

# Anchorage City Church

## Small Group Strategy

July 17, 2008

### Preamble

Small groups are important in 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian life. Whole church meetings are important for corporate worship, vision casting, teaching and exhortation, but it is in small groups that believers most readily find community, and community is the glue of the Church.

When well conceived, and led by the Holy Spirit, small groups also provide significant social and spiritual values not easily provided in the large group. These include more intimate friendship, deeper prayer support, and accountability. They also facilitate growth in spiritual maturity, exercise of spiritual gifts, leadership development, and relational opportunities for influence in the surrounding city.

Large church and small group gatherings working together can provide the best environment for growth in spiritual maturity, and a growing, better equipped congregation most able to engage with the world beyond the church building.

Small groups will help fulfill the mission of ACC:

Gather: Small groups will open doors to relationship within the ACC family. They will also provide relational doors into fellowship for outsiders; doors that gather people to the local and worldwide Church. Most evangelism takes place in the context of relationships. Small groups will provide relational opportunities as groups begin reaching outward.

Nurture: Small groups are safe communities where people can open their hearts to the healing that flows from the Lord through brothers and sisters in faith.

Equip: Small groups are little classrooms where faith will grow as people share their faith. Small groups can also provide an environment where individuals can exercise their spiritual gifts.

Mobilize: Small groups will empower people to reach beyond the comfortable walls of the church to serve the city and beyond.

For these reasons, ACC should begin the process of changing from a church with a few small groups to a church with an integral small group culture.

### Vision - The foundational purpose of ACC small groups

The purpose of small groups at City Church is to provide places where members can experience genuine community with fellow believers, grow in their intimacy with God, and find opportunities to reach out to those outside the church.

### Common Characteristics of all ACC small groups

The common "DNA" of all ACC small groups is that they ***reach up, reach in, and reach out***:

1. Reach up -- Prayer will be an essential element of group life
2. Reach in -- Groups will pursue deep personal relationships within the group
3. Reach out -- Groups will pursue opportunities to show God's love to others

Groups may apply reach up, reach in and reach out in ways are appropriate for the environment, focus, and membership of the group, but they should all be applied.

## How ACC small groups will operate

ACC will encourage the formation of small groups. We will simply call them "small groups" to avoid the appearance of a program to the younger generation.

These are some general guidelines for small group operation:

1. **Small groups may form and operate with minimal restriction.** In addition to the application of reach up, reach in and reach out, groups must remain true to the vision, mission and values of the church. Groups must also fit the ACC small group strategy articulated here, as determined by an ACC leader in advance of group formation.
2. **Small groups are free to stop meeting.**
3. **Groups may be short term (a few months) or long term (many months, or of no defined ending date).** A group's term could be freely changed by mutual consent within the group.
4. **Groups may be gender-specific, age-specific or built around particular interests or needs.**
5. **There will be five basic types of ACC small groups, and we will seek to achieve a balance among them:**
  - Life interests -- groups gathered around a specific interest; e.g. woodworking, hiking, motorcycles, fishing, etc.
  - Life service -- groups focused on service; e.g. prayer for ACC missions, providing food for the hungry, ushers, etc.
  - Life study -- groups designed to deepen understanding of the Christian life; e.g. study of a book of the Bible or other Christian work
  - Life issues -- groups existing to help individuals with issues in life; e.g. single parenting, sexual purity, marriage support, family finance, etc.
  - Life together -- groups with a focus of simply living the Christian life together in community
6. **Groups may be open, closed, or hybrid.** Open groups invite anyone to participate. Closed groups would be invitation-only. Hybrid groups might be open for some weeks, but then closed to allow relational development without the distraction of new relational connections. Most groups will be open or hybrid. A few groups may be closed to accomplish specific ministry purposes. For example, a ministry leadership team may choose to operate as a closed group. But closed groups must accept new members at some time.
7. **Groups may consist of any number of people, whether they are part of ACC or not.** Members of other churches should generally not become small group members, however. An ACC small group may have as few as two ACC members. As Jesus did, we want to work "two by two", at a minimum. They may consist of as many people as can be accommodated. However, small groups begin to lose their ability to provide close-knit community when they exceed about 10 members. For this reason, ACC will generally discourage larger groups.

## Leadership of Small Groups

Anyone who meets the requirements listed below may lead an ACC small group. Each leader must:

1. be a follower of Jesus

2. have attended Anchorage City Church or Anchorage Vineyard Church for at least the preceding six months
3. agree to support and uphold the vision, mission, values and articles of faith of the church.
4. be or have been a member of a small group. This requirement may be waived in our initial small groups.
5. be recommended by an ACC leader based on good character. Character traits that must be in place include integrity in family, finances, and behavior, and integrity in spiritual life.
6. agree to be in an accountable relationship with a designated leader
7. agree to participate in periodic classroom and experiential leadership training.
8. provide a completed application form and allow a background check. Past sin or criminal behavior does not automatically eliminate a candidate from leadership. ACC leaders will decide these cases individually based on time since the event, repentance and other factors.

Small group leaders are responsible for recruiting members for their group. The church may assist by providing published listings and small group fairs, and in other ways. Each small group leader is also responsible for the life and health of his or her group, although the church will assist by providing training and guidance.

Each leader will provide the church with a roster of small group members one month after group formation. Confidential groups may be exempted from providing names. The leader will also provide a simple weekly report (number of ACC members attending and total attendance, praises, problems).

ACC small group leaders should normally be seeking to:

1. Reproduce him or herself - develop other leaders in the group
2. Care for the group - model shepherd behavior for the members so they can learn to be a shepherd themselves
3. Help group members move at least one step closer to Jesus each term

## **Small Group Leader Support and Development**

ACC elders and staff will support small group leaders through some combination of mentoring, experience and classroom-style orientation and training. This will require more volunteer "leaders of leaders" and probably more paid staff as the church expands. Initially we will ask elders and staff to oversee 2-5 small group leaders. The staff small group coordinator will support overseers and organize training functions.

## **Using Small Groups to Improve the Function of Existing and Proposed ACC Ministries**

Wherever appropriate, ACC encourages its ministry leaders to use the small group model to accomplish their purposes. Small ministries may function well in a small group milieu. Larger ministries could organize their core leadership team as a small group. For example, the women's ministry leadership team has functioned as a small group except in name. The usher teams could function as small groups. Much of the demand for a singles ministry may dissipate when small groups begin to function well.

## **Small Group Startup Plan**

Small groups will thrive in an environment where they are regularly taught and talked about, and where small group life is modeled by church leaders. In a church lacking a small group culture, this will be a leadership challenge.

While a few small groups already exist at ACC, we will publicly initiate groups in September 2008. We will use some or all of these strategies:

1. Obtain senior leadership and staff commitment to this small group strategy and the fundamental shift in church life that will come as a result.
2. Provide teaching about small groups from the pulpit on two or three Sundays and Thursdays before September, 2008
3. Convene [an orientation meeting](#) of potential small group leaders in summer, 2008 to discuss our plans and to recruit leaders.
4. Identify potential leaders and actively train and work with them to begin small groups in the areas of their interests starting in September 2008.
5. Provide initial mentoring, experiential training, and classroom teaching in July and August 2008.
6. Provide a short final teaching and then a small group fair in both the 10 AM and noon services on a Sunday in mid September.
7. Provide easy-to-access information about available small groups on the church website and in other ways
8. Provide ongoing mentoring and training using a structure sufficient to support the groups we have existing.
9. Provide ongoing entry points for new leaders and pulpit and other messages encouraging the development of new groups
10. Provide a second term kickoff in January with leaders who have been encouraged to start small group ministries during the Fall term

## Measuring Success

A successful small group wing of the church will engage a majority of regular church attendees, and it will contribute significantly to the mission of the church. We will measure some characteristics of small groups to assess success. We will:

1. regularly compare total small group attendance to our Thursday night/Sunday morning large group attendance to monitor participation rate.
2. monitor the number of people outside the church family who are participating in small groups to monitor outreach.
3. observe the qualitative functioning of individual groups to assess whether they are as a group meeting the vision articulated here and the vision of ACC.

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*This document was initially drafted by David Johnson based on foundational concepts developed in the Spring of 2008 by a team consisting of Marita "Tiny" Biddle, Brian Gray, Erin Lynn Gray, David Johnson and Loren Wilson.*

*This strategy was approved by Pastor Irwin on May 30, 2008. The document continues to change as we better understand how we can serve our city and our congregation.*