adventist education ought to prepare students for service. (E. White, 1943).

2.3 Valley View University

Valley View University is one of the over 100 universities and colleges owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Oyibi campus has a student population of over 6000. The Techiman campus has about 2000 students. It is located within the South and the North and Ghana Union respectively, in the West African Division (WAD) of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Valley View University offer the following
Schools/Faculties/programmes:

1. The School of Theology and Missions comprises the Department of Theology and the Department of Religious Studies
2. The Faculty of Science comprises of the Department of Computer Science and the Department of Information Studies
3. The School of Business Studies comprises of the Department of Accounting, the Department of Marketing, the Department of Banking and Finance, the Department of Management Studies, and the Department of Human Resources
4. The School of Education, Development Studies comprises of the Department of Education, the Department of General Education,
5. The School of Health Science comprises of the Department of Nursing and the Department of Development Studies
6. School of Graduate Studies comprises of Master of Business Administration (Banking and Finance), Master of Business Administration (Strategic Management), Master of Business Administration (Human Resources Management), Post Graduate Diploma (Education), Post Graduate Diploma (Pastoral Ministry). In collaboration with Adventist University of Africa (AUA), the School also offers Master of Business Administration in Accounting (cohort and regular); Master of Business Administration in Information Systems (cohort and regular); Master of Business Administration in Management (cohort and regular); Master of Art in Biblical and Theological Studies (cohort). In collaboration with Andrews University, the School offers Master of Science (International Development)
7. Pre-university programme: American High Certificate. (Retrieve April 4 2014, 4:40pm)
8. Valley View University, as a Christian institution of higher learning, has an objective to prepare students and graduates for ministry both in the Seventh-day Adventist Church and in the wider society. Her mandate to prepare holistic products for ministry remains a privilege and a challenge. With the current surge in number of students, this mandate should be given a greater priority. It is the purpose of this paper to offer practical suggestions to ensure that the holistic education of Adventist Christian education become a useful tool to prepare lay people to service through small group ministries. There is no small group ministry at View University, with the exception of Sabbath school units, which meet every Sabbath morning before the divine service to discuss the Sabbath school lesson for the week. The Sabbath units, how-

ever, need to improve their functions like visiting absentee members in their apartments/halls. The small group ministry at Valley View University will improve the functions of the Sabbath school units and establish units in other departments of the church.

3. Small Groups Ministry

What is small group ministry? There are many advantages of Small Groups. They include (1) they help group members to grow as disciples of Jesus; (2) they build deep relationships between believers and a strong sense of community in the church; (3) they help believers develop their spiritual gifts, releasing the ministry potential of the church, and freeing pastors for the specific work they have been called to do; and (4) they also help more people come to faith in Christ (Kuntaraf, 2013). Small group ministries also ensure teambuilding, which in turn (1) produces more fruit; (2) gathers a variety of gifts/resources; (3) generate more ideas; (4) ensures accountability; (5) provides encouragement and support; and (6) helps train future leaders (Park, 2013). Small groups attract people of similar interest of different ages, race, marital, and economic status. They may also attract more people who might not want to commit themselves to long-term covenant groups, and favor people whose schedules change frequently (Hipp, n.d.).

3.1 The Need for Small Groups Today

A study (as quoted in Dougherty & Whitehead, 2011) has revealed that "The strength of a group and the commitment of its members will be a function of the specific ways the group is put together" (Kanter, 1972, 75). Kwon (2005) argues that the main problems of modern society are pervasiveness of human isolation and individualism. These problems exist both in the society and the church. The effects are that church members experience isolation as churches grow in size and numbers. Even family members feel isolated from one another. In his opinion, the church should respond to this social disintegration with the "Living Cell" project, which is a person-to-person interaction among believers, and between believers and non-believers that will lead to the creation of brother or sisterhood in Christ" (pp. 21-22). He explains that the Living Cell project could train members for the missionary work and also provide fellowship for them. Members will share one another's love and pain, gain knowledge from each other, and long for contacts and interactions with one another. Thus, the Living Cell could serve as an innovative spiritual family in God. Studies (Dougherty & Whitehead 2011; Martin 2007; Dalton 2002; Thomas &

Jardine 1994; Wuthnow 1994b, 1994c) have discovered a strong evidence of benefits when church members are involved in small group ministries.

Long, et al, (1995) have proposed the small group ministry as a means to fulfill students' deep needs for security and significance through friendships and community. Richardson (2000) has affirmed the influence of the small group ministry in the church. In addition to increased prayer life, members enjoyed fellowship with other members of the group, and invite non-Christians friends to join group meetings. Members become a community to each other and a team together in witness. Peel and Larimore (2010) have identified the opportunity to form small informal groups at workplace using common needs, common gifts and talents, common location, and common concerns. They underscore the need for Christian influence at the workplace, allowing the Christians to express their faith through overflows from in which God is actively at work.

3.2 How to Form Successful Small Groups

The first stages of a new group are very important. Primary steps to guarantee a healthy and mature new group include (1) deciding the purpose of the groups; (2) praying for God's guidance; (3) determining the needs of the church through observation; (4) enrolling leaders with matching vision for the groups; (5) meeting with and training leaders; (6) assisting leaders discover right resources for the groups; (7) inaugurating the small group ministries in a memorable way; (8) arranging for people to follow-up group members; (9) arranging for leaders meeting with staff and group leaders within the first month of inauguration; and (10) preparing a handbook for the leaders (Moore, 2002; Richardson, 2000; Mittelberg, 2000; Hipp, n.d).

4. Proposed Guidelines for the University Context

The successful formation and maintenance of Small Group spiritual formation and training units at Valley View University Campus begins with the researcher. The researcher will develop devotional life to benefit from the discipline. In 2 Timothy 3:15-17 Paul states the study of the Bible can make one wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 15). He also states that all Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (v. 16). It makes the student complete, and thoroughly equipped for good works (v. 17).

The researcher will then begin to form a core group of 6 people including me. The researcher will grow the people he will call by following Jesus' example. Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve — designating them apostles — that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach (Mark 3:13,14). The researcher will follow the principles of praying, calling, appointing, mentoring, and sending. The researcher will follow Wagner's suggestion on how leaders should pray. The researcher will increase my prayer life, develop the habit of group prayer, enlist personal intercessors, and be aware of spiritual issues (Wagner, 1984).

Following the guidelines for forming a team (D. White, 2000), the core group members whom the researcher will call should be teachable, who get along with me and everyone on the team, who share a burden for the work, who are dependable, who can take responsibilities, who have maturing faith, and who live consistent and healthy lifestyles. Moreover, the researcher will call a broad spectrum of people, including established and new members, males and females, seasoned and potential leaders, persons from community of church plant, administrators, prayerful persons, and older and a younger persons. When appointing the members of the core group, The researcher will consider the principles of how Jesus appointed he Twelve Apostles (Mark 3:14). The researcher will seek the guidance of the God through prayer. The researcher will ask God to guide me choose people who will help advance His work.

The researcher will also mentor the core group members, following Jesus' example (Mark 3:14). The researcher will make them members of my family (E. White, 1940). The researcher will also admonish the core group members to devote time for daily Bible study and prayer. The researcher will organize weekly meetings during which we will pray, study, and plan. The researcher will provide a model for caring and follow-up, and minister to each person in the group. The researcher will admonish each member to establish a closer relationship with Jesus because that is the only way that group can get closer to one another. The researcher will organize Upper Room weekend retreats, plan, pray (Kuntaraf, 2013; Park, 2013).

In our Upper Room Retreat Weekend, we will do as many things together as possible. We will worship, eat, pray, and stay together. We will divide into two-member brainstorming groups, determine grouping together for ministry, and appoint each team to a meaningful ministry. Moreover, the researcher will encourage the two-member brainstorming groups to plan and form a small group of six people each, teaching them how to multiply and replicate the process I have outlined above. As Jesus sent the Apostles, the researcher will "send" them to multiply themselves, having thoroughly equipped them (Mark 3:14; Kuntaraf, 2013; Park, 2013).

In forming the core group, which will later develop into small groups, the researcher takes note of the following: that where two or three people gathered together in Jesus' name (to seek the lost) there Jesus will be in the midst (Matt 18:20). The researcher will also transform existing groups, and begin with the Bible study group. The core and the small groups will also stay balanced, beginning with community in our meetings before transition with prayer. We will also study the Bible inductively, minister to the missing members of the group, and reach out to the empty chair, praying and calling others to join the newly formed small groups. We will pray and plan to reproduce the blessing, by multiplying the groups (Kuntaraf, 2013; Park, 2013).

On transforming existing groups, the researcher will begin with the Bible study group. We will stay balanced by turning committees into communities- each time the members meet together they should spend a balanced time for communion, community and commission. We will begin with community, sharing something that has happened in people's lives since the previous meeting, whether at home, in school, at work, about recreation, church, good news, or bad news. We will transition with prayer by making what members share their prayer list with the group. Praying for one another is one of the most caring and memorable things we can do for others (Kuntaraf, 2013; Park, 2013).

We will also study the Bible inductively through the use of Bible stories. We will also print and send out Bible passages, and have people study it before the meeting (Kuntaraf, 2013; Park, 2013; <http://bible.gospelcom.net/languages/>). On ministering to missing members, we will appoint someone as a secretary who will have the needed contact information, keep track of attendance and coordinate the follow-up. We will reach out to the empty chair. We will have an empty chair in the group and pray each week for a specific person that will come and fill the chair and become a member of the group. We will reproduce the blessing since "A little leaven, leavens the whole lump" (Gal. 5:9; Kuntaraf, 2013; Park, 2013).

5. Conclusion

The successful implementation of Small Group Ministries at the Oyibi campus of Valley View University would supplement the equipping of students for ministry to the wider society and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The strong biblical foundations of small groups both in the Bible and in the writings of Ellen G. White provide hope for its successful implementation.

The formation of small groups for ministry has strong biblical foundation. The creation account portrays God in a small group (Gen. 1). Jethro advised Moses to administer the Israelites in small groups (Exod. 18:23-27). In the Old Testament, the nation Israel practiced small groups for their individual and corporate identity (Exod. 18; Deut. 49; Josh. 7). The nation Israel was divided into twelve tribes which constituted administrative units. These tribes were further divided into families or clans, and households. A specific man, his wife and children was the smallest unit within the Jewish identity. A single family unit was the heart of the Jewish society- the primary small group. These identity groupings provided political, social, and political administrative units in Israel. In the NT, Jesus Christ and the NT Church both practiced small group ministries (Mark 3:13, 14; Luke 6:12-16; Act 2:42, 47; 5:42; Rom. 16:5; Philm. 2). In starting a small group ministry there are steps to follow. These include praying, receiving a vision for the groups to canvassing for information regarding specific needs, to actual recruitment of leaders, advertisement, kick-off, and follow-up.

To ensure a successful implementation of the Small Group Ministries at the Oyibi campus of Valley View University, the following strategies will be used: (1) the researcher will begin with Bible Study groups, an existing ministry; (2) the researcher will seek divine guidance through prayer and thorough research on small group ministries; (3) the researcher will form a core group of six people; (4) the researcher will follow Jesus' example in Mark 3:13, 14; and Luke 6 by praying, calling, appointing, mentoring, and sending. He will make a balanced use of community, communion, and commission; and (5) the core group, it is hoped, will develop into smaller groups, which will reproduce itself until it leavens the whole congregation and the larger community.

The above strategies suggested would ensure effective Small Group Ministry at the Oyibi Campus of Valley View University. The suggested strategies, if successful, would also be replicated in other campuses of the University. As a pilot project, its successful implementation would also encourage other churches, local conferences and missions in the two Ghana Unions, and other interested organizations to emulate in their respective areas of ministries.

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