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DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
FOR THE ADULTS OF THE NORTHSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH  
OF INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education Ministry

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by  
Steven M McNeil  
December 2012

## **APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
FOR THE ADULTS OF THE NORTHSIDE BAPTIST  
CHURCH OF INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

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Steven M McNeil

Indianapolis, Indiana

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop a comprehensive small group ministry plan for the adults of The Northside Baptist Church of Indianapolis, Indiana. The purpose was accomplished by achieving the following five goals.

#### **Goals**

The first goal was to compare two models of small group ministry and determine their similar principles and practices. The two models are the adult Sunday School model and the Home Small Group model. This project explored the similarities found in these models.

The second goal was to prepare and present a training experience for the Sunday School, small group and staff leadership of Northside Baptist Church that showed the similarities in the models described in goal number one.

The training experience of goal number two was a three hour seminar to train the leaders in the Biblical principles for small groups found in the Biblical research in Acts 2:42-47 which was then compared with the similarities found in the research of the two models. The trained leaders then taught the training material to their Sunday School or small group over a three week time period. The goal was to change the attitude of leaders from believing that one model (Sunday School or Home Small Groups) is better than the other, to an attitude of appreciation for both the Sunday School model and the Home Small Group model. If this goal was achieved there should be an appreciation in

the church that both models should be part of an overall delivery system to provide Bible study to adults. The leadership sample group was made up of the existing adult Sunday School leaders, adult small group leaders, and the pastoral staff members. This goal was measured by a questionnaire that was given at the beginning of the training process (pre-test) and then after the leadership taught the training material to existing Sunday School classes and small groups (post-test). The questionnaire was given to the leadership, to the Sunday School classes and small groups, prior to their training, and then the same questionnaire was given to the same groups at the end of the training to see if there was a shift in attitude toward Sunday School and small groups.

The third goal was to present a three-week process with the regular worship attenders of Northside Baptist Church where some of the same information found in goals one and two was presented to the entire worship audience by way of informational pieces in the worship bulletin and worship service media presentations.

This information was presented to promote an attitude change from thinking that either Sunday School or Home Small Groups is the better model to the perception that sees both models as valuable ways to involve adults in Bible study. It was also part of this goal to change attitudes of adult worship attenders that do not currently participate in either type of Bible study to become involved in either type. The first step to make this piece of the proposal effective was in goal number two where it dealt with educating the church leadership about these methods. It was very important to gain the trust of church leadership for this project to have maximum success. If attitudes are shown to have changed through the use of the questionnaire, and the leadership does see the validity of both Sunday School and Home Small Groups, the second step of the third goal was to use training and promotional methods intended to inform the attenders of Northside Baptist Church about both models. If the goal was effective, people would begin to appreciate the value of both methods and see how each served to accomplish the

goal of getting adults involved in Bible study.

The fourth goal of this project was to see an increase in the involvement of adults who are participating in adult Bible study as a result of this training and promotional plan. This was measured by determining the average attendance in Sunday School and small groups for the three months prior to the start of this project and then compared these averages with attendance at the conclusion of the project to see if there was an increase.

The fifth goal was to develop and present to the church leadership, a small group Bible study ministry plan for adults (see chapter four). This plan includes the utilization of Home Small Groups and traditional Sunday School as the plan to deliver Bible study to the adults of the Northside Baptist Church. While this plan was proposed for one church setting, this philosophy can be an example to be used by other churches as well.

### **Context**

The Northside Baptist Church is located in the northeast part of Indianapolis, Indiana. Northside has had a strong, stable history over its forty-eight years. It has been known as a church of growth and solid pastoral leadership. Pastors and staff of Northside have been leaders in the state and the national convention. The last four senior pastors have served as the State Convention president during their pastorate at Northside.

The church has been transitioning since the early 1990's from a traditional Southern Baptist church with a committee structure, a traditional worship style, and traditional Sunday School organization to a team-based structure, a blended and contemporary worship style, a satellite ministry, and both Home Small Groups and Sunday School.

## **General Background and History**

The Northside Baptist Church was the 1500<sup>th</sup> Southern Baptist church constituted in the Great Lakes region of the United States on December 31, 1963 ([Worshipfortoday.com/history](http://Worshipfortoday.com/history)). The church was birthed out of the First Southern Baptist Church of Indianapolis. Twenty-six charter members began meeting in a home for Bible study with the hope of starting a new church.

Northside Baptist Church meets in the northeast part of Indianapolis in an established neighborhood with homes between twenty and fifty years old. The facilities are three blocks east of Keystone Avenue which is a major north / south thoroughfare. The church address is on east 71<sup>st</sup> Street, which is a secondary city street. The location was adequate until the early 1990's when the church began to experience crowded facilities in its worship, education, and parking space.

The church is debt free, owns 13.5 acres of land, and effectively uses about five acres due to a flood plane and creek in the middle of the property. There is approximately 39,000 square feet of facilities, parking for 360 cars, worship space for 500 and classroom space for 400. Church worship attendance was at 750 and Sunday School attendance at 585 in the late 1990s.

In September of 2000, the senior pastor resigned due to a moral issue, which left a scar on the personality and self-esteem of the church. Northside had an interim pastor for 17 months before they called a new pastor in June 2002. That pastor announced his resignation to leave to another pastorate in 2010. The church is currently averaging 321 in worship and 257 in small group Bible Study, which includes Sunday School and the beginning stages of home bible study groups. The church called a new pastor in May of 2011 who resigned in October of 2012.

## **Analysis of the Setting**

Northside has shown consistent growth over its forty-eight year history. The

growth rate has been between 3% and 7% every year until 2000, when the senior pastor resigned and Northside went into a 20-month interim period. During that time the church experienced a number of internal conflicts over different issues that the church had not experienced in its earlier history. Previously the church was blessed with a lack of conflict and petty disputes. Since the 2000 resignation, conflict and disagreement have been experienced regularly.

The average age of the church has been growing older but is still relatively young. The average age has grown from 31 years old in 1987 to 39 presently. These averages were determined in annual age studies of the entire membership.

### **Groups the Church Is Currently Reaching**

There is the beginning of a positive racial mix in the church. A number of African-American families in the membership participate and serve in leadership roles. In the late 1990's the part-time staff member who served with college and singles was an African-American female. The church has one family from Iran, one from Bangladesh, one from Africa and several with Hispanic background.

In August 2004, the church moved to a satellite ministry philosophy with two locations under the same ministry umbrella of Northside Baptist Church. This move changed some of the percentage dynamics at the main campus where 75 percent of the preschool, children and youth moved to the north campus, which met in a local high school. This ministry stopped in June of 2007.

There has been a healthy make up of age groups in the church. The following percentages represent those that are either members of the church or that are on the Sunday School rolls. These percentages are from 2005, the year after the start of the satellite ministry. Preschoolers represented 10.6% of this group; children 10.3%; youth 13.4%; adults 18-55 was 53%, adults 56 and over represent 13% of the church make up.

The percentages prior to the satellite ministry starting were, preschool 16%, children 13%, youth 18%, adults between 18-55 were 43%, and adults 56 and over were 10%. The current make up of these age groups is, preschool 5%, children 25%, students 6%, adults 61%.

### **What Groups Are Not Being Reached?**

Northside has seen changes in the mixture of age groups in its attendance, which means there are several areas that need attention. With a once strong student ministry, one would think that the 18-25 year old adult area would also be strong. This assumption has not been the case due to students graduating from high school, going to college, and in general not returning to church. The north campus emphasis caused a large decrease in the student population at the main campus as many went to the north campus where the student minister spent most of his Sunday mornings. When the north campus was discontinued, these same students did not return to the main campus ministry. The student ministry has not been as strong since 2000.

The north campus pulling students away from the main campus and the general move of college age adults not returning to church is seen in research done by George Barna. He found a pattern in college age adults across the country displaying a similar pattern to leave home and become inactive in the local church. Barna's research shows that 46% of adults from 18-24 are unchurched and 54% who do attend with any regularity (Barna 2000b, 38).

Since the year 2000, the church has been experiencing a loss of its youngest couples that get married and then feel that there is not a place for them either in the Sunday School organization or in the church in general. Several of these newly married adults and single adults have left over the past ten years to attend churches in the north suburban areas where the age group in those churches is closer to their own.

Attempts have been made to improve the church's ministry to college students since 2005. Northside is 6 miles from Butler University and 10.5 miles from Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis (IUPUI). Many of the church's college members attend these schools. There has been an increase of Butler students visiting the worship services. There has not been great progress to capture and keep these students attending worship. The decision was made by the college director to move the weekly college Bible study time from Sunday morning at the main campus to Saturday night. This has left college students without a Bible study opportunity on Sunday morning at the main campus when other adults are participating in Sunday School. The church has regular guests on Sunday morning who ask about Bible study for college students. There has always been a certain level of frustration in trying to reach college students during the traditional Sunday morning Sunday School time due to the lack of regular attendance of this same age group.

The single adult world is a great opportunity for the church. Within 3 miles of the church are approximately 32,000 singles (Center for Missional Research 2010). Within one mile of the church are large apartment complexes filled with singles and young couples. Northside has not presently been able to penetrate this potential group to any level of success.

A third area of potential has been a dream started during the mid 1990's by senior pastor and an ad-hoc leadership team organized to search out ideas for growth and expansion of the church. One of those ideas was to relocate the church further northeast of the current location into Hamilton County which is northeast of Indianapolis. It is growing with a mixture of age groups and economic backgrounds from middle to upper class. In 1997, Northside completed a study of the locations of its membership. From that study the church discovered that the center point of its membership is about three miles northeast of its current location. The present location of the church is along the



south edge of its membership base. There have been studies, surveys, research, strategies, and planning done to find a way to relocate further north. The conclusion of the church leadership at that time was to move north which was strongly influenced by the location issues of the current church site. Factors influencing this conclusion include the church site being in a flood plane, the majority of the membership being north of the campus, and the growth of the Hamilton County area. Half of the church property is across a creek that can be reached only via a footbridge. The area where the church facility footprint sits is also in this flood plane and requires that the church build up a dirt foundation so that any new building would be above the flood plane. In Northside's last building program, \$250,000.00 (total cost 1.5 million dollars) of the project was for dirt to meet the requirements of the flood plane. The current property is in a residential area which is also somewhat difficult to find.

The decision was made in 1998 to move and to sell the current facility (church vote of 67% to move and 33% to stay). In 2000, the senior pastor resigned, the church spent much of the interim period dealing with staff issues and church fellowship issues. The dream to move to a new location began to transition into a vision to continue at the current location and to create an annex or satellite ministry in the northeast area of Indianapolis called Fishers (Hamilton County).

### **Analyzing the Demographics**

The location of the church is on an invisible line between socio-economic areas. To the west is the intersection of E. 71<sup>st</sup> and Keystone. To the north and west of that intersection is an area called Ravenswood. It is composed of a complex cultural demographic of socio-economic groups and lifestyles. Mix with that a representation of good hearted, hardworking people who value honesty and faith. South of 71<sup>st</sup> Street on the east side of Keystone are areas that were once middle income and even some upper middle income homes that are transitioning to a lower level economically and to more of

a racial mix. To the north and east of the church are middle and upper middle-income areas that are slightly more stable.

The personal experience of surveying door to door in the community has led to the observation that the predominant faith represented in the area within one half mile of the church site is strongly Catholic. St. Pious Catholic Church is one block west of Northside Baptist Church on E. 71<sup>st</sup> Street. Both St. Pius and Northside have existed for a similar length of time, but the degree of influence in the community is felt by the strength of the Catholic presence in the community. Northside has done door-to-door contacting for fifteen years and continuously runs into the comment at the homes, “that we are members at St. Pius.”

Two miles northeast of the church is one of Indiana’s busiest shopping malls. Three major roads carry people from the Northside area to the extreme north and northeast suburbs. They are Keystone Ave., Allisonville Road, and Interstate 69. To the east of the church location is also a major area of growth. The following is a summary of the demographic information derived from the 2000 Census (US Census Bureau 2000). Table 1 shows the population numbers for one mile from The Northside Baptist Church in the years of 2000 and 2009 and in the census projections for 2014. Table 2 gives the same population numbers on a three-mile basis. Tables 1 and 2 reflect the statistical data for the years 2000 and 2009 with the projected data for the year 2014 in the right column for the following categories, population, number of households, number of families and average size of those households in the particular areas. Tables 3 and 4 reflect the household income levels (number of households in each salary range and the percentage number of households in that salary range) at the one mile and three-mile levels.

Table 1: Population demographics 1 mile  
from Northside Baptist Church

Summary	2000	2009	2014
Population	8,140	7,758	7,627
Households	3,833	3,735	3,702
Families	2,061	1,856	1,769
Average Household Size	2.12	2.07	2.06
Owner Occupied HUs	2,605	2,482	2,417
Renter Occupied HUs	1,228	1,254	1,285
Median Age	40.7	43.7	44.9

Table 1 shows a declining population projection in a one mile radius of Northside Baptist Church. It also shows a decline in the average family size. It also reveals an increasing median age over the next few years. The age is still young enough to be family oriented but this information does not show if the average household size is due to families with one child or single adults who live with another person.

Table 2: Population demographics 3 miles  
from Northside Baptist Church

Summary	2000	2009	2014
Population	64,428	63,336	63,026
Households	30,595	30,775	30,857
Families	15,590	14,449	13,921
Average Household Size	2.08	2.03	2.02
Owner Occupied HUs	18,245	17,824	17,569
Renter Occupied HUs	12,349	12,951	13,288
Median Age	36.6	38.5	38.8

Table 2 reflects a contradiction. The projected population is in decline, yet the number of households is projected to increase. This could be due to an increasing population of adult households without children. The average household size is projected to decrease and the age increase.

**Table 3: Household Income within 1 mile  
of Northside Baptist Church**

	2000		2009		2014	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under \$15,000	462	11.6%	311	8.3%	307	8.3%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	400	10.0%	290	7.8%	273	7.4%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	531	13.3%	362	9.7%	319	8.6%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	661	16.6%	605	16.2%	537	14.5%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	811	20.3%	755	20.2%	908	24.5%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	441	11.1%	698	18.7%	679	18.3%
\$100,000- \$149,999	433	10.9%	464	12.4%	433	11.7%
\$150,000- \$199,000	100	2.5%	111	3.0%	107	2.9%
\$200,000 +	148	3.7%	139	3.7%	138	3.7%
Median Household Income	\$48,471		\$58,611		\$59,027	
Average Household Income	\$65,889		\$73,627		\$73,817	
Per Capita Income	\$31,971		\$35,517		\$35,890	

**Table 4: Household Income within 3 miles  
of Northside Baptist Church**

	2000		2009		2014	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Under \$15,000	2,643	8.6%	1,883	6.1%	1,862	6.0%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	2,945	9.6%	1,976	6.4%	1,895	6.1%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	3,905	12.7%	2,768	9.0%	2,459	8.0%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	5,186	16.9%	4,768	15.5%	4,251	13.8%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	6,537	21.3%	6,589	21.4%	7,875	25.5%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	3,848	12.6%	5,772	18.8%	5,679	18.4%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	3,294	10.7%	3,975	12.9%	3,818	12.4%
\$150,000 - \$199,000	947	3.1%	1,454	4.7%	1,431	4.6%
\$200,000+	1,348	4.4%	1,583	5.1%	1,580	5.1%
Median Household Income	\$51,934		\$64,196		\$64,229	
Average Household Income	\$70,951		\$82,115		\$82,210	
Per Capita Income	\$33,768		\$40,065		\$40,441	

### **Influence of the Mission Statement**

The Northside educational ministry operated with an intentional mission statement in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Prior to that time, the educational ministry

was program driven. From 2002-2006 the church Sunday School ministry operated with the theme of “Making The Mission Happen.” Northside believes that the Sunday School has the ability to lead the Northside member and guest into each of the five areas of their mission statement. The church mission statement is based on Matthew 28:18-20 and Matthew 22:37-40. It does this in the following ways with the statement quote followed by an explanation of the phrase:

“Praising The Lord in Worship” - the first emphasis is on the need for believers to build their own personal worship time. This should be done on a daily basis, and it will help the believers in their daily life as well as help them to be a positive contributor to the Northside mission. The second emphasis is that the small groups help to build the Northside worship experience. Adult classes contribute to the worship experience by preparing the worshipper for the upcoming corporate worship experience while they are in class on Sunday morning.

“Promoting Love in The Fellowship” - to keep people once one reaches them, a church must assimilate them into relationships with people. The small group is the best way for the church to accomplish this. Care groups help accomplish this by organizing every small group into smaller groups so that each person in a small group is part of a group of 6-8 people. This provides the delivery system for care, ministry and involvement in the life of the small group and the church.

“Pursing the Path of Discipleship” - the small group ministry helps anchor people through the intentional teaching ministry of the church. As people study God’s Word and they are challenged to live out the truths of His Word, they will be transformed by the truth of His Word and become the believers that God wants them to be. The small group is also a place of promotion for the total discipleship aspects of the church’s ministry.

“Participating as Gifted in Ministry” - Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and

Ephesians 4 give the church its Biblical mandate to help it understand its spiritual gifts and to use those gifts in the ministry life of the church. The most important aspect of all that the church does is to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit as it seeks to do God's will in ministry. The church strives to provide classes for its members that define spiritual gifts and to help members learn how to employ their gifts in the ministry of the church. The church utilizes the Ministry Placement Team to help match people, gifts and calling with ministry opportunities.

“Piercing the Lost World through Evangelism” - the small group is one strategic method used to accomplish the evangelistic part of the mission statement. The teaching must be done at a basic level so that a non-believer will feel comfortable with the study and discussion of the text. This attracting strategy also takes place through the organization of the small group with care group leaders and through contacts made by the class to prospective members.

### **Church Type**

Through the work of social researchers, we can categorize churches into different types to help us understand the churches we work with and serve. James Hopewell has categorized the churches in America under four umbrellas: empiric, canonic, Gnostic and charismatic (Hopewell 1987, 69). Northside Baptist Church would fall into three of these categories: empiric, canonic, and charismatic. The strongest of these three would be the canonic orientation. Northside has a strong commitment to the Bible, a realization that people are sinners and that they need to seek and follow the will of God. There is a presence of empiric because it is a thinking congregation that wants to balance the concepts of faith and reason. Northside is an educated people with most of the adult attenders being college graduates and many with post-graduate study. The church also represents some of the charismatic perspective because of its desire to feel connected to its relationship with God and to be led by the mystical side of faith where

people try to follow God and His will when it may not be logical or reasonable to the human or secular mind.

A second sociological study is found in *The Handbook for Congregational Studies*, where the authors have designated the four categories of activist, civic, evangelistic and sanctuary (Carroll 1986, 29). Northside would most strongly represent the categories of evangelist, civic, and sanctuary. The church believes in evangelism and is working to see that people come to faith in Christ as a result of their efforts. The paradox is that the church does not see a great number of people accept Christ during a year. All of the normal measurements are present like baptisms, lost people attending, training emphasis offered, budget dollars spent on evangelism, which should indicate that a church would be evangelistic. The mission statement, the budget, and the calendar all show the value of evangelism in the belief system, yet the church does not bear fruit of this value to any great degree (35-45 baptisms per year).

Northside is a people who seek to follow the rules and to make the civic aspects of its culture something to be valued and abided by. The seeming contradiction found in the value of evangelism and not bearing fruit is seen by the church also being categorized by the sanctuary category. Northside has become like most churches, a place that likes who it is and is not really concerned about those outside of the membership. The church is committed to holding each other together and taking care of each other (Jackson 1990, 29).

Tex Sample gives a third sociological perspective of churches. He categorizes them into the three views of the cultural left, cultural middle and cultural right. Northside is made up of each of these, with people who represent each worldview. The cultural left is composed of baby boomers that are self-directed and seek self-fulfillment. There is the cultural middle seeking to make it to the top of their careers. The church is also made up of the cultural right with those who are self-denying and hold traditional values (Sample

1990, 4).

The make-up of having people in all three views has begun to create some tensions in the church over the last ten years. The cultural left and middle represent people who want to see the church move forward and want to do great things for God. They tend to be people who enjoy more upbeat worship and music that is represented by the contemporary worship movement. The cultural right is generally the older population of the church who want things done by principle and tradition and enjoys more traditional worship. These views create at least a passive tension between styles and generational lifestyles. This tension finds its way into the subject matter for this project where the cultural left and middle have little problem with the idea of home small groups, and the cultural right is committed to the tradition of Sunday School. These divergent views are what led to the need for this project. How does a church with a traditional program of Bible study transition to a church that provides both the traditional delivery system and also creates an atmosphere of acceptance and appreciation for home small groups?

### **Rationale**

Can a contemporary church model be one where both home Bible studies and Sunday School exist and thrive in the same ministry setting? Is it possible for a church to develop a plan for Bible study that utilizes both of these methods without these approaches just becoming additional ministries of the church program? How can a church change its value for traditional Sunday School and see its people also embrace the value of home small groups? Can a church move from being a program-oriented church to being a church “of” small groups, instead of a church “with” small groups (Stark 2004, 18).

Questions like these sparked the motivation to pursue this project. The Northside Baptist Church has traditionally approached Bible study for adults through first, Sunday School and secondly through Sunday night discipleship courses. The



church body has become more exposed to other avenues of Bible study, so home groups have become a valid option as part of the delivery system for adult Bible study. Ten years ago, the adult population of Northside would not have welcomed home groups or the concept of being a church of small groups. Today the church atmosphere has changed and people are looking for additional ways to connect people in life-changing Bible study.

There is a need to make home small groups part of the overall delivery system for Bible study to the adults of Northside Baptist Church, which should provide another avenue for those who seek the tradition of Sunday School and for those who seek something different like home groups. The principles of home groups and Sunday School are very similar and need to be celebrated as such by a church that seeks to reach an ever-changing culture.

Most of the available materials and research dealing with small groups will inform the reader that the options available for a church are either home small group Bible studies or traditional Sunday School. Churches are building their Christian education foundation upon one or the other of these methods. The purpose of this project is to dispel the assumption that the local church must choose either home groups or Sunday School, and show that a church can have a comprehensive approach that utilizes both methods to reach and teach adults.

This project does not deal with issues related to children or youth in either the Sunday School or home group context. It is important to note that an effective adult Bible study ministry goes hand in hand with the children and youth in their small group ministry. It is not usually an issue in the Sunday School context because ministry is provided in this setting for all ages. This project will endeavor to show that a church does not have to choose only Sunday School or home groups, and that the church can utilize both methods and be healthy and fruitful.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL BASIS OF SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

The goal of this chapter is to examine Acts 2:42-47 to uncover the principles relevant and applicable to influence today's small group ministries with the church. These principles can be used as methods, as basic rules of operation to give direction to followers of Jesus Christ in any time period.

The Bible does not speak directly to contemporary small group ministry or to the rapidly changing trends observed in the modern day church. However, there are multiple biblical references to people meeting in the synagogue, in homes and as a part of everyday life for the teaching of God's Word, for fellowship and ministry (Acts 2:46, 5:42, 20:20). This research will primarily focus on Acts 2:42-47 as it provides seven principles found in the life of the early church which gives guidance to modern day small group ministry. This review will delineate the principles that emerge out of the text which are: teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, expectation, community, and evangelism.

The book of Acts is considered a continuation of Luke's gospel since many scholars believe that Luke authored both the gospel of Luke and Acts (Bruce, Longenecker, MacArthur, Polhill). Arguments from the internal evidence, historical evidence, and the "we passages" (16:10-17; 20:5-21: 18; 27:1-28:16) contribute to MacArthur's conclusion that "the unanimous testimony of the early church was that Luke, author of the gospel bearing his name, and the traveling companion and close friend of Paul, wrote Acts" (MacArthur 1994, 2).

The overall view of what was being experienced at the time of this writing is captured by G. Campbell Morgan as he wrote, “There was a new church order. When people joined that Church, then it meant business. The conditions of entry were radical and revolutionary – repent, believe, confess. Their whole life was changed” (Morgan 1968, 159). This new group was experiencing a new paradigm modeled by Jesus and followed by His disciples. The first New Testament church was learning how to follow Jesus. Polhill points out that the book of Acts “is a triumphant story of how the early Christian community in the power of the Spirit saturated their world with the message of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ” (Polhill 1992, 71). The Acts 2:42-47 passage can be “summarized by the life of the community both internally (v. 42) and with those outside (vv. 43-47)” (Bock 2007, 149).

Not everything in the early church was perfect as Peterson notes, “Luke does not hide its weaknesses (cf. 5:1-10; 6:1), but he implies that the church in Jerusalem was a model of what could happen when people were bound together by a belief in the gospel, an understanding of its implications, and an enjoyment of its blessings” (Peterson 2009, 159). There is much to see and learn from this first expression of the New Testament church.

Many of the early believers were converts from Judaism who met together and took the Gospel into the synagogue and into their homes. The make-up of this early Christian movement was, as Stagg comments, that many of the new followers were,

Jewish in constituency and popular with the Jewish people. Three thousand people were baptized in one day. Evidently these were all Jews or proselytes (Gentiles who had been inducted into Judaism as a nation and a religion). These converts were made while Jerusalem was filled with Jews ‘from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5).’ (Stagg 1955, 65)

The first Christian community was made up partially of “Jewish followers of Jesus that did not in any full way separate themselves from their Jewish context and heritage, but rather participated in it, going regularly (day by day) to the temple” (Witherington 1998,

161). The background of these converts from Judaism laid a spiritual foundation for their new faith.

The example and experiences of the Acts 2 church can influence today's small groups. "The pattern of a healthy church (small group), can be gleaned from several passages of Scripture. Acts 2:42-47 is often cited as an example of a healthy church. Characteristics include teaching, fellowship, prayer, miracles, giving, meeting needs, praise, evangelism, and assimilation" (Rainer 1993, 297). As seen in this quote, the Acts 2:42-47 passage gives the modern day church much from which it can learn. As stated previously, this examination will be limited to Acts 2:42-47 and will serve as the biblical basis for the overall project.

This passage was chosen because multiple scholars agree that the text reflects healthy practices that helped the early church thrive and practices that will help a church in any generation. Polhill states "v. 42 pictures the community life in itself, verses 43-46 deals with the life of the whole Christian community" (Dockery 1992, 118). MacArthur notes that the early church "manifested spiritual duties and spiritual attitudes, and the result was spiritual impact" (MacArthur 1994, 80). These duties and attitudes when applied in the modern church could provide the same impact. This same sentiment is expressed by Maclaren as he considers the Acts 2:42-47 passage, "that beautiful description of the demeanour of the new converts in ver. 42 may well be laid to heart by churches to-day" (Maclaren 1959, 23). The passage as written by Luke:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 HCSB)

Luke records that the early converts “devoted themselves” (Acts 2:42) as Polhill states “to four practices in their new lives together” (Dockery 1992, 119). The four practices mentioned by Polhill are the first four principles examined in this chapter. Bock notes “community life is summarized as involving four key areas” (Bock 2007, 149). The first four principles found in verse 42 “characterize the life of the Spirit” (Parson 2008, 48).

The word translated devoted is προσκαρτερεο (*proskartereo*) which Longenecker states is “a verb that is a common one that connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action” (Gaebelein 1981, 289). Bock adds that devoted “has the idea of persistence or persevering in something” (Bock 2007, 149). B. H. Carroll strongly emphasizes that to which these first followers of Jesus were devoting themselves: “It is the object of that verse to express a habit of the early church – a habit of continual attention to the following things: (1) public worship; (2) the contribution – worship (for that is what fellowship here means); (3) the Lord’s Supper – worship; (4) the prayer – meeting worship” (Carroll 1916, 114). The indication is that true conversion is reflected in the lives of these early believers as it is described in Acts 2:42-47, to the point that the life interests for these early believers changed. They were now interested in worship of their Savior and meeting together. Each of the seven principles found in this passage will be examined here beginning with teaching.

### **The Principle of Teaching: Acts 2:42**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship” (Acts 2:42b). The first principle is teaching. The disciples were with Jesus for three years where they learned from Him and they were now in a position to pass on to others what they learned (2 Tim 2:2). Examples of the teachings are found in Stephen’s sermon in Acts 7, with Cornelius in Acts 10:30-33, in the church at Antioch in Acts 11:19-26, as

the new believers were prepared and sent out to new places in Acts 13:1-3, in the evangelization of Lystra in Acts 14:21-22, as Paul and his disciple Timothy went out in Acts 16:1-5, as Paul and Silas taught in Berea in Acts 17:10-12, and as Apollos taught in Acts 18:24-28. As these followers learned from the disciples, they began teaching and proclaiming their faith in Jesus. Teaching was important to these new converts as “the apostolic teaching was authoritative because it was the teaching the Lord communicated through the apostles” (Bruce 1980, 79). The new believers were eager to learn from the disciples who had been with Jesus.

The word teaching is διδασκαλῆς (*didache*), which means “doctrine, instruction or teachings” (Kubo 1980, 103). “Reference to teaching using the term διδασκαλῆς (*didache*) appears thirty times in the NT, five of which are in Luke-Acts (Luke 4:32; Acts 2:42; 5:28; 13:12; 17:19)” (Bock 2007, 150). It was the purpose of the disciples to take what they learned from Jesus and teach it to these new converts so that they could pass on these doctrines and teachings to others. *The Dictionary of New Testament Theology* interprets the word διδασκαλῆς (*didache*) as “used for the early Christian preaching, and appears in a variety of phrases: ‘the apostles’ teaching’ (Acts 2:42); ‘the teaching of the Lord’ (Acts 13:12); ‘new teaching’ (Acts 17:19); all these expressions, in the mind of Luke, denote the testimony of the apostles to Jesus Christ” (Wegenast 1986, 769). MacClaren refers to this teaching as “the Apostle’s doctrine” (MacClaren 1959, 23). The teachings that were being passed on from the disciples were undoubtedly the oral tradition of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus which Longenecker explains, “was thought of in terms of a Christian ‘tradition’ παραδοσις (*paradosis*) that could be passed on to others” (Gaebelein 1981, 289). Polhill contributes to this idea by stating, “it would have included such subjects as His resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus’ earthly ministry and teachings” (Dockery 1992, 119). This is supported by Longenecker’s comment that the

apostles would have taught, “some account of His earthly ministry, passion and resurrection (cf. 2:22-24), and a declaration of what all this meant for man’s redemption (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-5)” (Gaebelein 1981, 289). Wegenast summarizes that the word διδαχῆ (*didache*) “denotes Christ’s message (with his call to repentance and faith) and the early Christian preaching in the widest sense, that no explicit distinction is made between a fixed body of doctrine (handed down by tradition) and the message preached at any given time” (Wegenast 1986, 770).

The result of the teaching was, as Barrett notes, “the apostles’ teaching means (a) that the Christians listened to the apostles whenever they taught and (b) that they assiduously practiced what they heard” (Barrett 1994, 163). This would be consistent with what Jesus spoke, “He who has ears, let him hear” (Matt 13:9 NASB), and James “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jas 1:22, NASB).

The importance of teaching is seen throughout the New Testament in passages, such as “Rom 6:17; 12:7; 16:17; 1 Cor 11:2; 14:26; 2 Thes 2:16; 3:6; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Jas 3:1, and the frequent linking of prophets and teachers in the New Testament (cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28; 14:6; Eph 4:11), the creative role of prophecy in the early church was balanced by the conserving role of teaching” (Gaebelein 1981, 289). Without the practice of teaching, the doctrines, and truths that Jesus taught would have died an early death. In order for the world to hear about salvation through Jesus Christ, His teachings would have to be passed on through His followers. The disciples delivery of ‘the teaching’ through preaching or teaching is not distinguishable as Barrett notes “the *didache* of the apostles cannot be sharply or consistently distinguished” (Barrett 1994, 163). If there is a point of distinction, it could be in the context of the teaching. Some of the teaching was “done in the synagogue (Solomon’s Colonnade cf. 3:11),” (Gaebelein 1981, 291) and some was done in homes. These two settings could have provided a place

where a distinction in the style of delivery for ‘the teaching’ could have been distinguished. Barrett points out, “One can hardly infer a technical vocabulary and procedure of instruction. There is no indication how far the teaching of the apostles may have consisted in handing on the teaching of Jesus” (Barrett 1994, 163). One can infer that what was taught or preached was “teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Matt 28:20a).

Three thousand new converts were added to the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), so these new converts needed to be taught the meaning, doctrine and truth of being a Jesus follower. They were teaching them the difference between what they already knew (Judaism) and what they needed to know to reflect their new life in Christ (Rom 12:1-2).

Paul adds to the importance and focus of the teaching principle as he wrote, “all Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17 HCSB). This passage helps clarify some of the intent of what the new believers were being taught. The disciples’ goal was to teach the new converts about Jesus teachings so that they would be “equipped.” Acts 6:2, and Acts 6:7 both indicate that the disciples had a strong conviction about the need for these new followers to be under the teaching of “the word of God.” They saw that they could not be distracted from the vital role of teaching.

The book of Acts refers to “teaching” eleven times directly (Acts 2:42; 4:2; 5:25; 5:28; 5:42; 13:12; 15:35; 17:19; 18:11; 20:20; 28:31). Teaching is referred to in Paul’s epistles 27 times (Rom 6:17; 12:7; 1 Cor 14:6; 14:26; Eph 4:14; Col 1:28; 3:16; 1 Tim 1:10; 3:2; 4:6; 4:13; 4:16; 5:17; 6:1; 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:15; 2:24; 3:10; 3:16; 4:2; Titus 1:9; 1:11; 2:1; 2:7; 2:10). Teaching was taking place in the synagogue, in homes and even during their meals “implying that their meetings regularly involved instruction,



(table) fellowship, then the Lord's Supper and prayers. However, verses 44-47, appears to be an expansion on this initial summary, and some of the things mentioned there clearly took place at different times and in different places" (Peterson 2009, 160). This shows the blending of these principles found in Acts 2:42-47, and how it is difficult to separate one from the other. It will be revealed that the principles in this text lean on and depend on each other. When teaching takes place, there is great fellowship, meals shared where the Lord's Supper is remembered and people share all they have which impresses a lost world, and people are added to the church daily. "In the case of this earliest community, the believers' preaching was matched by their community, making a powerful testimony for their mission. When the early church said that God cared, the care they gave their own demonstrated this" (Bock 2007, 155).

#### **The Principle of Fellowship: Acts 2:42**

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship" (Acts 2:42b). The second principle is fellowship, which is the Greek word *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*) meaning "communion, fellowship" (Kubo 1975, 103). Polhill adds that the meaning of the word fellowship is "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship" (Dockery 1992, 119). Witherington interprets fellowship to mean a "participation or sharing in common of something with someone else" (Witherington 1998, 160). The principle of fellowship is a critical reflection of a believer's relationship with God.

In the primeval history of Gen. the rupture of fellowship with God was followed by the loss of unity among men, . . . and the *koinonia* in Acts 2:42 can be taken in an absolute sense as an essential part of the life of worship: 'and in this case, *koinonia* could be translated 'communion,' or liturgical fellowship in worship.' It denotes the unanimity and unity brought about by the Spirit; . . . the individual was completely upheld by the community. (Schattenmann 1986, 641-42)

The meaning of fellowship is merged with other components in the text in effect to blur the difference between the principles. Commentators (Longenecker, Bruce, Kistemaker, Morgan) blend the ideas of prayer, the Lord's Supper, sharing meals, and breaking bread together under the umbrella principle of fellowship, which Kistemaker notes, "fellowship describes the enthusiasm believers demonstrated in a common bond at worship, at meals, and in the sharing of their material goods (v. 44). The Christians visibly showed their unity in Jesus Christ in the worship services, where they called one another brothers and sisters" (Kistemaker 1990, 110-11). This does not mean that commentators believe that these principles are all the same which will be clarified below, but they do point out that they complement each other in how they were lived out. Polhill clarifies this idea by stating that the "meaning of fellowship would then be that they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together" (Dockery 1992, 119). The Acts 2:42-47 text is a beautiful description of how the principles were being experienced by a people whose lives were now going in a different direction.

The first followers of Jesus were,

driven together by the pressure of a hostile nation, these first converts realized this, as we do not do. But our need of it is as great as theirs; and we all have to fight against the dividing influences, in modern churches, of diversities in rank, culture, and opinion. Where fellowship is weak, faith cannot be strong. (MacLaren 1959, 24)

While the modern day church does carry out some of the same practices as the early church (i.e., participating in the Lord's Supper at meals), fellowship also has a deeper meaning in the context of the early church. Longenecker points this out by noting, "the definite article *τε*, (*te*) in 'the fellowship' *τε κοινωνία* (*te koinonia*), implies that there was something distinctive in the gatherings of the early believers." (Gaebelein 1981, 289). This is the "only use of the word *koinonia* in all of Acts, but is used fifteen times in the NT, fourteen of which are in Paul" (Bock 2007, 150).

One of the deeper elements of their fellowship will be examined in the principle on the Lord's Supper. With Longenecker's perspective in mind one can see the interconnectivity of the principles listed in Acts 2:42-47. The church met for meals, which included the Lord's Supper, and to support one another which all fall into the broader principle of fellowship. As the people voluntarily participated in these acts, they were growing in their fellowship.

The early church had a reputation in the community as "the fellowship" (Gaebelein 1981, 290) which attracted people to their faith, their hunger for God's Word, their way of life, and to their life sharing fellowship. The fellowship is also "a partnership, or sharing" (MacArthur 1994, 84) of this new way of life. The early church shared a partnership with Jesus which enabled them to be involved with other followers of Christ in fulfilling His commission to His church. Robertson adds that the word *κοινωνος* (*koinonos*) means "partner, sharer in common interest and this from *κοινος* (*koinos*) what is common to all. This partnership involves participation in, as the blood of Christ (Phil 2:1), or co-operation in the work of the gospel (Phil 1:5)" (Robertson 1930, 37). MacArthur accurately declares that the "Bible does not envision the Christian life as one lived apart from other believers. All members of the universal church, the body of Christ, are to be actively and intentionally involved in local assemblies" (MacArthur 1994, 84).

The principle of fellowship is enhanced further, as Morgan suggests:

*κοινωνία* (*koinonia*), so rich in its suggestiveness that you will find it translated in many ways, fellowship, communion, distribution, contribution, partnership, partakership – all translations of the one word. The root from which it comes is *κοινος*, (*koinos*), had all things in common, but don't associate that with the material. It was expressed in that way; but it is the having of all things in common, with God. (Morgan 1968, 161)

The fellowship they shared was not just material goods, but it meant they were sharing their life, the teaching, the struggles, and the material goods. From the above information one can see that the early followers of Jesus wanted to be together. They wanted to

celebrate their new lives together. Their new life of learning and sharing with each other was influenced by teaching about Jesus, which would have instructed them to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt 22:37-40 HCSB). Through the teaching and the fellowship, the early church was living obediently to this command.

The church was forming under the leadership of the apostles who had been with Jesus and they recognized the need to assimilate the new followers into the faith. A good summary of the principle of fellowship is offered by Morgan, “it means that they talked together of the things of the spirit; they compared with each other their experiences; they had fellowship in conversation, in communication, in spiritual things” (Morgan 1968, 161). The fellowship they shared impacted all of the principles listed in the Acts 2:42-47 passage. The relational foundation of the early church was built on the back of the principle of fellowship.

### **The Principle of Breaking Bread: Acts 2:42, 46**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house” (Acts 2:42c, 46). The third principle is breaking bread and the Lord’s Supper. Agreement exists with scholars (Bruce, Longenecker, Polhill, Robertson) about the phrase “the breaking of bread” in Acts 2:42, that it refers to the practice of sharing meals together and the inclusion of partaking of the Lord’s Supper. The text does not indicate that this was a regular occurrence, but as Bock points out the reference to the Lord’s Supper is probably a more broad meaning than they just shared meals. It is still “a reference to taking some meals

together, of which the Lord's Supper was a part" (Bock 2007, 150). The early church spent time together in each other's homes and they shared meals together. This practice was modeled for the church by Jesus as he met with people in their homes (Mark 2:1-5). Part of the regular practice was to eat a meal in their home and then acknowledge Jesus by taking the Lord's Supper as part of the meal experience. Robertson comments on the Greek in this text:

τει κλασει του αρτου, (*tei klasei tou artou*). The word κλασις, (*klasis*) is an old word, but used only by Luke in the N.T. (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42), though the verb κλαο, (*klao*) occurs in other parts of the N.T. as in verse 46. The problem here is whether Luke refers to the ordinary meal as in Luke 24:35 or to the Lord's Supper. The same verb κλαο, (*klao*) is used of breaking bread at the ordinary meal (Luke 24:30) or the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:19). (Robertson 1930, 39)

According to Robertson, the phrase can mean either regular breaking bread or a meal, or the Lord's Supper. The explanation found in Robertson is also reflected by other scholars. Longenecker concurs with the translation of the phrase and elaborates that the meal was probably both the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal:

The breaking of bread in that way in his passion narrative (Luke 22:19), elsewhere he uses it for an ordinary meal (cf. Luke 24:30, 35; Acts 20:11; 27:35) and seems to mean just that even in 2:46. Yet it is difficult to believe that Luke had in mind here only an ordinary meal, placing the expression, as he does, between two such religiously loaded terms as 'the fellowship' and 'prayer.' (Gaebelein 1981, 290)

This same interpretation is shared by Bruce but he adds to the interpretation by writing, "the 'breaking of bread' here denotes something more than the ordinary partaking of food together: the regular observance of the Lord's Supper is no doubt indicated" (Bruce 1980, 79). The early believers were drawn together around a shared and practiced common faith. They were coming together to learn from the apostles' teaching, and fellowshiping together, by sharing meals with each other, and remembering what Jesus did for them on the cross as they shared some version of the Lord's Supper. "It probably also involved as well their participation in the main agape meal together" (Dockery 1992, 119). The agape meal is referred to as the "love-feast" (Robertson 1930, 39).

Longenecker describes the “agape feast as something that emphasized the joy of communion with the risen Lord and of fellowship with one another” (Gaebelein 1981, 289).

The new disciples, many of whom were coming out of Judaism and were accustomed to worshipping in the synagogue, continued in that practice and now were following the apostles teaching and remembering Jesus’ sacrifice through the Lord’s Supper. Maclaren points out (referring to the new converts),

They frequented the Temple as devout Jews, they gathered more privately ‘at home’ as Christians, to observe the Lord’s Supper in connection with their ordinary meals. To these believers it was but part of their daily meal, sanctifying that by remembering the Lord’s death. Thus beautifully did religion and family ties blend. Thus it was the alliance between the most sacred and the most trivial acts. (Maclaren 1959, 25)

The early church was developing. They were learning what it means to follow Jesus and they were going through this unintentional process that lacked modern day strategy, programs, or models for effectiveness. Yet, these followers were learning, being together, remembering their Lord as they shared meals together and celebrating their new life in Christ through the Lord’s Supper.

The mention in verse 46 to the fact they “broke bread from house to house” refers to a “regular meal” (Robertson 1930, 39). Even if one makes the interpretation of the phrase “from house to house, *κατ οικον*, (*kat oikon*)” (Robertson 1930, 39) it does not mean that the practice of the Lord’s Supper mentioned in verse 42 did not take place as it was common for houses to have a “worship room in the house church” (Robertson 1930, 39). It has already been established from verse 42 that the regular meals and the Lord’s Supper were a common practice.

The reference in verse 46 to meeting in the temple would have meant that they gathered in “Solomon’s colonnade, running along the east side of the outer court (cf. Acts 3:11; 5:12)” (Bruce 1980, 81) for the communal meal called the “haburah, which could not be conveniently eaten in the temple precincts, so they ate by households or ‘from

house to house' (AV)'" (Bruce 1980, 81). The church was meeting in the synagogue for worship, to gather together and to pray. They were meeting in their homes for meals and in the process of those meals they regularly broke bread for their physical needs and to remember their Lord and His sacrifice that provided salvation.

The home meetings also provided a place to continue 'the teaching' of the apostles. The "houses (domus) were one-family dwellings up to four stories high. The dining room on the top floor was the only large room and often opened on a terrace. This is the 'upper room' of Acts 1:13; 9:37, 39; 20:8; Mark 14:15" (Ferguson 1987, 104). The first church met in the synagogue for large meetings, teaching and prayers. They met in homes for smaller groups to continue the teaching, breaking of bread, fellowship, sharing the Lord's Supper and to minister to one another's needs.

### **The Principle of Prayer: Acts 2:42**

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers (Acts 2:42d HCSB). The fourth principle is prayer. Among all of the principles mentioned by Luke, he makes sure that prayer is in the description of what the early believers practiced regularly. An emphasis on prayer would have been consistent with Jesus' teaching as he taught the disciples how to pray (Luke 11:1-4). Robertson translates the phrase "the prayers" as "ταῖς προσευχαῖς (*tais proseuchais*)" (Robertson 1930, 38), which he believed referred to "services where they prayed as in Acts 1:14, in the temple Acts 3:2, in their homes 4:13" (Robertson 1930, 38). Bock adds that the word prayers "ἡ προσευχή (*proseuchais*), which is a noun that appears thirty-six times in the NT, twelve of which are in Luke-Acts and nine of which are in Acts (1:4; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 10:4, 31; 12:5; 16:13, 16)" (Bock 2007, 151).

The new believers in Jesus who were converted out of Judaism were still following some of their Jewish traditions where "they were keeping the formal prayer

hours of Judaism in the temple,” and “sharing in prayer together in their private house worship” (Dockery 1992, 120). Coming from a background of Judaism would have influenced the practices of their prayer life. Barrett points out the influences to their prayer life would have been their Jewish background and teachings, Jesus’ teachings, and spontaneous prayer. Were the prayers formal or informal?

Luke gives no hint elsewhere of a Christian set of prayers, and it is likely that (unless the plural is an intensive – they prayed more than others were accustomed to do) the prayers were familiar Jewish prayers; cf. 3.1; 10.9, . . . .  
Stahlin (57) thinks of the Psalter; the Eighteen Benedictions; the Lord’s Prayer; new Christian psalms and hymns; all plausible guesses, no more. (Barrett 1994, 166)

The mixture of Jewish traditions and teachings about Jesus they were receiving from the apostles probably caused them to practice their new faith by mixing,

formal prayers, probably both Jewish and Christian, in addition, it is not difficult to envision the earliest believers using extemporaneous prayers built on past models such as Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah’s Song of Praise (Luke 1:67-79), or Simeon’s Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:28-32). (Gaebelein 1981, 290)

One can conclude that their worship contained both formal (from tradition and teaching) and informal (spontaneous) prayers. Their worship was a mixture of time in prayer in the temple (Acts 3:1) and time with fellow believers in their homes (Acts 6:4, 10:30).

Prayer was a critical part of the life of the new church. A good summary of the importance of prayer and the first four principles listed in this chapter is given by MacArthur, who writes,

The first fellowship knew the critical importance of pursuing spiritual duties. They knew the church must be made up of saved individuals, devoted to studying the Word, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. Those elements are the unique expressions of the life of the church. They are the means of grace by which the church becomes what God wants it to be. (MacArthur 1994, 85)

MacArthur’s comment presents a good image of what the church should be like. It is a reflection of what should influence the modern church to reach into scripture to find these foundational principles that are applicable to church practices today.



## **The Principle of Expectation: Acts 2:43**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles” (Acts 2:43 HCSB). The fifth principle is expectation. What was the atmosphere like in the early church? What was happening on a regular basis that would have shaped their daily lives as they were being taught the meaning of following Jesus? The examination of Acts 2:43 will show how the early church lived every day with the expectation that God was moving through the lives of the apostles and will present answers to these questions.

The phrase “signs and wonders” used in Acts 2:43,

is probably a reference to the prophet Joel which Peter had quoted at the outset of his address declaring that the ‘great and notable day’ would be heralded not only by ‘wonders in the heaven above’ but also by ‘signs on the earth beneath’ (Acts 2:19:f). Among the signs on the earth may surely be reckoned the ‘mighty works and wonders and signs’ (Acts 2:22). (Bruce 1980, 80)

These “signs and wonders” (Acts 2:43) worked to give credibility and authority to the apostles’ ministry just as they did for Jesus, “which God performed through Jesus of Nazareth, thus accrediting His messianic office. And just as the miracles of Jesus when He was on earth were ‘signs’ of the kingdom of God, the miracles performed by His apostles partook of the same character” (Bruce 1980, 80). Kistemaker adds:

Jesus endowed the apostles with authority to perform miracles (compare Matt 10:8). The apostles repeatedly exercised this power either in response to the faith of the people or to increase their faith. The result was twofold: the believers were conscious of God’s sacred presence among them and numberless converts were added to the church. (Kistemaker 1990, 111)

The examples of Jesus’ miracles are found in Matt 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37; Mark 8:22-26; Matt 11:27-31. The phrase “signs and wonders” describes how God was working in their lives, as Bock points out:

The term for ‘wonder’ *τερας* (*teras*) appears sixteen times in the NT, nine of which are in Acts with none in Luke (the others are Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3; 15:12). The term for ‘sign’ *σημειον* (*semeion*) appears

seventy-seven times in the NT, twenty-four of which are in Luke-Acts with thirteen in Acts (the others are Luke 2:12, 34; 11:16, 29-30 [4x]; 21:7, 11, 25; 23:8; Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 4:16, 22, 30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12). (Bock 2007, 115)

The “signs and wonders” caused the people to “respond with a reverential fear *πηοβος* (*phobos*, ‘awe,’ NIV)” (Dockery 1992, 120). This reverential fear was such that it “kept coming through the apostles. The two things went on *παρι πασσυ* (*pari passu*), the more wonders the more fear” (Robertson 1930, 39). As the people saw God working through the apostles, they were gripped by this reverential fear and the more ‘signs and wonders’ they experienced, the more reverence they experienced. Kistemaker notes that “a sense of awe filled the hearts of all believers because they experienced the nearness of God in their midst. The Greek attests that their awe continued unabated (5.5, 11; 19.17). This stemmed from the ‘many wonders and signs’ the apostles performed (5.12)” (Kistemaker 1990, 111).

The apostles were carrying out the work that Jesus assigned them. Peter has just preached and Pentecost was experienced (Acts 2:14-41) and now new believers needed to be cared for and taught. People began to believe in Jesus and their lives were being spiritually changed and for some physically changed as we see “one such miraculous sign in Acts 3:1-10. Luke’s summary statement would indicate that this healing story is only one example of many miracles worked by the apostles in this early stage of their ministry” (Dockery 1992, 120). God made himself known to the people through “many wonders and miraculous signs *πολλα δε τερατα και σημεια* (*polla de terata kai semeia*) as they were done *εγινετο* (*egineto*) by the apostles. By such means, God confirmed the teaching and the special status of the apostles in his plan and purpose (cf. 4:30; 5:12; 14:3; 15:12)” (Peterson 2009, 162). Evidence of these “signs and wonders” being done through the ministry of the Apostles is found in Acts 3:1-10 in the healing of the lame man, 5:1-11 where God dealt with Ananias and Sapphira, 5:11-16 where more signs and wonders were witnessed, 9:1-11 Saul was blinded and called, 9:23-

35 Aeneas was healed, 9:36-43 Dorcas was restored to life, 10:1-8 Cornelius received a vision, 10:9-16 where Peter receives his vision, 12:6-14 the angel rescues Peter, 13:1-3 Barnabas and Saul are called, 13:6-12 Paul confronts the sorcerer, 14:8-13 lame man from Lystra is healed, 16:16-18 Paul casts the demon from the slave girl, 16:25-30 Paul and Silas are delivered by an earthquake, 18:8 Crispus is converted, 19:11-20 miracles at Ephesus, 21:30-36 Paul delivered from a mob attack, and in 28:7-10 Publius father is healed. God was showing himself to be real so that people would believe.

The use of the word “everyone” is a reference to “those outside the Christian community who were awed by the apostolic miracles (cf. 5:12-13)” (Dockery 1992, 120). The result of this awe by those outside the Christian community could be what is seen in verse 47 where people were being added to the church on a daily basis. Longenecker elaborates on the use of “everyone” as he writes, “‘everyone’ (*pase psyche*), in contradistinction to ‘all the believers’ (*pantes hoi pisteusantes*) of v. 44, refers hyperbolically to nonbelievers in Jerusalem who knew of the events of Pentecost and were observing the life of the early congregation in the months that followed” (Gaebelein 1981, 290).

The atmosphere described in this passage is one of expectation. The believers in the early church were experiencing God’s activity through “signs and wonders” on a regular basis, which caused the church to expect God to demonstrate His power through the apostles. Longenecker confirms this by writing that “the verb γινομαι (*ginomai*, to be) in the imperfect tense denotes that the awe ‘was’ and the miracles ‘were’ no momentary phenomena but continued to happen during those early days” (Gaebelein 1981, 290). This is evidenced by the list of miracles mentioned earlier throughout the book of Acts. The early church was growing in number and they were in awe as MacArthur points out, “not by the church because of its buildings, programs, or anything

reflecting human ability, but by the supernatural character of its life” (MacArthur 1994, 86).

The new believers experienced a life change that took place at conversion (2 Cor 5:17) and their faith was fed by the regular teaching of God’s Word (2:42). They were witnesses of the “signs and wonders” (2:43) which helped establish an atmosphere for non-believers to see what God was doing and thus make Acts 2:47 come true, “the Lord added to the church daily.”

### **The Principle of Community: Acts 2:44-45**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. (Acts 2:42-45 HCSB)

The sixth principle is community. The following will examine the principle of community to see what can be learned from the text and the context of the early church. The word community is defined by Webster’s Dictionary of American English (Random House, 1997) as the “condition of sharing or having things in common.” The Acts 2:44-45 text will live up to this definition by showing how the first church did share with each other and how they had things in common. The first disciples would have experienced community because of the following influences.

Community was driven by unity. This concept is revealed in the text by the use of the phrase; “all the believers were together” (Acts 2:44 HCSB). “The unity of community is empirically demonstrated by their sharing of all possessions” (Parson 2008, 48). The phrase “were together, *εσαν επτ το αυτο (esan ept to auto)* in the same place, and has *και ειχον, (kai eichon)* the imperfect active, kept on having, a habit in the present emergency” (Robertson 1930, 39). The Greek phrase “is notoriously difficult to translate, occurring five times in Acts (1:15; 2:1, 44, 47; 4:26). It seems to depict the

gathered community with a strong emphasis on their unity” (Dockery 1992, 120). The early church found unity in their new understanding and acceptance of Jesus as Savior and their bond with fellow believers. The phrase “ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ (*epi to auto*) is an important one, . . . it refers to a gathered group in harmony with one another (Witherington 1998, 161). These factors pulled the church together as they shared their lives, meals and possessions with each other. The spirit of unity is confirmed by Morgan who writes that, “inside the unity of the Church there should be no man or woman or child in need” (Morgan 1968, 165). This unity is what they needed to survive in the circumstances they faced.

Community means being willing to share all you have with the family of God. The Holman Christian Standard Bible reads, “they sold their possessions” (Acts 2:45 HCSB), while the New American Standard translates this phrase as, “they began selling their possessions” (Acts 2:45 NASB). The Interlinear translates it “and the possessions they sold” (Green 1985, 843). The word “sold ἐπιπρασκον (*epipraskon*) means a habit or custom from time to time” (Robertson 1930, 39). The early church “gave up the idea of private property and had all things in common. This pooling of property could be maintained only when their sense of the unity of the Spirit was exceptionally active” (Bruce 1980, 81). It is not to be understood that the early church developed a,

practice of community ownership. The imperfect tense is used, indicating that this was a recurrent, continuing practice: their practice was to sell their property and goods and apportion the proceeds whenever a need arose. This is much more in keeping with the Old Testament ideal of community equality, of sharing with the needy so that ‘there will be no poor among you (Deut 15:4f).’ (Dockery 1992, 121)

The church shared a sense of unity around their commitment to Jesus, their fellowship with each other, and the teaching they were receiving. The early church shared what they had with those who were in need, “this sharing of material things in common is not a required communalism but a voluntary, caring response to need” (Bock 2007, 152).

Bock continues to bring light to this aspect of the early church sharing with each other by

noting, “possessing all things in common are not unusual as a sign of ethical virtue in the culture (Philo, Good Person 12, 86; Hypothetica 11.10-13; Abraham 40, 235; Josephus. Ant. 18.1.5, 20 [of the Essenes])” (Bock 2007, 152-153). The idea of this being an ethical value in a culture and not necessarily unique to the new church, is reflected in Polhill’s comment:

Here two ideals for a community of goods seem to be combined. First is the Greek ideal of a community in which everything is held in common and shared equally. It is a basically utopian concept, which can be traced as far back as the Pythagorean communities and is often expressed by the same phrase Luke employed in v. 44, “holding all in common” (echein hapanta koina). (Dockery 1992, 120-121)

Community was found in persecution. The experience of being persecuted would have been evident from the Romans, the Jewish religious leaders and from the community which Wells points out, “in the early period, persecution was initiated partly by Roman emperors and partly by mobs” (Wells 1981, 766). The early church experienced great change. Many were converting from Judaism to follow Jesus and others were converting from believing nothing to living for Jesus. Polhill points out that “the favor of the people was overshadowed by persecutions from the Jewish officials” (Dockery 1992, 122). New believers who were converting from Judaism would have participated in worship practices in the Temple and the Synagogue as was their normal routine; therefore they continued to practice some aspects of their previous faith in connection with their new faith in Jesus Christ. Ferguson points out that the book of,

Acts also reflects the background to the later treatment of Christians: accusations by Jews eager to make a distinction between Christians and themselves (13:50; 14:2, 19; 17:5-6, 13; 18:13; 24:1-2; 25:1-3), popular turmoil (14:5; 19:23ff.; cf. Suetonius, Claudius 25.4), and the recognition that Christianity involved a way of life threatening to traditional pagan society (16:20-21). (Ferguson 1987, 481)

The followers of Jesus became a disruption for the political and religious leaders. Jewish leaders would have watched Jews, who were one day practicing Judaism, turn their affection and loyalty to following Jesus. These activities bothered the Jewish leaders to

the point that they would have been one group who would have reason to persecute the early church. Acts 13:45 records, “but when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to oppose what Paul was saying by insulting him” (also 13:50, 14:2). Longenecker points out that “while Acts implies that overt persecution of Christians came somewhat later, in certain instances economic and social sanctions were undoubtedly imposed on the early believers” (Gaebelin 1981, 290). The early church would have been persecuted by religious leaders, by local people and by political leaders who were not appreciative of the new zeal seen in the lives of the early followers.

The persecution that the early church experienced could have one of two responses, either to pull the church tighter together or to split it apart. They did find strength and favor with each other as they met together and shared things in common because some in the culture would not sell to them or would have persecuted them because of their faith in Jesus. The early church must be viewed through the,

social, economic, and cultural life, as well as political, which was interwoven with the polytheistic tradition. Even today missionaries in many countries and cultures face the power of family custom, and they can understand the pressures of conformity that must be overcome by one who would break with the past to accept a new religion. (Ferguson (1987, 486)

The early church existed in a community that needs to “be understood, at least in part, as a response to these pressures” (Gaebelin 1981, 290).

Community was found because needs were met. Whether people had personal needs due to some persecution or just due to economic reasons does not matter to the person who is in need. That person just knows they need food, or water, or other personal needs that they cannot meet themselves. The church responded to people who were in need. The Greek word for need is “*χρηεια* (*chreia*), which means a gap in the life” (Vines 1940, 787). People found themselves with a gap in their money, or food, or transportation, or other normal demands of daily life. When these gaps were present, the church would come to remove the gap or meet the need. The church would meet these

needs as they sold personal possessions to fill the gap for others. The church “gave up the idea of private property and ‘had all things common, they began to sell their assets and divide the proceeds among the members of the community, according to individual need’” (Bruce 1981, 81). Polhill agrees as he writes, “their practice was to sell their property and goods and apportion the proceeds whenever a need arose” (Dockery 1992, 121).

The church was responding to people as needs would arise. They met needs, or filled the gap in order to show lost people the love of Jesus Christ through His church. It was through the teaching of the disciples, through the practices of breaking bread and remembering Jesus through the Lord’s Supper, through their fellowship and through prayer that this community was driven to meet people’s needs by sacrificing their own property to help others. Peterson notes that this new community,

was no primitive form of ‘communism’, but a generous response to particular problems in their midst (cf. 4:34-5). The examples given in 4:37; 5:4 show that people did not necessarily dispose of their whole estate but only certain portions of it. Believers continued to maintain their own homes and used them for the benefit of others in the church (cf. 12:12). There was no rule about the common ownership of property such as was found among the men of the council of the Qumran Community. What appeared to motivate such generosity was a sense of God’s grace towards them. (Peterson 2009, 163)

The followers of Jesus were also driven by the strong belief that Jesus Christ was going to return soon (Matt 24). With this eschatological view being so strong, holding on to personal goods would not make sense. Parson refers to the early church “as the eschatological community of God” (Parson 2008, 58). They believed that their destination was in the next life and that Jesus said He would be returning soon, so there was no need to hold on to this life and the possessions that are available here on earth (Matt 5:12, 6:20, 10:7, 19:21).



## **The Principle of Evangelism: Acts 2:47**

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. Every day they devoted themselves [to meeting] together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 HCSB)

The seventh principle is evangelism. The Greek Interlinear translates this phrase “and the Lord added those being saved from day to day to the church” (Green 1986, 843). The Codex Bezae translates this phrase “praising God and having favour with all of the world, the Lord added daily those being saved to the group united in the church,” while the Codex Vaticanus translates the same phrase “praising God and having favour with all of the people, the Lord added daily to the united group those being saved” (Rius-Camps 2004, 195). The minor difference between the two is Codex Bezae refers to “favour with all of the world” while Codex Vaticanus, “favour with all of the people.” Codex Bezae refers to “adding those being saved to the group united in the church” and Codex Vaticanus, “the Lord added to the united group those being saved.”

The beginning of v. 47, “praising God and having favor with all the people,” implies two things, “the first phrase relates to God and the other to the people” (Kistemaker 1990, 114). This comment is supported by Bock who writes “a vibrant community extends itself in two directions: toward God and toward neighbor” (Bock 2007, 154). These comments reflect the ultimate command that Jesus reflected in Matthew 22:36-40. This is evidence that Jesus’ teaching on the great commandment was being accomplished by the first New Testament church. This thought is supported by Kistemaker who comments that,

the first phrase (praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people) relates to God and the other to the people. Both phrases are structurally part of the preceding verse (v. 46) in which Luke describes the daily activities of the

believers. What a testimony to true Christianity! These Christians live a life of praise to God and as a result are praised by the people. They demonstrate the power of the gospel and the presence of the Spirit. Thus they are living witnesses for Christ. Here the missionary church is at work, for the people noticing the Christian conduct of the converts speak in favor of the church and are drawn to Christ. (Kistemaker 1990, 114)

Before one tries to find a formula in this process that can be completely replicated by today's church, Peterson points out "in the process of what is often called 'church growth,' Luke highlights both the behavior of believers and the sovereign determination of God" (Peterson 2009, 163). The Lord was adding to the church through conversions. When all of the principles come together and when God's people live out this fresh, real faith, then lost people will be able to see the Gospel lived out. Those without faith in Christ can hear the Gospel as believers share with them and then they will have the opportunity to believe in Jesus as their Savior. The responsibility and privilege of witnessing to the lost world is given to the people of God who empowers them through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). They lived, believed, behaved and witnessed in front of their world in a way that was infectious to those who watched them. The result of their lives is seen in 2:47 that God through His sovereignty, added to His church.

It was an ongoing experience, seeing people come to know Jesus as Savior "every day" (2:47). It would have been like "a continuous revival, day by day" (Robertson 1930, 40). Those who were being saved, "σοζο like σωτηρια (*sozo* like *soteria*) is used for 'save' in three senses (beginning, process, conclusion), but here repetition is clearly the point of the present tense" (Robertson 1930, 40). Lost people and religious people were being saved through the witness of the early church. Regular worship still took place at the Temple and these followers of Jesus went there and gave their witness as to how their life was changed by believing in Jesus:

The Christian presence in the temple testifies not only to their remaining faithful to their Jewish heritage but also evidenced their zeal for witness. In Jerusalem the temple was the primary place where crowds would be found, and there the Christians went to bear their witness (3:11-12; 5:21, 42). If the temple was the place of witness, homes were the place for fellowship. (Dockery 1992, 121)

The new believers of Jesus were telling their story. They were giving witness of what Jesus did in their life, which is reflected in Witherington's comment, "these early Christians were characterized by having glad and sincere hearts that prompted praise of God, and goodwill among the local Jews in general. The result was that daily God added those who were being saved to this community. Its presence and witness were infectious" (Witherington 1998, 163). The result was that people were being saved. This was happening as God added to the church. The phrase "the Lord" is the Greek "ὁ κυριος (*ho kyrios*), that it is the Lord himself who adds to his church" (Gaebelein 1981, 291). The latter part of this phrase in Greek is "τοὺς σοζομένους (*tous sozomenous*) which is translated those who were being saved" (Gaebelein 1981, 292). Bruce adds "it is the Lord whose prerogative it is to add new members to His own community; it is the joyful duty of the community to welcome to their ranks those whom Christ has accepted (cf. Rom 15:7)" (Bruce 1980, 81). The word "added is προσετιτελει (*prosetitheei*) is imperfect active, kept on adding. If the Lord only always 'added' those who join our churches. Note verse 41 where the same verb is used of the 3,000" (Robertson 1939, 40).

When the church functions like the early church did as evidenced in these brief passages, the results would seem to be what was experienced by the early church. The converts discovered that their lives were changed. John MacArthur presents a wonderful description of these passages in his commentary on Acts, where he writes,

That the Lord was adding to the church those who were being saved reminds one that God is sovereign in salvation (cf. 5:14). The imperfect tense of the verb translated was adding, along with the phrase day by day, indicates that people were continually being saved as they observed the daily conduct of the believers. So unified, joyful and spirit filled were they that their very existence was a powerful testimony to the truth of the gospel. True evangelism flows from the life of a healthy church. This brief glimpse of the first fellowship gives valuable insight into what makes a healthy, growing church worthy of the name. The proper devotion to the duties of the Spirit produces the proper character, which in turn produces a powerful and saving impact on sinners. (MacArthur 1994, 92-93)

When the people of God respond to God in a way that glorifies God, they become a contagious people. When the first six principles are alive and being experienced, it creates an atmosphere and culture where people can come to know Christ as their Savior because they are seeing Him in the lives of His followers. “Clearly at this stage the followers of Jesus are being portrayed by Luke as true, messianic Jews, attempting to rescue other Jews so they might be part of a righteous remnant of Israel, the eschatological people of God” (Witherington 1998, 163).

The seven principles discovered in the text of Acts 2:42-47 present a potential Biblical foundation for small group ministries in today’s church. While the principles do not create a definite prescriptive formula for the results experienced by the early church, they do present strong evidence that there is potential for life change. This could be experienced today when the people of God hunger for the teaching of God’s Word, when they love being with each other, sharing meals, remembering Jesus by taking the Lord’s Supper together, by not allowing material possessions to become more important than helping someone in need, when expectation exists that God is real and ready to demonstrate His power in the daily pattern of life, and when God’s people will tell others the story of Jesus and how He has changed their life.

The following chapter will examine the principles of modern day research in the fields of Sunday School and Small groups. This examination will look at what authors have determined to be healthy principles for Sunday School and small group systems. These principles will then be compared to the principles discovered in this chapter from Acts 2:42-47.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH COMPARING SUNDAY SCHOOL AND SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Authors of Sunday School and Home Small Group models share common principles that contribute to a healthy church. This chapter will examine the writings of these authors to discover where commonalities exist in the models mentioned above. The purpose of this chapter is to show these similarities so that the church might see that both of these models are credible ways of enabling the church to live out the principles discovered in chapter two based on Acts 2:42-47. It is not the goal of this chapter to show whether Sunday School or small groups is better than the other or to show how they are different.

Small group Bible study is critical to the health of a balanced church life. Research-based church health assessment tools like Natural Church Development (based on the research project of Christian Schwartz), Church Central (based on the research of Thom Rainer and Charles Lawless), Transformational Church (based on a research project done through LifeWay Christian Resources and Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer), and MAP Church (created by the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention), all include some form of small group measurement in their evaluation of healthy church life.

Are small group Bible studies important? One of the church growth movement's patriarchs and futurists believes "the church of the future, though far bigger than the typical parish of today, will not be known for its central meeting spot, but for its small-group ministry 'franchise'" (George 1992, 22). The Transformational Church

research project done by LifeWay Christian Resources began by interviewing pastors of 7000 churches. That list was narrowed down to 250 pastors, in order to find the criteria that made those churches “transformational” (Rainer 28, 2010). While these interviews were open-ended, there were criteria by which the study began. One of the criteria in Transformational Church is described as,

the percentage of worship attendees involved in some small group, Sunday School class, or similar group. In this we are making a statement. Simply put, we believe churches that are transformational will have people in small community. It is an assumption we believe to be true. It is a qualification for a church to be transformational. (Rainer 2010, 28)

Natural Church Development states “our research in growing and declining churches all over the world has shown that continuous multiplication of small groups is a universal church growth principle” (Schwarz 1996, 32). Thom Rainer also adds in reference to Acts 2:42-47 that “it is difficult to see how any structure other than small groups can best fulfill these needs (mentioned in Acts 2:42-47). They allow for the ministry to a few by a few, rather than one or a few staff members attempting to meet the needs of hundreds or thousands” (Rainer 1993, 297).

This chapter will examine the writing of experts and practitioners first in the area of Sunday School, then small groups. These sections will look at principles that Sunday School and small group authors determine are essential to the effectiveness of these models. The third section of the chapter will look at these Sunday School and small group principles as compared to the principles found in chapter two from Acts 2:42-47. The last part of the chapter will show where the two models do have similarities.

### **Healthy Sunday School Principles**

There will be three areas examined in this section beginning with, the criteria of a healthy Sunday School as defined by Arthur Flake. Second will be the criteria by Max Caldwell. Third will be other assorted writers who add to the discussion of healthy Sunday School principles that also reflect the writing of Flake and Caldwell. The writing

of Flake and Caldwell has been chosen due to their influence on other writers which can be seen by how often to which they are referenced.

In much of the writing about Southern Baptist Sunday Schools, one will discover the names of Robert Raikes and Arthur Flake. Raikes is considered to be the founder of the Sunday School movement (Francis, Hemphill, Taylor, Townes). His work is usually referred to from a historical perspective as he developed his practices in 1780 (Townes 1993, 457). The work of Raikes is important for a historical understanding of Sunday School but it will not be dealt with, in this research as the history does not impact the overall objective of determining the common principles in the Sunday School and small groups.

The name of Arthur Flake is different due to “Flake’s Formula” (Miller 2009, 125) where he established criteria for a healthy Sunday School. This was developed in the 1920’s and continues to be a measurement for churches today.

Arthur Flake was a traveling salesman and department store manager who was converted at age thirty-one. He then organized a local church, and was the state’s volunteer Sunday School superintendent. In 1920 he was placed in charge of the new Department of Sunday School Administration. His book, *Building a Standard Sunday School*, has given guidance and motivation for the expansion of the Southern Baptist Sunday school work. (Townes 1993, 253)

As Haynes discovered in being a practitioner and writing a book on Sunday School, “one item which surfaced repeatedly in one way or another was to remember Arthur Flake’s formula for growing Sunday Schools” (Haynes 1992, 5).

### **The Sunday School Principles of Arthur Flake**

A healthy Sunday School is more effective when an evaluation process is utilized. Flake’s Formula continues to be used as an evaluation tool for Sunday School. Townes points out that “most people who want to build a New Testament church give attention to the spiritual growth principles in the Word of God but neglect the natural factors of good organization and techniques. These principles built on common sense

cannot be ignored if you want to build a New Testament church” (Townes 1993, 409). This is what “Flake’s Formula” does for a Sunday School organization. Arthur Flake discovered effective natural factors that help focus a Sunday School on health. The five points of this evaluation process that are attributed to Arthur Flake and referred to as “Flake’s Formula” are, “1. Know the possibilities, 2. Enlarge the organization, 3. Provide space and equipment, 4. Enlist and train the workers, 5. Go after the people” (Flake 1951, 26).

**Know the possibilities.** A successful Sunday School will evaluate its mission field, demographics, and the make-up of the church where, Flake points out, the leaders of the Sunday School “should plan to devote as much of his time as possible to a study of the people with whom he labors” (Flake 1923, 61). Dobbin’s adds that “a careful census must be taken of the entire community which the church serves to discover legitimate prospects” (Dobbins 1923, 112). Knowing the possibilities of who the church can reach means being intentional about the study of a church and its field. As Miller points out, “the goal is to identify who you are not currently reaching that is present in your church field” (Miller 2009, 125).

**Enlarge the organization.** This growth principle directs the church to reach more people by creating more teaching units. “New classes and departments help a Sunday School reach new people” (Adams 1979, 38). The principle is reinforced by Hemphill who writes, “to enlarge the size of a pyramid one must build a larger base” (Hemphill 1996, 2). This logic supports Flake’s idea that a healthy Sunday School will find new possibilities of people to reach and make a place for them by enlarging the overall organization.

**Provide space and equipment.** In a healthy Sunday School the groups must have a place where they meet. The first place to look is in the church building, but as



Miller points out other possible places would be to look at “community buildings, schools or houses” (Miller 2009, 126). Churches form groups and provide regular class room space as well as more creative spaces like Miller points out.

**Enlist and train workers.** Some of Flake’s points are dependent on each in order for them to be effective. One example is for point two to succeed (enlarge the organization), “as a church growth tool the number of teachers will need to increase. It is obvious that you cannot start new units without an adequate number of qualified leaders to staff both existing and new units” (Hemphill 1996, 142). Many leadership positions are important in the life of a Sunday School, but the role of the teacher is a high calling and critical to a positive encounter with the Word of God. This is reinforced by Alan Taylor who writes,

The important ministry of a Sunday School teacher cannot be overstated! Teachers handle the two most precious things to God every week – God’s Word and God’s people. I do not know of anything God loves more than His Word and His people. Churches need to understand the significance of their Sunday School teachers. All teachers need to understand the significance of their ministry in the lives of their class members. Teachers have an exalted place in the church! (Taylor 2009, 56)

Teaching God’s Word is critically important and thus one must enlist the best people possible who will need to be trained. Dunn notes “the secret for success is the provision of adequate and effective training for those all important leaders” (Dunn 1992, 12). Jesus provides the best example of training people for ministry as Parr points out, “Jesus extended His influence into the world by equipping and then releasing His disciples to minister outside of the group of twelve. Sunday school teachers should have the same goal” (Parr 2010, 46).

**Go after the people.** Many authors argue that the Sunday School is in decline (Hemphill, Rainer, Taylor). Statistics by these same authors support that argument. Why is the Sunday School declining? Hemphill points out in his writing that Sunday Schools have failed at this fifth point:

It is my conviction that the beginning of the so-called demise of Sunday School can be traced to a time when denominations and local churches failed to use the Sunday School with evangelistic intentionality and purpose. When the design was forgotten, the Sunday School became a maintenance tool rather than a growth tool. (Hemphill 1996, 4)

It is clear from the research that those who write about Sunday School believe that one of the primary purposes is for it to be evangelistic. Dobbins and Flake write about this in the 1920's and current authors like Caldwell, Piland, Rainer, and Taylor continue that conviction. Their conviction is a Biblical one as Piland notes:

Millions of people are on their way to hell to an eternal destiny without hope, without Christ, and without God. The Bible is absolutely clear on this point (Rom. 3:23, 6:23, John 14:6, Acts 4:12). Today, millions of unreached and unchurched persons live in this land of ours and around the world. (Piland 1990, 26)

Their conviction is based on God's mandate in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18).

Adams summarizes this conviction by writing:

A New Testament church is a growing church. The churches that Paul and the apostles knew were planted to reach people for Christ. They were emblazoned with the Great Commission: 'Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (Matt. 28:19). They could not sit still and be content with business as usual. They had a burning fire within their spirits that compelled them to seek out and lay hold on others. The news was too good to keep. It had to be shared. (Adams 1979, 4)

The five principles that Arthur Flake discovered have become timeless as they continue to be relevant from the 1920's until today. Sunday School leaders continue to see the value of these principles in building a healthy Bible-teaching, people-reaching ministry. One example is the former LifeWay Christian Resources Director of Sunday School, Bill Taylor. He points out the influence of Flake and his historical significance to the work of Sunday School as he writes:

Only about half of Southern Baptist churches had Sunday Schools in 1920. Twenty-six years later, Sunday Schools were found in 84 percent of churches cooperating with the Southern Baptist Convention. Today the legacy lives on – one because he created the 'science of Sunday School growth,' 'commonly referred to as the 'Flake Formula for Growth,' and the other because of his compassion for people and his phenomenal record for reaching people. (Taylor 1996, 39)

## **The Sunday School Principles of Max Caldwell**

The materials discovered in this research reveal that Flake continues to influence Sunday School standards today. This section will show Flake's influence on modern day Sunday School as Max Caldwell added to Flake's five principles and expanded them to nine. Max Caldwell wrote "A Guide to Standard Sunday School Work" in 1982. Others have also written and added to Flake's five principles which will be examined in the third section of this chapter. The nine principles are:

1. Make a commitment to growth, 2. Identify and enroll prospects, 3. Start new classes and departments, 4. Enlist workers, 5. Train workers, 6. Provide space and equipment, 7. Conduct weekly workers' meetings, 8. Conduct weekly visitation, 9. Teach the Bible to win the lost and develop the saved. (Caldwell 1982, 14)

Next will be a brief description of Caldwell's nine principles for a balanced Sunday School.

**Make a commitment to growth.** Healthy Sunday Schools must "be willing to pray, study, set goals, evaluate, and report on their work. They must have a vision of what can be accomplished through the work of the Sunday School" (Caldwell 1982, 14). The commitment and vision that Caldwell writes about can be seen in another Sunday School pioneer, J.N Barnett, who "'believed the program and ministry were worth whatever it cost him. He didn't have a conviction: the conviction had him" (Taylor 1996, 45).

**Identify and enroll prospects.** For a Sunday School to reach new people and assimilate them into the small group structure it must "be actively involved in the discovery of prospects" (Caldwell 1982, 14). Prospects "are people not attending Sunday School anywhere. They can be church members, worship attendees, friends, coworkers, classmates, family members, neighbors, patrons of our businesses and people encountered every day" (Edmonds 2009, 32). This principle relates to Flake's "go after the people." Both writers seek to accomplish the same goal which is to reach lost people

by using the tool of an organized Sunday School. Taylor writes that both principles seek to reach people for Christ; “we have correctly been taught that Christians ought to do what Jesus did! I submit to you that Sunday School should also do what Jesus did! Jesus was reaching people, teaching people, and ministering to people” (Taylor 2009, 34). Sunday Schools must be intentional about discovering lost people and inviting them to be part of a Sunday School small group.

**Start new classes and departments.** This principle denotes that growth will not happen if new life is not planned. Caldwell states “beginning new units is a key principle of growth. Growing churches start new classes, departments, and Sunday Schools whenever they are needed” (Caldwell 1982, 14). This is reinforced by Francis who writes “ideas abound about how a Sunday School, a church, or the larger kingdom of God grows. All of those theories can be reduced to this most basic principle: start new units” (Francis 2009, 82). Proof of the value of this principle is seen in a survey done in Georgia Southern Baptist churches that determined the top ten practices of growing Sunday Schools. This survey revealed that “83 percent were assertive in creating and launching new classes” (Parr 2010, 78). Hemphill adds that “church growth authors universally agree that the key to growth is the creation of new units. These new units broaden the base of the pyramid, enabling it to sustain greater height” (Hemphill 1996, 73).

**Enlist workers.** Every Sunday School exists to work with people and therefore it must have workers, leaders or people in places of leadership in order for the organization to fulfill its mission. Caldwell writes that “Sunday School leaders must identify persons who are potential leaders, develop a list of these potential leaders, then enlist them in leadership positions as needed” (Caldwell 1982, 14). Stubblefield points out that this is a critical principle in any organization in the church by writing “successful ministry in a church depends upon the recruitment and development of many leaders who

give freely of their services” (Stubblefield 1996, 81).

**Train workers.** The principle of providing training for the leadership in the Sunday School is essential. The healthy Sunday School provides training for specific skills in the organization so that the Sunday School works effectively and accomplishes its purpose. The “Sunday School leaders must determine training needs, plan for these needs, conduct training programs on every age level, and recognize the leaders who complete the training” (Caldwell 1982, 15). Hemphill adds that “the growing church puts a high priority on recruiting and training leaders” (Hemphill 1996, 14).

**Provide space and equipment.** Sunday School relies on meeting space located primarily in the church facility. For classes or groups to function they must have a place to meet and they need the best equipment that can be provided to enhance the teaching and learning experience. “To keep a Sunday School alive and growing, attention must be given to space and equipment needs” (Caldwell 1982, 15), like rooms, furnishings, and teaching equipment. Dobbins adds, “we need not expect to build a great Sunday school without paying the price. We will not have more people in our school than we can properly care for, and teachers cannot do their best work without adequate facilities” (Dobbins 1923, 112).

**Conduct weekly workers’ meetings.** Regular planning and communication is essential for a Sunday School to work effectively, as Caldwell writes this should be done through “a weekly workers’ meeting” (Caldwell 1982, 15). The purpose of these meetings is to accomplish the “essentials for coordination, planning, encouragement, and communication” (Hemphill 1996, 155). The goal of a weekly workers meeting is to have an organized, communicating and well directed Sunday School system. Hemphill writes that “adequate planning will allow a church to have a design that enables them to maintain positive momentum and avoid the roller coaster rides of growth and decline”

(Hemphill 1996, 46). He continues by noting that if some form of planning and meeting is not done then the consequence could be that, “churches latch onto a new idea and try to implement it immediately. They spend little time in the design phase. Soon they are frustrated. This wasted effort can have the further effect of slowing positive growth momentum” (Hemphill 1996, 45).

The importance of a weekly workers meeting is also found in Flakes writing. He saw the following four purposes of the weekly meeting: “To promote study of the lesson for the following Sunday. To study how best to teach the lesson. To consider briefly the problems of the school. To pray” (Flake 1954, 109). The importance of these meetings is emphasized by Flake who writes, “it is almost impossible to maintain an effective Sunday school without a functioning weekly officers and teachers’ meeting” (Flake 1954, 108). “It is imperative that Sunday School leaders meet on a cyclical basis. The work of the ministry must always be planned, coordinated, and tweaked. This cannot happen without a time that is set aside for this purpose” (Taylor 2009, 36).

**Conduct weekly visitation.** The goal of weekly visitation is to make a positive contact with the people who are prospects for the church in order to reach them for Jesus Christ. “Sunday School leaders and members must go out and invite people to become part of the Bible study program. There must be regular visitation each week by every class and department throughout the Sunday School” (Caldwell 1982, 15). Adams reinforces this practice by adding, “Sunday School visitation is the heart of a church’s growth program. A church cannot expect to have ongoing growth without Sunday School visitation” (Adams 1979, 78). One might argue that this practice is an outdated practice. Rainer argues against this idea by stating that, “some church growth pundits have indicated that visitor follow-up is not welcome in today’s culture, our research indicates that it is critical for both growth and ultimately retention” (Rainer 1999, 92). Some form of follow-up needs to take place for the church to be outward focused and thus oriented

toward reaching new people for Christ.

**Teach the Bible to win the lost and develop the saved.** As one can see from these principles, there are many practices that make a healthy Sunday School, but the practice of teaching is a primary purpose. It is this practice that introduces lost people who are in attendance to an understanding of the Gospel. This practice leads believers to a more mature understanding of God's Word (Acts 2:42, 2 Tim. 3:16-17). "Bible teaching must be the priority of the Sunday School hour. The Sunday School must be set aside for Bible teaching if men and women, boys and girls are to discover the truths of Christ's redemptive message and accept him as personal Savior" (Caldwell 1982, 15). The teacher of God's Word must remember where the power comes from as Hemphill notes, "it is not so much the persuasiveness of the teacher that makes a Sunday School lesson powerful, it is the power of the Word of God taught plainly and with conviction under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (Hemphill 1996, 132).

### **Flake and Caldwell Summary**

The principles that Flake and Caldwell discovered are building blocks where current Sunday School leaders build. The next section will examine complimentary and additional principles that other practitioners have developed. Authors have attempted to modernize principles or to make Sunday School contemporary which one might see are a rewording of Flake's Formula and Caldwell's nine principles of a balanced Sunday School.

### **Sunday School principles from other Authors**

In his book "Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur," author Ken Hemphill attempts to change the perspective of Sunday School critics by addressing contemporary criticisms. He rewords the titles of the principles to give them a fresh view. He emphasizes the areas of "vision, design, organization, outreach, assimilation,

teaching, and evaluation” (Hemphill 1996, ix).

Bill Taylor and other authors (Taylor, Townes, Rainer, Hemphill) write about the historical significance of the Sunday School movement by acknowledging Robert Raikes and Arthur Flake. Taylor’s book presents many of the same principles as Flake and Caldwell and also adds the nuance of writing from the perspective of a minister of education. He writes about the subjects of how the Sunday School is a great place to produce workers for the rest of the church. Taylor also gives credit for this to Arthur Flake as he was replying to a question that someone asked him about the idea of the Sunday School being “the employment agency of the church.” He writes that “Arthur Flake wrote a book in 1930 called ‘The True Function of the Sunday School.’ One of the chapters was entitled ‘The Sunday School is the Employment Agency of the Church’” (Taylor 1996, 109).

One person who is seen by many in Southern Baptist life today as a modern day “Mr. Sunday School” is Alan Taylor. Thom Rainer makes this reference in the forward of Taylor’s book by giving it the label, “Sunday School in HD.” He has attempted in his book to make Sunday School principles contemporary. His principles reflect the influence of Flake and Caldwell, but express them by talking about “Role, Purpose, Growth, Leadership and Passion” (Taylor 1996, VII).

### **Other Authors Summary**

Sunday School authors from Flake, to Caldwell, to Taylor, point out that a healthy Sunday School will teach the Bible, reach out to the lost, be organized, communicate, plan, expand the organization, and know their mission field. These too are a rewording of Flake’s basic principles, expanded by Caldwell and made contemporary by today’s practitioners of Sunday School. The following section will turn attention to the common principles found in small groups as the reader will note the significant overlap between Sunday School principles and small group principles.



## **Healthy Small Group Principles**

Small groups have become a popular strategy in the church today. As was mentioned in the previous section, some believe Sunday School is irrelevant in today's church (Hemphill). Rainer writes that, "the small group concept is one of the most discussed topics in American church growth today" (Rainer 1993, 289). This section will show research discovered by authors who write about Home Small Groups that generally meet in homes. It should be noted from the previous section that churches today have Sunday School groups that meet in homes, and small group churches have groups that meet in their church building on Sunday morning. This research defines the Sunday School as groups that meet on Sunday morning in the church building. Churches practice both Sunday School and Home Small Groups outside of these definitional boundaries but these definitions would be generally understood to apply. Home Small Groups are defined as groups that meet during the week and usually meet in a home.

The research will reflect principles found in the writing of two of the most referenced authors on small groups, David Cho and Bill Donahue. These authors were selected to give a reflection of the writing that exists on small groups and to discover common principles that lead to healthy small groups in the local church. The third part of this section will be research discovered from other authors to see if other principles are found that are complementary or different from those found in the writing of Cho and Donahue.

### **David Yonggi Cho**

Many authors attribute the small group movement in America to "Dr. David Yonggi Cho who is pastor of the most researched church on earth" (Townes 1986, 61). He is the pastor of the Full Gospel Central Church in Seoul, South Korea. His church is built on the concept of small groups. He has been so successful at this that churches all over the world have tried to model their church after Cho's success. Rainer adds that his success has created an attitude that "it was seen as a strategy best suited for churches in

other lands” (Rainer 1993, 289). In the forward of Cho’s book, “Successful Home Cell Groups,” he attributes the success to the idea that “home cell groups give every church member an opportunity to participate in the ministry of his church and to bring revival to his own neighborhood” (Cho 1981, vi).

What are the principles of successful small groups that Cho has discovered? His book reveals his personal discovery of small group principles, which include pastoral involvement and support, using a prescribed approved curriculum (standard Bible study course written by Cho), not allowing outside speakers in the groups, starting new groups when it reaches fifteen families, the need for organization, setting goals for growth, promoting unity in the body, groups must be used for evangelism, there must be training for group leaders, creating a system for supervision of the groups, select the right leaders, keep good records and provide for celebration. A brief report of these principles’ follows for clarification.

**Pastor involvement and support.** This one point for Cho is the most critical piece. It is his belief that the pastor must be the champion, promoter and overseer of the small group system. Cho says “the pastor must be the key person involved. Without the pastor, the system will not hold together. It is a system, and a system must have a control point. The controlling factor in home cell groups is the pastor” (Cho 1981, 107). He argues that some have tried to do small groups without the control of the pastor and they have failed.

**A prescribed curriculum.** A second principle for Cho is that the groups must use approved curriculum which in the early days of their groups were written by Cho. He writes, “I provide all of my cell leaders with a standard lesson each week . . . our church has adopted a standard Bible study course for cell groups similar to the standard Sunday school courses available in many churches” (Cho 1981, 113).

**Starting new groups.** The third principle for Cho is starting new groups. He describes different crisis in his small groups which helped him develop principles for their system. At one point his groups became too large to the point that a single leader could not care for the group. His solution was to mandate that groups “must divide when the group exceeded fifteen families” (Cho 1981, 38). This principle corresponds with the Sunday School principle of enlarging the organization. Cho writes that this was a difficult step at first for groups to follow, but it gradually became the expected norm.

**Need for organization.** The fourth principle that Cho learned was the need to provide organization for the system. This became necessary because of the numerical growth of the groups. His wife was administrating the organization as best that she could, until it became too large. He found it was time to “hire some assistant ministers. We hired three of them, and we put fifty home cell groups under each licensed minister” (Cho 1981, 39). This principle of Cho’s corresponds to Caldwell’s emphasis on organization.

**Setting goals for growth.** The fifth principle that Cho advocates is the importance of setting goals. He describes an experience with fellow Christians in Australia who were struggling with their churches not growing and they were looking to Cho for help. He “stressed the need for setting goals, based on the experience of my own church” (Cho 1981, 75). Once these church leaders took his advice and challenge, they found their churches growing again. This principle is similar to Flake’s “knowing the possibilities.”

**Promote unity in the body.** The sixth principle discovered by Cho was the need for unity in the body. He experienced some renegade ministers who attempted to take part of the people they were overseeing to start their own churches. He had to deal with complaints and disgruntled members. He came to the point that he wrote, “I believe we should always promote the unity of the body of Christ, and we should reject anything that seeks to divide the Church” (Cho 1981, 92). Bill Taylor writes a chapter which deals

with similar concerns in his church that was working to build a stronger, growing Sunday School. His conclusion is that there are many human frailties and churches, Sunday schools and small groups are not immune from those frailties. When they are experienced, God is there to help people work through the debris.

**Groups must be used for evangelism.** The seventh principle that Cho found was the importance of evangelism in small groups. His church uses other methods of evangelism but the church seeks to “carry out evangelism primarily through the home cell group system. Each cell group becomes a nucleus of revival in its neighborhood, because the cell group is where real life is to be found in that neighborhood” (Cho 1981, 58). His vision for evangelism through small groups is very similar to what Acts 2:47 reflects. Cho describes this as when a “home cell meeting is full of life, and when people are happy and sharing their faith and witnessing to what the Lord has done in their lives, other people are drawn to them. Unbelievers become curious” (Cho 1981, 58). The importance of evangelism is as paramount to Cho as pastoral leadership. He writes, “there is only one way that the home cell group system will be successful in a church, if that system is to be used as a tool of evangelism” (Cho 1981, 107). Flake, Caldwell, Hemphill, Piland and Adams all agree with this conclusion as it relates to Sunday School.

**Training for group leaders.** The eighth principle that Cho discovered was that leaders must be trained to lead the groups. Once again he learned this by having to deal with problems that occurred. The problems created the need to fix something and in this case the solution was training. He describes this in relation to fixing the group size issue as he writes, “it was apparent something would have to be done to split the cells into smaller groups. So I worked out a plan to train assistant leaders for each fellowship” (Cho 1981, 38). The role of the pastor is a main priority as “he needs to remain the obvious leader, training the cell leaders and motivating them to reach the goals that have been established for each group” (Cho 1981, 109). Training is a key component to a

healthy Sunday School. This principle is a key element as described by Flake, Caldwell, Hemphill, Taylor and Piland.

**System for supervision of the groups.** The ninth principle that Cho advocates is the need for supervision in the groups. This point is attached to two other principles, pastoral involvement and organization. As Cho added ministers to the organization who reported to him, then the groups had a better system of supervision and accountability. Part of the supervision comes from setting goals in the groups, keeping records of what is happening in those groups and thus they have a system of accountability. This type of strong supervision and oversight is a component of Sunday School. Caldwell's principle of organization confirms this.

**Selecting the right leaders.** The tenth principle he discovered for small group success is in the selection of leaders for the groups. He identified criteria that would help his groups succeed. He states that "selecting the right lay leaders is essential. Success or failure can depend on them" (Cho 1981, 111). He adds that enlistment and training are critical and he emphasizes the importance of selecting leaders by writing that, "once the leaders are selected, they need to be trained" (Cho 1981, 113). He gives five other criteria for what he looks for in his leaders. These are "1. Enthusiasm, 2. Testimony, 3. Dedication, 4. Spirit-filled, 5. Time and money" (Cho 1981, 111). Both Flake and Caldwell give strong emphasis on the need for enlisting and training leaders to have a strong Sunday School.

**Keep good records.** The eleventh principle that Cho reveals is inferred in his discussion about how to start cell groups where he mentions the need to "have statistics to back up the testimonies, showing how many people have been healed or helped in other ways at the meetings, how many unbelievers have been led to Christ and so on" (Cho 1981, 115). In order for this information to be available to Cho and his leaders,

they would have to keep records of some kind. The Sunday School has a strong emphasis on good record keeping. Andy Anderson devised an entire evaluation and goal setting process called “The Growth Spiral” based on the records that a strong Sunday School maintains (Marler 2009, 123).

**Provide for celebration.** The twelfth principle that Cho presents is an indirect principle. As he writes about starting groups, he reveals that:

At the general church meeting, the cell leaders and members of their groups should give testimony to the whole congregation, showing what God is doing through the cell meetings. Believe me, it will be an exciting time. The enthusiasm of the leaders and cell members will be infectious. People will be convinced that the cell system has something for them. (Cho 1981, 115)

This principle has a marketing effect that keeps the cell group system in front of the people and celebrates the good things that happen.

### **Bill Donahue**

The first section on small groups has looked at the discoveries of David Yonggi Cho as a small group practitioner. The following section will look at the principles researched in the writing of Bill Donahue who is the Executive Director of Small Group Ministries for the Willow Creek Association. His philosophy of small groups is influenced by Carl George’s book “Preparing Your Church for the Future” which advocates the idea of a,

meta church which means ‘change.’ A meta-church is a church that is changing the way it accomplishes the expansion of the kingdom. A meta-church is organized around cell groups, where people can find friendship, be mentored in the faith, understand and discuss the truth of the Word, identify and use their spiritual gifts, and provide care for one another. (Donahue 1996, 13)

This is a foundational influence for his writing and his perspective about small groups. Another key ingredient that is derived from George is the difference between whether the church “will be a church with small groups or a church of small groups” (Donahue 1996, 16). The distinction is a church with small groups is a programmatic approach to small groups where a church of small groups has small groups in mind in everything the church

does (Donahue). He points to five key areas for small groups to be effective which are, “span of care, leadership development, group multiplication, intentional shepherding, and ministry coordination” (Donahue 1996, 13). These will be examined in the following pages.

**Span of care.** Donahue argues that it is unreasonable for a pastor to “shepherd a flock of 80 or 200 or 500 people” (Donahue 1996, 14) so the care must be broken down into smaller groups. He advocates that “a reasonable ‘span of care,’ is a ratio of 1:10 – for every leader team, up to ten members can be cared for” (Donahue 1996, 14). In the span of care principle one could also place the principle of relationships which is a major emphasis in Donahue’s writing. He believes that relationships are a key to small group health, so much so that he writes “you cannot pursue a life of transformation – sanctification in Bible terms – on your own. Peter says it is a progression that culminates in genuine love expressed in community” (Donahue 2001, 59). The Sunday School organization attempts to meet this need through care groups where one leader is responsible for a smaller group within the class group. Piland describes this role by stating “the care-group leaders are responsible to the teacher for contacting, ministering to, cultivating, and discipling as many as seven assigned class members” (Piland 1990, 94).

**Leadership development.** The second principle that Donahue advocates is leadership development. He points out “the small group ministry at your church thrives on the ability to identify and develop qualified leaders to shepherd little flocks of believers and reach out to strays who need Christ” (Donahue 1996, 14). For a church to effectively develop their leaders, they must do three things, enlist, train, and coach their leaders (Donahue 2001). The church small group leadership must take care in the selection process as he states “the small group ministry of the church rises and falls on the quality of its leaders. Envisioned, equipped, and compassionate leaders will guide

groups toward spiritual growth, mutual care, and Spirit-empowered service” (Donahue 2001, 123). Small group leaders should be selected with criteria based on the acrostic “A.R.E. – Affections, Reputation, and Expectations, which describe the essential characteristics for small group leadership” (Donahue 2001, 124).

Once the leaders are carefully selected, they must be trained which “means helping someone acquire a skill. It’s different from development, which includes character growth, increased ministry responsibility, and nurture” (Donahue 2001, 135). He provides a three phase process for training leaders which includes “classroom training, apprentice training and on-the-job training” (Donahue 2001, 136). He also provides ideas for training leaders at different levels of experience from “new leaders, intermediate leaders, to seasoned leaders” (Donahue 2001, 141).

The third area of training that should be provided is coaching for the small group leaders. This will provide “shepherding, support, prayer, new ideas and sometimes a kind voice on the phone” (Donahue 2001, 146) for the small group leader who can sometimes “feel isolated” (Donahue 2001, 145). The coaching role is a way to provide accountability for the small group by allowing the church leadership to have a direct hand into each small group through the coach who answers to the church leaders. This area is very critical as he notes that “every time we have hit a ministry bottleneck, the cause was leader shortage. If the shortage persisted, it was because we had neglected ongoing leadership development” (Donahue 2002, 103). Flake, Caldwell, Taylor, Piland and Hemphill all emphasize this same need in the Sunday School. Developing leaders is a critical in the “Growth Spiral as it measures the number of leaders who are currently involved in training” (Marler 2009, 123).

**Group multiplication.** The third principle that Donahue advocates is groups must start new groups. This is a natural form of life. Schwartz states that “every form of organic growth sooner or later reaches its natural limits. A tree does not keep getting



bigger; it brings forth new trees, which in turn produce more trees. This is the biotic principle of ‘multiplication,’ which characterizes all of God’s creation” (Schwartz 1998, 68). Donahue points out, that “we are called to multiply our ministry by extending the kingdom and enfolded new followers. The use of the open chair to allow for consistent, well-paced group growth will enable new believers or inquiring seekers to find a group” (Donahue 1996, 15). Sunday School leaders also advocate that groups must multiply. This is referred to as starting new teaching units as Pike notes, “new units are absolutely essential for growing a Sunday School. Most new classes grow to their maximum size within 18-24 months of their beginning” (Pike 2009, 152).

**Intentional shepherding.** The fourth principle that Donahue describes is intentional shepherding which means a balance between nurturing people, meeting their needs, ministering to them and making them a disciple. He points out that “well-balanced shepherding takes place when caring and discipling get equal emphasis in group life. It is a ‘both-and’ proposition versus an ‘either-or’ decision” (Donahue 2001, 111). He presents an interesting idea in his discussion on this point which comes from a book that influenced him. The book he talks about is “Polarity Management” by Barry Johnson. This book presents the idea that opposites exist in our world which pointed his thinking to small groups where there is a natural tension between group disciplines like shepherding, caring, and nurturing skills in contrast to the disciplines of discipleship and Bible study aspects of small groups (Donahue 14, 2003). In his attempt to create balance between these valid needs in a small group, he writes:

Spiritual growth is a process that requires time and a willing spirit. It results from the work of the Holy Spirit, obedience to Scripture, intimacy with Christ, and having experiences (especially adversity) and accountable relationships in community. As a group leader, you do not cause spiritual growth, but you can create an environment that promotes and facilitates such growth. That’s why we have stressed the importance of using the Word of God in your group, teaching your group to pray, understanding the role of the Holy Spirit in your group, and the need to build authentic, lasting relationships with members. (Donahue 1996, 147)

The Sunday School works to accomplish this goal as Hemphill points out that “the Sunday School has the organizational structure to hold together the three elements of the Great Commission – evangelizing, assimilating, and discipling” (Hemphill 1996, 39).

**Ministry coordination.** The fifth principle described by Donahue is ministry coordination. The objective of this principle is to make sure that the people are involved in ministry. Once again Donahue refers to the “meta-church model that fosters teamwork and coordination of ministry efforts. Since all ministries of the church are designed and developed using small groups, it is essential that all of those groups function together to accomplish the church’s mission” (Donahue 1996, 15). This principle is the organizational aspect of the small group system. A church deciding to move in this direction “needs to present the organizational case to every segment of your church, including your ministries to children and adults, couples and singles, men and women, jocks and computer geeks, the mature and the emotionally unstable, the leaders and newly converted” (Donahue 2001, 46).

These are descriptions of Donahue’s primary principles for healthy small groups. Much more detail is listed in his books, “Leading Life-Changing Small Groups,” “Building a Church of Small Groups,” “The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry,” and “Walking the Small Group Tightrope.” In subtle ways he advocates principles of Cho’s like a central point person to lead the system and having curriculum. Both advocate having a lead person in charge of the small group system, but Cho believes it should always be the pastor and Donahue allows for someone else to manage the small group system, like a staff member.

### **Cho and Donahue Summary**

Cho believes that there should be a tightly controlled curriculum overseen by the pastor and Donahue believes there should be curriculum approved by the small group coach, who is accountable to the church leaders. Both believe in the need to reproduce

groups, carefully enlist leaders, train leaders, organize their systems, communicate with their groups and keep control of the groups. Do other principles exist for healthy small groups beyond those found in the writing of Cho and Donahue? The next section will research this question to find if other principles exist.

### **Small Group Principles from Other Authors**

This section will examine principles discovered in this research from other authors of small groups. The overall goal is to discover common small group principles found in the research by authors beyond the writing of Cho and Donahue.

#### **Julie Gorman**

“Author Julie Gorman brings solid qualifications to provide such a resource, as a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, she has taught thousands of Christians the art and science of building Christian community through small groups” (Gorman 2002, 9). Gorman approaches her writing about small group principles from the perspective as a practitioner and academician. One might assume from the title, *Christian Community*, that the primary emphasis of this book would be relationships in a small group, which is true, but the book has a second priority which is to provide a broader learning experience for those who participate in groups. Gorman writes “studies have shown the priority of small group experiences in enhancing the process of learning: Small groups increase involvement, improve achievement, and promote persistence and positive attitudes toward learning” (Gorman 2002, 11).

This book is more theoretical than practical. She gives more examples of research in presenting her points and she often writes as a reporter rather than a practitioner, giving different options to the specific point being discussed. Most of the principles that she advocates are the same as Cho and Donahue. She emphasizes common factors like relationships, community, group size, enlistment, training and communication. One different area that Gorman and Donahue emphasize is conflict.

Both authors deal with the reality that conflict will come when you are dealing with people in groups. Gorman's view of the importance of conflict is summarized in her statement that "a group that cares deeply about its members is torn between being agreeable and being honest with one another" (Gorman 2002, 171). This shows that the primary emphasis for Gorman seems to be that small groups are for relationships. She and Donahue write about the need to know one's self, and to know God, but she doesn't see a separation between knowing God and being in relationship with people. This view is verified as she writes, "relating is at the heart of knowing God. Relating is also at the heart of becoming the people of God. Our faith journey is one we make together. Community is the context for our growth, and it is a distinctively Christian concept" (Gorman 2002, 24).

### **David Stark**

The primary benefit that Stark contributes to this research is his emphasis on people growing in their relationship with Christ. He presents a summary of his principles in the following paragraph:

A God-sized small-group vision celebrates the diversity He created. It's large enough to include a wide variety of small groups. It frees people to listen to God's voice and use their God-given gifts. It's not controlling but empowering, not draining but energizing. It's organic and fluid in nature, changing its methods according to the surrounding cultured landscape but changeless in its central purpose of growing people on their journey to becoming completely committed Christ-followers. It acknowledges that new groups constantly form, and when their purpose has been accomplished, they end. It's a vision that presumes change, constantly asking, 'what is God doing right here, right now, with this person, with this group in this place?' It's a vision built on mutual trust and accountability. It's filled with anticipation of God's provision and blessing. (Stark 2004, 20)

This paragraph lists the elements that Stark presents in his book that will create an atmosphere in small groups where people will be able to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Stark advocates more of a free atmosphere in his organization as compared to Cho or Donahue who believe that a central point of control is essential for the groups to

grow. This could be because Stark's emphasis is creating an atmosphere where the main concern is the growth of people rather than the growth of the organization. "Small Groups are all about people because the crown of God's creation is people. It's people He wants us to build, not programs" (Stark 2004, 24).

His emphasis is on understanding how people grow spiritually, seeing where they are growing and, as the small group leader, being a facilitator for their growth. He spends two chapters dealing with stages of development. In these chapters he writes about Biblical understanding by applying the story of "the parable of the sower" (Stark (2004, 63) and explains how these types of soil create opportunities for small groups to help people grow in Christ. The second chapter is devoted to principles of growth that he describes as "Sociological Growth Principles" (Stark 2004, 72). These principles are belonging, support, learning retention, transformation, accountability, experimentation, risk-taking, synergy, decision making and problem solving (Stark 2004, 73).

The principles defined by Stark are similar to those described by Cho, Donahue, and Gorman. Each author describes the need for accountability, but each has a different degree of intensity in how they propose it to be carried out. Cho advocates that the pastor is the one that the small group system answers to. Donahue writes that the pastor should be involved and believe in the system, but that a staff member or lay person could be the leader of the system. Stark's perspective is an organic view that everyone in the small group system is growing at different levels and paces and thus must be treated differently, so the system must be designed to allow for this diversity. His view is "there is no one-size-fits all small-group models for an entire denomination" (Stark 2004, 12). A common principle discovered in each author's writing is that the spiritual growth of the group participants is of utmost importance.

The Sunday School system seeks to accomplish the spiritual growth of individuals as Hemphill writes, "after persons were won to Christ, the Sunday School

would nurture and train these new believers even as it helped mature all believers” (Hemphill 1996, 4).

### **Rick Howerton**

The writing of Rick Howerton represents the influences of “Lyman Coleman and Bill Donahue – giants on whose shoulders the small-group movement has been carried and greatly influenced for decades; men whose work and lives have inspired myself and thousands of others” (Howerton 2007, 4). Howerton currently leads the development of small group curriculum for NAV Press. The small group principles that he describes in his book, “Destination: Community, Small-Group Ministry Manual” are “experiential discipleship, community, obtaining group members, organization, unity, vision, purpose, planning, getting church approval, role of the pastor, evangelism, prayer and multiplication” (Howerton 2007, 5).

Acts 2:42-47 is the basis of what Howerton describes as the “five actions of healthy small-groups” (Howerton 2007, 97). The actions he describes are “1. Provocative, demanding Bible study, 2. Redemptive community, 3. Risky, transparent praying, 4. Doing life together, and 5. Take care of each other” (Howerton 2007, 98). Each of these will be defined as follows.

**Provocative, demanding Bible study.** Howerton suggests that in Acts 2:42-47, Luke is describing the early church as people who “wanted to discover more of the larger story and learn from the apostles how to understand the Scriptures and their lives in view of that larger story and Jesus’ identity. The focus is not merely amassing knowledge, but on experiential Bible study that results in radical transformation” (Howerton 2007, 98).

**Redemptive community.** It is his interpretation that these early followers of

Jesus were able to “eat meals together daily, and sacrifice to meet the needs of others in the group. These small groups truly share life together and shine light for people trapped in darkness” (Howerton 2007, 99).

**Risky, transparent praying.** From Howerton’s interpretation of Acts 2:42-47 he describes prayer as “tears of passion, expectation, and celebration. These believers are so in tune with one another’s hurts, and needs that they not only say prayers, but they beg, plead, and prod God with full confidence that He will act” (Howerton 2007, 99).

**Doing life together.** The early church spent time going through life with each other. Howerton makes the distinction that “there is a big difference between eating together and sharing a meal together. In Biblical times, meals could last a couple of hours. Eating together enabled relational intimacy. Discussions about Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection and about God’s work in the past were common during meal times” (Howerton 2007, 99).

**Take care of each other.** Howerton makes the point that one of the early church practices found in Acts 2:42-47 was to sacrifice for each other. He writes that “you know you love someone when you will sacrifice what you’ve worked hard to attain in order to meet that person’s needs” (Howerton 2007, 100). It should be the goal of a healthy small group to giving of oneself and to sacrifice so that others might not be in need.

### **Other Authors Summary**

Each of the authors who write on small groups principles in the local church does so from the perspective of being a practitioner. They have worked in their groups, worked with the leaders in the groups, and they have administrated the oversight of the groups. The principles they write about have influenced each other, as was mentioned by Howerton being influenced by Bill Donahue and Lyman Coleman. One would think that

the principles in small group writing would be more consistent. Many of the principles are consistent with each other, yet each author adds nuances to their own writing. The principles found in the Sunday School section are more consistent than the ones discovered in the small group research.

### **Biblical Research Compared with Social Research**

Chapter two examined the Biblical principles found in Acts 2:42-47. These principles can be applied to the modern day Sunday School / small group system. The seven principles discovered in Acts 2:42-47 are teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, expectation, community, and evangelism. The next section will compare the principles discovered in the Sunday School section and the small group section with the seven principles discovered in Acts 2:42-47. Where similarities are discovered they will be presented to show how both Sunday School and small groups function to fulfill the principles in Acts 2:42-47. This will be done by taking each of the seven principles in Acts 2 and identifying how authors believe Sunday School or small groups accomplish that principle.

#### **Principle of Teaching**

Sunday School and small group authors agree that teaching should be a central point of the experience. Caldwell points to this priority by writing, “to be a Sunday School teacher is to be a teacher of the Bible. This concept is so much a part of our commitment that the terms ‘Sunday School’ and ‘Bible study’ are synonymous in our usage. When we think ‘Sunday School,’ we think ‘Bible study’” (Caldwell 1982, 40). The importance of teaching is one of Hemphill’s key points to a healthy Sunday School as he notes “teaching is at the heart of the Bible study program of the local church. The teacher must also be the catalyst and leader who pulls together the Great Commission strategy of the Sunday School class. Every teacher should establish clear goals for his or her teaching ministry” (Hemphill 1996, 146). Another perspective related to the



importance of teaching in the Sunday School is presented by Piland, “teaching the Bible is at the heart of what Sunday Schools do with those who are reached” (Piland 1990, 139).

Small group authors also emphasize the importance of teaching. Donahue implies this by writing that “the Bible as the final authority in all areas that it teaches about and desires to be wholly obedient to it” (Donahue 2002, 25). Other writers emphasize ideas like spiritual growth, maturity, transformation, and Bible study but fail in their writing to give specific emphasis to the role and task of teaching (Stark 2004, Howerton 2007).

### **The Principle of Fellowship**

The Acts 2:42 passage teaches that the early church was committed “to the fellowship.” This is reflected in Caldwell’s writing where he states that one of the goals of the Sunday School is to achieve fellowship or relationships with fellow believers. He writes that “the person-centered ministry, the one-to-one relationship with individuals, the giving of oneself to help another discover the will of God for his life, the energy expended on the part of one individual to help another put Christ’s teaching into practice is indeed the essence of the teachings of Christ” (Caldwell 1982, 68). Alan Taylor adds that “God designed us for relationships, and relationships are best formed in small group settings. We recognize the spiritual experience that church attendance provides, but it also offers social experiences, and we need both” (Taylor 2009, 23).

Small group authors use the words relationship and community interchangeably. This is demonstrated by Stanley who writes about “building relational, transforming communities where people are experiencing oneness with God and oneness with one another. Communities that are so satisfying, so unique, and so compelling that they create thirst in a watching world” (Stanley 2004, 45). Stanley’s description has a vision for the accomplishment of Acts 2:47 where the result of the relationships that were

lived out in the early church became evangelism. Cho also writes about the power of a strong fellowship having an evangelistic affect. Building relationships is critical to the health of small groups. Cho reports that small groups in his church could be described as being places “where they have an opportunity to worship the Lord, to pray together, to learn from the Word, to experience the working of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to see miracles and healings and to enjoy loving relationships with their fellow Christians” (Cho 1981, 50).

### **The Principle of Breaking Bread**

In the Acts 2: 42 text it refers to the early church “breaking bread” together in the normal walks of life. People in the early church shared meals with each other and sometimes that included the Lord’s Supper. The Sunday School attempts to address this need as Adams writes “opportunities for family ministry are to be found in parent-child conflicts, helping care for a family member who is ill, providing food and clothing in times of crisis” (Adams 1979, 83). Ellison adds that it should be a normal process in a Sunday School to “plan fellowships to intentionally engage everyone” (Ellison 2009, 109). Strawn adds that he tries to utilize this principle in the development of leaders in his work with Sunday School by “setting aside two lunches a week to take teachers or directors to lunch just to visit and get to know them better (Strawn 1992, 101). This principle is not written about extensively in the Sunday School materials researched here, but it is inferred in many ways by the authors. The aspect of the Lord’s Supper is not found in Sunday School writing.

The authors of small groups in this research share a primary focus which is the importance of relationships. Every book in this research has a reference to relationships being a driving force in the health of small groups in homes. Breaking bread by the early church is equated by small group authors as experiencing community. Stanley affirms

this by writing “we have emphasized the fact that people need community” (Stanley 2004, 44). Cho points out a potential problem with this principle by writing:

The cell meetings were growing, and the leaders were carrying out my program, teaching the Word, praying for needs and providing real fellowship, but they did not know when to stop. Soon the meetings took on the character of a party. Members would alternate as hosts, so that the meetings moved from house to house in each succeeding week. In one house the people would be treated to rice and kimchi (hot, spicy pickled vegetables), but the next week the new host would add fish to the menu, and the third week they would have steak. (Cho 1981, 35)

Breaking bread is part of small groups in homes because of the natural principle found in Acts 2:42. People seek to be with other people and to be in relationships with each other.

### **The Principle of Prayer**

One of the outcomes of a healthy Sunday School is to disciple the people who participate. Cooper points out that Sunday School plays a role in this discipleship process by recognizing that “we must be constantly leading people into a growing, learning understanding of what it means to follow Christ daily through prayer, study and the disciplines of the faith” (Cooper 1992, 22). Leaders in Sunday School should follow the example of Jesus in regard to prayer as Parr notes “many teachers will go through an entire year (or many years) without ever applying the principle of praying about and directly enlisting others to be a part of the group as Jesus did” (Parr 2010, 43). Prayer is an important part of Sunday School as Piland writes:

The group may focus their prayers on persons with special ministry needs. Included are the sick, the sorrowing, and the needy. At another time the prayers may be for absentees and at another time they may be for persons the group is trying to enroll in Sunday School. Prayer for the lost should be part of every meeting. The lost should be identified by name. Included may be those enrolled, family members of those enrolled, friends and neighbors, persons with whom the workers are employed, and persons on the group’s prospect list. (Piland 1990, 167)

Small group writers also emphasize the priority of prayer for a healthy group. Howerton notes that “one of the most vital roles small groups can play in the life of a Christian is to teach people to pray. Not only can group members hear prayer modeled,

they can also pray themselves” (Howerton 2007, 122). Cho adds his emphasis on prayer as he spells out what a typical home group agenda might follow:

There would be opening prayers and singing, followed by a representative (or corporate) prayer, preaching from the Word of God for encouragement (using my sermon outline), and then an offering. The meeting would end with testimonies, prayers for healing and the baptism in the Holy Spirit, and a closing prayer. (Cho 1981, 35)

This shows that prayer is very much a normal part of a healthy small group experience.

This quote by Cho also reveals his theological and denominational perspective

(Assemblies of God) which believes in gifts of the spirit and second baptism of the spirit.

This belief states that,

‘the baptism of the Spirit,’ has replaced the scriptural phrases, especially in Pentecostal and charismatic circles. In its most common use this new expression has tended to place less emphasis upon the indwelling of the Spirit, with the illumination of mind (John 14:26; 16:8-15), the refinement of character (the fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22-23; love, 1 Cor. 12:127-13:13), and the gifts of peace, power, and joy that the Spirit bestows. Instead, while not denying these, the phrase has become associated specifically with the initial and continuing endowment of individuals by the Spirit with miraculous powers, gifts, abilities, and emotional resources, manifest in spiritual healing, speaking in unknown tongues, prophesying, leadership, exuberant emotion, and other forms of equipment for Christian service. (Elwell 1984, 121)

Cho’s theological perspective and denominational background would affect some of the small group practices (like the agenda in a group) but does not affect the principles discussed here which are broader in their perspective.

### **The Principle of Expectation**

Healthy Sunday School groups will exhibit expectations that God is at work in the lives of those who are in the group. Hemphill affirms this idea as he writes that “we need teachers who teach from supernatural empowering” (Hemphill 1996, 47). There is expectation when people see God at work. An example of this is expressed by Parr as he writes about a church in Georgia where they “were blessed to baptize more this year than in any previous year in the history of the church. Almost half of those baptized were formerly un-churched people who came to know Christ through the ministry and witness

of the members. Almost all of those who trusted Christ are involved in a small group or Sunday School class” (Parr 2010, 51). People experiencing life change is what leads to an atmosphere of expectation.

Vision is important to the health of small groups. In his argument for small groups to establish their own vision, Donahue advocates that:

Small groups were an integral part of the early church structure. They were small enough to allow individual members to minister to one another, use their spiritual gifts, and be discipled in the teachings of Christ. In addition, they were vibrant and life-giving communities where evangelism could take place as un-churched people watched a loving and compassionate community in action. Small groups not only built up the church as the first living examples of biblical community but were vehicles for reaching a lost world for Christ. (Donahue 2002, 26)

### **The Principle of Community**

A community shares life with each other. Yoakum writes that “today, people hunger for relationships and friends. Many people live apart from their family and need friends. A Sunday School class can provide these relationships” (Yoakum 2009, 100). This principle is affirmed by Adams who adds:

Ministry and witnessing are parts of the total outreach to people. Each are expressions of the love of Christ. Growing Sunday Schools express the love of Christ through trying to meet all of the needs of members and nonmembers. All Sunday School workers should be concerned with all of the needs of the persons for whom they are responsible. (Adams 1979, 81)

Small group authors write about community. Many books have “community” in the title (Gorman, Stanley, Howerton). While authors use the word community, they often mean relationships more than the principle of community found in Acts 2:44-45 which was established (chapter two) as being about meeting needs of people. The research did find small group authors who write about meeting needs as being part of healthy small groups. Cho writes “a third ingredient of our cell meetings is ministry to one another” (Cho 1981, 114). They see meeting needs as being part of community, but the overall belief is that relationships is the major part of community. An example can be seen where Stanley writes, “I believe one of God’s biggest dreams for us is authentic

community – the kind of meaningful relationships that are best characterized by oneness with Him and with one another” (Stanley 2004, 40). Gorman writes that “community was and is kingdom living in the making. We are never closer to the heart of God than when we respond corporately to him and his word as his corporate people who reflect his glory” (Gorman 2002, 18). The healthy small group will help those in and outside of the group as Cloud describes, “groups take over where the weak person gives out. They provide love, support, advice, and encouragement when the person just doesn’t have the resolve to do something that seems difficult or even impossible” (Cloud 2003, 90). A great picture of how small groups should function and experience an Acts 2:44-45 community is presented by Cho who writes, “it’s a wonderful communal life. Each one is helping the other. When a member belongs to a home cell group, he knows he is loved and cared for” (Cho 1981, 54).

The authors of both Sunday School and small groups do not emphasize what Acts 2:44-45 teaches, to share with each other to the point of even selling material goods for the good of others in the group. The writers do teach that healthy groups will have a strong emphasis on building relationships with both God and His people (Gorman 2002, Stanley 2004, Cloud 2003, Taylor 2009, Piland 1990). One could assume the practice of helping group members with material needs does occur but that could not be established in this research.

### **The Principle of Evangelism**

Most authors who write about the principles and practices of Sunday School will agree that evangelism is a key purpose of a healthy Sunday School (Flake, Caldwell, Piland, Taylor, Hemphill). Arthur Flake began this belief as he wrote that “all Sunday Schools have the same constituency – men, women, and children; they have the same textbook – the Bible; they have the same objective – winning the lost to Christ and winning the saved to service” (Flake 1923, 9). His belief continues as Parr notes, “you

will observe that congregations that are more intentional in engaging nonbelievers are blessed to see more people come into a personal relationship with Christ than congregations that are evangelistically passive. The same is true for groups within a congregation such as Sunday School classes and small groups” (Parr 2010, 122). This is reinforced in Caldwell’s writing as he states “the ultimate objective of a balanced program of Sunday School work is to win the lost to Christ. The ultimate objective of your church’s Sunday School is to win the lost to Christ” (Caldwell 1982, 55). This research has found that authors mostly agree that this is the purpose of a healthy Sunday School but Sunday Schools do exist that do not experience effective evangelism. This is affirmed in Piland’s writing; “churches simply have not sustained the positive, vigorous, aggressive, and effective outreach that has for so long characterized our churches. Too many have become complacent and self-satisfied” (Piland 1990, 8).

Evangelism is a small group principle expressed with most authors. Cho believes small groups should be evangelistic and that for them to be successful, the pastor must be involved. He writes that “there is only one way that the home cell group system will be successful in a church, if that system is to be used as a tool of evangelism” (Cho 1981, 107). He adds that in his small groups “the meetings are required to be evangelistic” (Cho 1981, 114). Howerton believes that “small groups are one of the most effective ways we can reach an unbelieving humanity” (Howerton 2007, 114). Gorman contributes that “the task of Christian community is not a democratic process, not a meet-your-neighbor club, not a platform for diversity or an assembly line for accomplishment, it is movement toward Christ” (Gorman 2002, 93). The principle of evangelism in small groups is not assumed to be part of every group. Authors agree (Howerton, Donahue, Gorman) that one of the steps necessary in forming a group is to decide the purpose of the group. An example of this is found in Donahue’s writing, “if you want to build small groups that are very active evangelistically, study cell group churches such as Bethany

World Prayer Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where evangelism in every cell is an integral part of the strategy” (Donahue 2002, 41).

### **Conclusion**

One can see from this research that both Sunday School and small groups seek at some level to accomplish the seven principles presented in chapter two. The objective of this project is to show how Sunday School and small groups are similar. Looking at the seven principles found in Acts 2:42-47 lays a solid Biblical foundation for both Sunday School and small groups. Both models should seek to follow the principles in Acts 2:42-47. It is more challenging to find some of the principles in the writing about Sunday School and small groups. Two examples are the principles of breaking bread, and community. This is due to the clarification of what the words mean as discovered in chapter two. Authors use these words but they have different definitions as to the meaning of the words.

Sunday School and small groups have many similarities. This is seen in the previous pages. The five principles discovered in the section on Arthur Flake are also found in some form in Caldwell, Donahue, and Cho.

Each relies on strong pastoral leadership whether that is direct (Cho1981) or more subtle (Donahue 2001, Gorman 2002) or the perspective where the group itself exercises more authority (Stark 2004). Stark is the only author found in this research to advocate a loose leadership structure. The pastor must be supportive of the small group system to champion the system, to make sure resources, calendar, budget and priority are given to system.

Sunday School and small group authors write that the groups must be evangelistic and groups must understand their purpose. Healthy groups will have a balanced approach as they strive to accomplish the seven principles from Acts 2:42-47. Donahue’s writing about the influence of opposites is true in small groups and Sunday



School. Healthy groups will have a strong emphasis on Bible study and discipleship on one end of the spectrum and care, nurture and relationships on the other end.

This research found only one author who has dealt with the Sunday School and Home Small Groups being presented side by side in the local church. Michael Mack devotes one chapter where he compares the Sunday School model and the small group model. Many of his conclusions are stereotypical conclusions of the two models, but it is a good example of the writing of authors in regard to Sunday School and Home Small Groups. His comparison is good for discussion and an example of his conclusions is listed in the following table.

Table 5.  
Comparison of Sunday School  
and Small Groups

Factor	Sunday School	Small Groups
Size	10 to 400	3 to 12
Place	Church building usually	Depends on type of group. Support, recovery, and growth groups usually meet at church building. Fellowship/Bible study groups usually meet in members' homes.
Time	Usually Sunday morning	Group decides
Length of time	45 to 90 minutes	90 to 120 minutes
Duration	Open-ended	Usually closed-ended (5 weeks to 3 years)
Dress	Usually "Sunday best"	Casual
Format	Lesson	Discussion
Leader	Teacher	Facilitator
Discussion	Usually conceptual	Personal
Bible study	Usually travelogue	Guided tour
Curriculum	Quarterly, shorter studies, or topical studies	Varies – usually group decides
Focus	Content oriented: information and learning	Process oriented: depends on type of group; relationships important
Purpose	Christian education / training	Group decides
Contact	Back of people's heads when set up in rows; usually surface level	Face-to-face and heart-to-heart
Tone of meetings	Friendly, formal	Friendly, intimate, informal

Table 5 – Continued. Comparison of Sunday School and Small Groups

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Sunday School</u>	<u>Small Groups</u>
Level of group life	Designed to create a sense of belonging and identity	Designed to foster intimacy and accountability
Homogeneity	Somewhat homogeneous (more than celebration-size group), but inclusive of variety of people	Very homogeneous, particularly in terms of needs, lifestyles, ages, generally heterogeneous in sex, race, background
General benefits	Convenience for schedule, child care usually provided, systematic study of Bible	Encourages intimacy, accountability, and high-degree of involvement

Michael Mack summarizes some of the differences between the two models,

Small groups generally meet in a home rather than a classroom, and usually in the evening rather than in the morning; the less structured environment of a small group, which allows people to share needs in a more natural manner; the closeness people feel with one another because relationship building is purposefully built into the meeting time; and longer meetings usually two hours rather than an hour to ninety minutes. (Mack 1996, 85)

One could argue that Mack makes a good presentation for the two models, yet his observations that are filled with an understanding of what is seen in the two models, not what the two models are designed to do. One can see from the research in this chapter that Flake, Caldwell, and Piland see the Sunday School purpose as being evangelism. Even a casual observer of Sunday School would be able to see that evangelism is not taking place on a regular basis. Both Sunday School and Home Small Groups are greatly influenced by the initial purpose for which the group was established. The groups are then influenced by the personality and teaching styles of the group leaders. This is a subject for another time but merits research.

The conclusion of this research is that healthy small groups need to be based on the truth of God's Word. The seven principles discovered in chapter two provide a Biblical foundation that small groups can follow. Churches should engage a small group system to provide health for a balanced church ministry. As a church chooses a small group model the leaders of the church can choose Sunday School or small groups or both

and be confident that they will be choosing a model that is Biblically based and can help the church fulfill the purposes discovered in Acts 2:42-47.

Churches that currently use Sunday School or small groups need not change their system to provide small group opportunities for the church. Churches can and should use both models whenever possible to provide different settings and opportunities for healthy small group opportunity. Churches should use both models to meet generational preferences, space issues and to accomplish specific purposes. The strength of a small group process in a local church should be to build their small groups in two areas. First the church should build small groups on the seven Biblical principles discovered in Acts 2:42-47 and secondly the church should build small groups on the consistent principles that make Sunday School and Home Small Groups similar. Church leaders should acknowledge the similarities of the two models discussed, use those similarities as a point of strength rather than focusing on how the two models are different and potentially create an atmosphere of division in the church.

When a church is focused on intentionally establishing the seven principles from Acts 2:42-47 as the foundation of small group ministry, then the group system has a sound Biblical foundation. This will enable the focus to be on the accomplishing of the principles and moving the focus away from the location of the group, or the time when the group meets. The goal of the group should be to seek to live out and experience the seven Biblical principles in Acts 2:42-47.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This chapter is a description of the process of this project. The goals, action steps, research methodology and the recommendations for the small group ministries of Northside Baptist Church are presented here. Chapter two examined Biblical research from Acts 2:42-47 which revealed seven principles that provide boundaries for the small group leadership to follow. Chapter three examined authors who are recognized practitioners in the Sunday School and Home Small Group models. The writing of these authors was examined to determine common principles in the two models and compare those principles with the findings in chapter 2. The research from chapter 2 and 3 provided the foundation for teaching material that was presented to the Sunday School classes and Home Small Groups at Northside Baptist Church. An explanation of the process must begin with a reminder as to the project goals.

#### **Project Goals**

The goals for this project were listed at the beginning of chapter one. This chapter provides a reminder of the goals and the action steps taken to implement the goals. The project goals, their implementation and the overall project effectiveness will be evaluated in chapter five.

The first goal was to compare the models of Sunday School and Home Small Groups to determine the similar principles and practices of the two models. This project did not include a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the two models. Much is written about that comparison and it is not dealt with here.

The second goal was to present a training experience for the leaders of the Sunday School, Home Small Groups and the pastoral staff of Northside Baptist Church. In the training experience the Biblical research from chapter 2 was examined which revealed seven principles that the early church experienced and that are applicable for the church today. The training step of this project also presented research from chapter 3 which examined writing from authors of Sunday School and small groups. Part of the project goal was to show that both Sunday School and Home Small Groups are designed to address the seven principles discovered in the Biblical research chapter.

The perceptions of the participants in relation to Sunday School and Home Small Groups was measured by a questionnaire that was administered at the beginning of the training process and then after the leadership taught the training materials to existing Sunday School classes and Small Groups. The same questionnaire was given to the groups at the end of the three week teaching experience to see if a shift in perceptions about Sunday School and Home Small Groups took place.

The third goal was to present a three-week process with the regular worship attenders of Northside Baptist Church where a limited version of the research material was presented to the entire Sunday morning worship audience by way of informational pieces in the worship bulletin and PowerPoint media presentations. The amount of informational material presented during the worship services was determined by the church pastoral staff as time and space allowed. The purpose of presenting the educational information was to inform attenders of the benefits of being involved in a small group experience. The desired outcome of this goal was to influence the attitudes of adult worship attenders that do not currently participate in either model to become involved in a group of either type.

The third aspect of this goal was to influence perceptions in the church toward an appreciation for both Sunday School and Home Small Groups. The desired outcome was to help the church realize that a healthy overall church model for small group ministry is to utilize both models so that more people are engaged in small groups (Sunday School and/or Home Small Groups).

The fourth goal of this project was to see an increase in the number of adults involved in an adult Sunday School / Home Small Group experience. This was measured by determining the average attendance in Sunday School and small groups by comparing the beginning and ending averages against each other. It was also determined if there was any new participants involved in small groups at the conclusion of the project.

The fifth goal was to develop a comprehensive small group Bible study ministry plan for adults which will be presented to the leadership of the church. This plan includes the utilization of Home Small Groups and traditional Sunday School as the best way to deliver Bible study to the adults of the Northside Baptist Church. The recommendations presented here are specifically for the leadership at Northside Baptist Church but this philosophy and these recommendations can also be an example for other churches.

### **Project Action Steps**

The following section will explain the steps taken toward accomplishing the goals of this project. These steps are explained in the chronological order with which they were attempted.

#### **Secure Leadership Approval**

The first step of the project was to gain the permission and cooperation from the senior pastor. Once his help was enlisted and the overall project milestones were agreed upon, then the Small Group Coordinator support was enlisted. Both of these leaders were cooperative in their desire to see this project accomplished as they saw the

benefit of the emphasis on small groups and the training that was provided through the project as a way to improve this ministry area.

### **Establish the Project Calendar**

After securing the cooperation of the church pastor and small group leader, the next step was to establish the project calendar by determining the dates for the pre-test, the training, dates to teach the materials, presentation of the media materials during worship, the post-test and the evaluation of the process with church leadership.

### **Enlist the Focus Group**

The next phase of the enlistment process was to request that all current Sunday School and Home Small Group leaders agree to participate in the project. Those who agreed to participate made up the focus group for the survey and training. The group was made up of those who lead either of the group models and any apprentices or co-teachers. When the focus group was determined they were invited to attend the training event on February 12, 2012. The training experience was a three hour seminar which presented the research material from chapters 2 and 3. The goal of this training was to show that both Sunday School and Small Groups accomplish the seven Biblical principles discovered in Acts 2:42-47.

The leaders who attended the training taught the training material to their Sunday School or small group over a three week period. The goal was for the teaching material to change the attitude of leaders and participants from believing that one model is better than the other, to an attitude of appreciation for both the Sunday School model and the Home Small Group model. The project allowed for people to prefer one of the models over the other, but did attempt to develop an atmosphere in the church that allows for both to co-exist.

### **Present the Pre-test Questionnaire**

The survey was presented to two target groups, the focus group and the participants' group. The first survey was conducted during the focus group training. Prior to the training session taking place (February 12), the focus group was given the questionnaire to fill out. This same process took place on the first week of the small groups just prior to the teaching material being presented to group participants. Once the survey was filled out and returned to the group leader, then the teaching began.

### **Present the Training Material**

The Sunday School, Home Small Group and pastoral leaders participated in three hours of training with breaks and dinner over a four hour time period on February 12. The training material is provided in the appendix of this project (see Appendix 1). The training included the seven principles from Acts 2:42-47. The purpose of training the teacher / facilitators was so that they could teach the materials to their Sunday School and Home Small Groups during the weeks of March 4, 11 and 18. The first week was an introduction to the process and then training on the principles of teaching, fellowship and breaking bread. The second week in the teaching material was the principles of prayer and expectation. The third week of the material was the principles of community and evangelism.

The leaders who attended were taught the training material so that they could return to their Sunday School or small group and teach the material over the three week schedule. The goal was for the teaching material to change the attitude of leaders from believing that one model is better than the other, to an attitude of appreciation for both the Sunday School model and the Home Small Group model. If this goal was achieved there should be an appreciation in the church that both models should be part of an overall delivery system to engage adults in a small group experience (Sunday School or Home Small Groups).



The first half hour of the training experience presented a modeled presentation of the first part of the teaching material as it should be taught during the regular Sunday School and Home Small Group teaching experience. The Act 2:42-47 teaching procedures were then handed out to the leaders so that they could follow along in the teaching procedures throughout the remaining time of the training. The teaching process was set up for a 30-40 minute teaching time in the Sunday School or Home Small Groups. The materials were taught to participants in Sunday School and Home Small Groups during the weeks of March 4, 11 and 18.

### **Post-test Questionnaire**

The survey was presented to the participants on the first week after the teaching material was presented on March 25. The focus group received the survey at the beginning of the February 12 training and during the March 25 group meeting. The survey was given out during the regular group meetings during the week of March 25. Group participants were asked to fill out the survey on a white sheet of paper while the focus group was given the same survey but on a yellow sheet of paper to distinguish between the focus group and regular participants. This allowed for comparisons between what the leadership (focus group) believes and the group participants believe.

### **Media Materials**

On Sunday March 4, 11, and 18, media materials were provided to church leaders for the purpose of providing informational pieces so that church worship attenders could experience some of the information that was being taught in the small groups. This was done through written information in the worship bulletin and through PowerPoint information presented before the worship service on the presentation screen in the worship center.

## **Statistical Evaluation**

The next phase of the project was to determine the number of people in average attendance for the month preceding the project. That average was compared to the average of the month after the training was completed. This was used to create a pre-project base line of attendance prior to the training and then a post-project base line at the conclusion of the project. This will reveal if the project had an effect on the small group attendance patterns. The project also gathered statistical information related to the average between attendance and the membership number in both Sunday School and Home Small Groups. These statistics were used to help the church determine if the project has helped to raise awareness of small groups to the point that participation in both increased.

The questionnaire information was put into a spreadsheet file so that each individual question could be compared to the pre-test and post-test results. This information would show if the teaching materials had any influence on the perceptions of the leaders or the participants.

## **Teach the Participants**

Over the first three weeks of March the group leaders taught the training material which covered the Biblical research found in chapter two alongside of the sociological research found in chapter 3. It was the task of the small group leader to teach the Acts 2:42-47 text and intersperse provided quotes and research information from chapter 3 to the small group participants.

## **Follow-up Survey**

Each small group leader was instructed on March 25, to pass out copies of the questionnaire to their group at the start of their session and ask participants to complete the survey, which was taken up immediately when completed. The results were added to the pre-test results in a spreadsheet file so that comparisons could be made between the

pre-test survey and the post-test results.

### **Research Methodology**

The goal of the project was to influence the attitudes of the members of Northside Baptist Church in regard to their perspectives about Sunday School and Home Small Groups. To accomplish this the project teaching material presented Biblical principles from Acts 2:42-47 and research from Sunday School and Home Small Groups to the leaders and small group participants so that they could see that both models accomplish the principles found in Acts 2:42-47. The effectiveness of this training was evaluated through two means, a survey and attendance records.

### **Focus Group Composition**

The following were selected for the focus group based on their involvement in the Sunday School and Home Small Group models at the time of the questionnaire; the pastoral staff (made up of the senior pastor, worship leader, student minister and small group coordinator), and the adult Sunday School leaders and Home Small Group leaders. The pre-test surveys filled out by the focus group were compared to the post-test surveys which were filled out by the same group at the end of the project. A pre-test and post-test process was also used to compare the attitudes of the group participants. One question on the survey shows if the participants' attitudes revealed a bias toward either Sunday School or Home Small Groups or if participants began the process with the attitude that both models are beneficial for the church to involve adults in a small group experience.

### **Project Time Line**

The focus group was determined in consultation with the senior pastor. The overall project took place between December 15, 2011 and April 8, 2012. The leadership group was invited to attend a training meeting where they participated in the pre-test survey and received training on the content of the study that they presented to their small

group during March 2012 (March 4, 11 and 18). This pre-test and training took place on February 12 at Northside Baptist Church. The second questionnaire was presented and filled out during the week of March 25, 2012.

### **How the Results Were Measured**

Measuring the results was accomplished by measuring two criteria, attendance and the project survey. By measuring the number of people attending small groups before the project began with the number of adults attending at the end of the project shows if the project influenced adults to participate in small groups. Results were measured by comparing the overall percentage of worship attendance to small group attendance at the beginning of the project and at the conclusion.

The survey results show the perceptions of the leadership group and the small group participants toward the two models (Sunday School and Home Small Groups). The survey results were entered into a spreadsheet program to compile the pre-test results and the post-test results. These were compared to each other and evaluated to see if perceptions changed during the project. The results were compared in the following ways. Pre-test leadership (focus group) surveys were compared with post-test leadership (focus group) surveys. Pre-test participant surveys were compared with post-test participant surveys. Leadership (focus group) surveys were also compared with participant surveys to see if there was a difference in the attitudes of the two groups about small group ministry. The statistics that were significant to this project were the percentage of people who believed that Sunday School and Home Small Groups could co-exist in the same church. There was also a comparison made between those who prefer Sunday School or Home Small Groups and yet still believed that the two models could co-exist in the same church. More of the statistical analysis will be presented in chapter 5.

## **Small Group Ministry Plan**

Improving the local church ministry is a critical issue today. The following recommendations are intended to help the leadership at Northside Baptist Church improve the small group ministry and to engage more people in the small group process ultimately leading to the development of disciples. This section addresses the fifth goal of this project which is to develop a small group ministry plan.

Small group ministries should produce growth in both individual disciples and the church. A primary goal of this project was to influence the adults of Northside Baptist Church to participate in a small group experience so that the seven principles discovered in chapter 2 might be accomplished. This section will present recommendations for the church leadership to consider as they organize and manage the small group ministry which is clarified below. The following recommendations are presented as ideas that can facilitate the leadership of Northside in improving the small group ministry.

### **Recommendation One**

The church would benefit from adopting two philosophical views. The first view is to see the overall church as a “church of small groups rather than a church with small groups” (Donahue 45, 2001). The difference in these two views is seeing every group in the church as part of the small group ministry rather than the second which views small groups as another program in the church. Choosing the first view allows for a greater probability that all church members and attenders can be attached to a small group experience that provides some level of teaching, ministry and care.

The second philosophy to adopt understands the small group ministry as a four part window pane. The first pane is Sunday School, the second is Home Small Groups, the third is intentional discipleship groups and the fourth is all other groups (teams, committees, and groups). Adopting this philosophy will give balance to the church

ministry plan as it seeks to involve the most number of people in a small group experience.

### **Recommendation Two**

The leadership should continue to improve the overall Sunday School organization by utilizing the principles discovered in chapter 3. These principles would include “Flakes Formula,” the nine best practices of Caldwell, and the instruction of Bill Taylor, Alan Taylor and Hemphill.

### **Recommendation Three**

The small group leaders should evaluate the current organizational structure through an age study, space study and curriculum study which can be found at [www.LifeWay.com](http://www.LifeWay.com). These studies will reveal where new groups may be needed and if there is space in the current facility to potentially form new Sunday School groups and to determine if the curriculum is working to accomplish the church teaching and ministry plan. It will also help the leadership to determine where new Home Small Groups might be needed and where they could be established.

In the study process the leadership should evaluate or survey the morning worship attenders to discover adults who are not currently involved in a small group of any kind and determine if these adults are interested but unengaged, or if they are not interested at all. Those who are interested in a small group experience should be engaged by the leadership to draw them into existing groups or to help form new groups.

### **Recommendation Four**

There should be an evaluation done by the leadership to determine the training needs of the small group leadership team. Training can be presented to the Sunday School and Home Small Group leaders in two forms. There should be training with all leaders to establish that the Sunday School and Home Small Groups are all part of the

same church ministry team. This general training could include sections based on the seven principles discovered in Acts 2:42-47 in chapter 2. This would create a focused small group direction based on the seven principles.

The training should include subjects like how to teach, how to prepare a Bible lesson and how to interpret scripture. Other training concerns would include how to improve listening skills and teaching methods. It would be advantageous to present training on teaching styles, learning styles and personality styles to show the teacher/facilitator how to best communicate and engage the participants in their group.

The second part of the training should be to address the specifics of Sunday School and Home Small Groups. This training could include how to develop their group, how to build the fellowship of their group, how to make their group a place of ministry and mission. It would be advantageous to present training, on how to make the group evangelistic and how to present the Gospel to someone.

### **Summary**

This chapter has addressed the overall process of the project conducted with Northside Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN. The project included a fifteen week process where church leadership was engaged to participate and to see how the project could help church small group leaders move the ministry forward.

The small group leadership and participants took part in a survey which revealed the perspectives and church perceptions about Sunday School and Home Small Groups and whether these can co-exist in the same church setting. The results of this survey will be examined in chapter 5 where an evaluation will be done as to the effectiveness of this project. The goal was to move perceptions about Sunday School and Home Small Groups from an attitude that believes one of these is better than the other and that only one of the models should be part of the ministry plan, to an attitude of both being accepted as good models for this church to use to engage adults in small group

ministry and to accomplish the seven principles examined in chapter 2. The next chapter will reveal the results of this project.



## CHAPTER 5

### PROJECT EVALUATION

In the book *Transformational Church* by Thom Rainer and Ed Stetzer, they write “measurement matters. It matters when you are building and it matters when you are assessing” (Rainer 2010, 25). Malphurs adds, “my experience is that most established churches do little formal evaluation. If they did, it could be more helpful in making needed corrections” (Malphurs 2007, 136). The goal of Chapter 5 is to follow the example of these experts by evaluating this project and identifying needed corrections. In this final chapter, the five project goals are analyzed to determine their effectiveness and the overall project components.

#### **Goal One**

The first goal was to compare two models of small group ministry and determine their similar principles and practices. The two models were the adult Sunday School model and the Home Small Group model. This project explored the similarities found in these models.

The research found in Chapter 3 shows how the two models compare. The project began with a belief that the two models had many similarities and the research proved that to be true. It was learned that the principles of Sunday School have a more narrow focus when one examines experts within that particular discipline. The Sunday School writers work from a more narrow perspective, meaning that there is a common acceptance of fewer principles that help a Sunday School function. The authors who write about home groups have a more diverse or broad perspective about the principles of

## Home Small Groups.

Sunday School authors beginning with Arthur Flake's formula of five principles express a common and narrow focus (Flake 1951, 26). In the 1960-1970's authors began to expand this list to ten, but the principles were still a reflection and expansion of Flake's principles (Caldwell 1982, 14). Home Small Group authors express a variety of beliefs (Cho, Donahue, Howerton, Stark, Willits). One perspective is a strict, controlling philosophy, like Cho advocates (Cho 1981, 37). His view is that he is the leader, he determines the length of time that the group meets, he determines the Bible study material and he has direct contact with the small group leaders. The other end of the Home Group perspective is reflected by Stark who believes that each group can determine its purpose, its curriculum, and how many months or years the group will be together (Stark 2004, 20). The Sunday School authors shared a perspective more like that of Cho's where there is uniformity in the process.

The research revealed that Sunday School and Home Small Groups share many similarities. Each model can easily meet the Acts 2:42-47 biblical criteria revealed in Chapter 2. The seven principles discovered in this text are primary purposes found in the authors of both the Sunday School and the Home Small Group models. Each model has as its purpose to be evangelistic, to teach God's Word, to provide an avenue for fellowship (building relationships), to create an atmosphere for prayer needs, to build community (sharing with each other and meeting each other's needs), and to create an atmosphere of expectation where people see God working in the lives of individuals. The principle of "breaking of bread" is easily met when the text refers to the body of Christ sharing meals together and continuing their fellowship. Neither model practices the aspect of partaking of the Lord's Supper. Churches tend to reserve the Lord's Supper to their corporate worship time. This would be determined by a church's overall practice and polity. Churches could choose to practice the Lord's Supper in Sunday School or Home Small Groups if the leadership and theological parameters of the church allowed

for this practice.

## **Goal Two**

The second goal was to prepare and present a training experience for the Sunday School, Home Small Group and staff leadership of Northside Baptist Church that showed the similarities in the models described in goal number one. The training experience taught the biblical foundation of small groups as discovered in the research in Chapter 2 (Acts 2:42-47) and the sociological research discovered in chapter 3.

The training experience of goal number two was a three-hour seminar which trained the leaders in the biblical principles for small groups found in the Chapter 2 research in Acts 2:42-47. These seven principles were compared with the similarities found in the research of the two models in Chapter 3. The trained leaders were asked to teach the training material to their Sunday School or Home Small Group over a three-week time period. The goal was to change the attitude of leaders from believing that one model (Sunday School or Home Small Groups) is better than the other, to an attitude of appreciation for both the Sunday School model and the Home Small Group model. If this goal was achieved there should be an appreciation in the church that both models should be part of an overall delivery system to provide Bible study to adults. The leadership sample group was made up of the existing adult Sunday School leaders, adult small group leaders, and the pastoral staff members.

This goal was measured by a questionnaire that was given at the beginning of the training process (pre-test) and then after the leadership taught the training material to existing Sunday School classes and small groups (post-test). The questionnaire was given to the leadership, to the Sunday School classes and small groups, prior to their training. The same questionnaire was given to these groups at the end of the training to see if there was a shift in attitude toward Sunday School and small groups or both. The survey results are evaluated in the following pages.

The training event was well attended by both teachers and leaders. There were only three out of eleven adult teachers in the Sunday School that did not attend the training. Four of the adult classes also had apprentice teachers present. The training material was also well received and helpful to the teachers. This conclusion is derived from personal responses and from a follow-up email that was sent to each participant of the training where evaluation questions were asked as to the relevance and quality of the training (Appendix 2). The pastor and the director of Small Groups also indicated that the training time was valuable and well received.

### **Goal Three**

The third goal was to present the three-week media process with the regular worship attenders of Northside Baptist Church in which a limited amount of the same information found in goals one and two was presented to the entire worship audience by way of informational pieces in the worship bulletin and worship service media presentations (Appendix 4).

This information was presented to educate and inform worship attenders about the value of small groups and promote an attitude change. The goal was to see perceptions change from thinking that either Sunday School or Home Small Groups is the better model to the perception that sees both models as valuable ways to involve adults in Bible study. It was also part of this goal to change attitudes of adult worship attenders that do not currently participate in any small group to become involved in either type. The first step to make this piece of the proposal effective was, in goal number two, which was to educate the church leadership about these methods. It was very important to gain the trust of church leadership for this project to have maximum success. If attitudes are shown to have changed through the use of the questionnaire and the leadership does see the validity of both Sunday School and Home Small Groups, then the second step was to use training and promotional methods intended to inform the attenders of Northside

Baptist Church about both models. If the goal was effective, people would begin to appreciate the value of both methods and see how each serves to accomplish the goal of involving adults in a small group experience.

It is unclear as to the effectiveness of the media presentations in the worship services. It was measured by looking at the number of new people that are attending Sunday School or Home Small Groups since the end of the media presentations (Table 6 below).

#### **Goal Four**

The fourth goal of this project was to see an increase in the involvement of adults who are participating in adult Bible study as a result of this training and promotional plan. This was measured by determining the average attendance in Sunday School and small groups for the period between November 2011 and April 2012. These numbers show that there was not a significant change in the attendance in worship, small groups or in the number of new members to the church. The percentage of people who attend worship compared to the number who attend small groups did not change significantly either. One consideration in looking at these numbers is seen in April which had the influence of school spring breaks and Easter which does effect attendance figures.

The following table (Table 6) shows the average worship and small group attendance from the month before the project began (December 2011) through the last month of the project (April 2012). The table shows the averages for the month. The statistical information does not indicate any real effect to attendance or new members. The second column is the average worship attendance, column three is the Sunday School/small group average, column four is the percentage of people who attend Sunday School/small groups compared to the worship attendance, column five is the numerical difference between worship and small groups and the sixth column shows the number of new members that joined the church during that month.

Table 6  
Worship and Small Group Attendance  
November 2011 – April 2012

Date	Worship	Sun Sch	Worship to SS %	Numerical Difference	New Members
Sept 2011	339	243	72%	96	6
Oct 2011	358	254	71%	104	1
Nov 2011	385	286	74%	99	4
Dec 2011	345	262	76%	83	8
Jan 2012	334	234	70%	100	0
Feb 2012	340	270	79%	70	3
Mar 2012	341	248	73%	93	7
Apr 2012	389	250	64%	139	0
Averages	354	256	72%	98	4

This table indicates that there has not been a significant change in attendance. Column five, the numerical difference number indicates that there are opportunities to begin new Sunday School groups or home groups as there is an average of 98 people every month who are not in a small group. This means that on average, 28% of those attending worship are not involved in a small group of either type.

### **Goal Five**

The fifth goal was to develop and present a comprehensive small group Bible study ministry plan for adults to the leadership of the church (see chapter four). This plan includes the utilization of Home Small Groups and traditional Sunday School as the plan to deliver Bible study to the adults of the Northside Baptist Church. While this plan was proposed for one church setting, this philosophy can be an example to be used by other churches as well.

The completion of this goal is presented in Chapter 4 which presents the window pane plan for a comprehensive small group ministry. The window pane plan describes four areas of groups that the church should invest in: Sunday School, Home Small Groups, intentional discipleship groups and all other groups and teams. Each of these groups should work to include the seven principles revealed in Chapter 2 so that the group ministries of the church are biblically based and seeking to accomplish the

purposes of Acts 2:42-47.

### **Evaluation of the Setting**

Northside Baptist Church is in the process of discovering a new day. Chapter 1 revealed many great years of ministry and some scars in the life of the church. The atmosphere in the church turned from one of positivity and trust, to an atmosphere of distrust and caution since 2000. Expectation levels were low and people were not excited about their church so they were not inviting new people. The church called a new pastor in May of 2011 and there is a new excitement and spirit of expectation. The pastor believes in Sunday School and Home Small Groups and he is leading the church for everyone to be involved in a small group of some kind. He was in agreement with the goals of this project and felt like it was well timed. The church just recently called an interim Small Group pastor to serve on the church staff.

### **Evaluation of the Biblical Research**

At the beginning of this process, the Biblical research started out encompassing the entire Bible. Several studies were conducted into particular passages (Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 2:1-6, John 4: 12-28, Ephesians 4:11-16) but none provided the perspective and balance that was needed. The desire was to find a text that through exegesis revealed small group principles without practicing eisegesis. Acts 2:42-47 fit this criterion.

This text has been challenging for years to this student. The text seemed too familiar and maybe even overused, so it was difficult at first to choose this text. Once that decision was made, the project and the research began to move forward. The study for this project was informative and much was learned about the early followers of Jesus. What were the highlights learned while researching Acts 2:42-47?

It all begins with evangelism! Bible students often times hear this passage taught from the perspective that if the church will do the things listed in the text, then the

result will be what is mentioned in verse 47, that “the Lord will add to the church those that are being saved.” It can be presented as a church growth formula. Actually the reverse is what the text is teaching and was what the early church experienced. Because of Pentecost and the fact that people were being saved, the church had to respond by doing the things listed in the text. The result of the church responding as it did was the Lord added even more to the church.

Teaching was central to all they did and they taught with urgency. The aspect of teaching is found in several ways in the text. It is referred to directly in verse 42, where it says that “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” The indirect reference is found in the research where teaching was taking place “in the fellowship” which was around the table as they were eating meals. They continued to teach during their meals. They were teaching when they were taking the Lord’s Supper. They were teaching as they were at the synagogue and as they were going through everyday life. Teaching infiltrated everything they did.

There was a natural community that caused them to lean on each other. The research in the text revealed that three things contributed to this high level of community. They were seeking to live rightly with this new group of followers which was based on their common relationship with Jesus and their desire to be part of His church. They leaned on each other because there was a presence of persecution against these followers of Jesus and their belief that Jesus was going to return soon.

### **Evaluation of the Sociological Research**

The research in Chapter 3 comparing the common traits of Sunday School and Home Small groups was informative and confirming. It was informative because new information about the small group movement and the principles that give boundaries to the practices of groups was discovered. There was new information learned from the authors of Sunday School and small groups that had not previously been read. Digging



into the research allowed confirmation to take place as to the principles and practices of each model. New insights were also part of this research. One insight is that the perceptions that exist as to the purpose of Sunday School and small groups are not accurate. An example would be that small groups are more evangelistic than Sunday School. This is only true where small groups are intentionally organized for evangelism. Most of the authors of both Sunday School and small groups indicate that a primary purpose is that they should be evangelistic. Churches today experience the same lack of evangelism in their Sunday School groups as they do in their small groups as they do in many other ministry areas. The point is that a practitioner cannot make the statement that small groups are more evangelistic than Sunday School any more than someone can make the statement that Sunday School is better at teaching than Home Small Groups. There are too many factors involved to make those stereotypical statements. Factors like teaching styles, theological backgrounds, personality traits of the leader and the groups' purpose for existing.

### **Evaluation of the Questionnaire**

The instrument that was used to determine the perceptions of the leaders and members of Sunday School and Home Small Groups was a one-page, 19 question survey based on a Likert scale that listed the following options. Participants were asked to respond to 18 questions with either Unsure (the participant cannot determine a choice), Both (meaning Sunday School and Home Small Groups), Sunday School (meaning the participant believes that Sunday School is the best way to accomplish the question), Small Groups (meaning Home Small Groups), or Neither (meaning the participant believes that neither Sunday School or Home Small Groups satisfies the question). Question 19 intended to determine a bias as to whether both Sunday School and Home Small Groups can co-exist in the same church. Participants were given three options to select from (yes, no, unsure).

This section will evaluate the questionnaire results and the process that was used to measure the survey responses. The results were evaluated by using the t-test for independent samples. This determination was made from evaluating Salkind's definition of research models. Because this survey was done two times (pre and post) with the same survey, but not with an exact group of participants, Salkind's direction is that the t-test for independent samples would be the appropriate model because the research was "interested in finding out if there was a difference in the average scores of one (or more) variable(s) between the two groups that were independent of one another" (Salkind 2011, 190).

**Survey information.** The survey information was divided into two categories, the leadership group and the membership group for the pre-test and post-test. The leadership group was made up of Sunday School and Home Small Group teachers or facilitators. The membership group was made up of regular attenders in the Sunday School and Home Small Groups. The questions on the survey were compared within these two categories in the pre-test and the post-test results. The focus group (leadership) had 17 who participated in the pre-test and 8 in the post-test. There is a difference between the pre-test and post-test leader number because apprentice teachers and substitute teachers were present in the pre-test training meeting due to some of the regular teacher, facilitators not being able to be present for all three weeks of the teaching process in their regular groups. The pre-test leaders group represented all potential leaders who might teach during the three week teaching process. The surveys were separated in the post-test results between the leadership group (teachers or facilitators) and the membership group. The post-test leadership group was determined by those who taught or facilitated their group on the week following the teaching component to the membership. The overall survey and the results gathered did not show a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test results. The t-test results

showed a .66 average difference between the pre-test and post-test results on the first 18 questions. This was arrived at by taking the 18 questions and comparing each questions t-test result, and then averaging the results from each question result. There were 18 questions with 2 results in each question representing the 2 groups, leadership and membership. These 36 numbers were averaged to get the .66 t-test average. An example is seen in Table 8 in relation to question 1 of the survey. The t-test results on the remaining questions are found in the Appendix, Table A2.

Table 7.  
Question 1, pre and post T-Test results  
Which do you prefer, Sunday School  
or Small Group

Question 1	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	0	22	48	1	0	0.86
Member Post	2	32	39	9	0	
Leader Pre	1	10	3	3	0	0.40
Leader Post	0	5	2	1	0	

The survey that was utilized can be found in Appendix 3. The findings of the surveys are discussed below. There were 71 small group participants who participated in the pre-test survey and 82 in the post-test survey. That is a total of 153 surveys of members and 23 total leadership surveys. Since this was a pre-test and post-test survey, the total number of those participating would include duplicate participants, meaning that a person would take both the pre-test and post-test survey. There was not an attempt to completely control who took the survey in the pre-test or post-test.

The difference between the pre and post-test participants was a 13% increase of members who took the post-test and a 53% decrease in the number of the leadership group who took the post-test. The decrease in the leadership group is due to the pre-test being conducted in a training session for all adult teachers who would potentially teach

one of the three weeks of the teaching component of the project. There were apprentice teachers present in the training who were counted in the pre-test focus group statistics.

The major part of the survey was taken by people who could have a bias toward Sunday School because the church has 9 adult Sunday School groups and only 2 adult Home Small Groups. Question 1 would reflect if this bias is true or not because the question asked which model they preferred, Sunday School or Small Groups. In the pre-test result there were 48 who preferred Sunday School and 1 that preferred Small Groups. In the post-test results that number moved to 39 preferring Sunday School and 9 preferring Small Groups. Questions 1 and 18 were intended to discover if there was a natural bias toward one of the two models. Each of these questions asked which model of small group they prefer. Respondents chose Sunday School 67% of the time and 30% preferred both. This information was taken with the result of question 18 which revealed that 75% would pick Sunday School over small groups if there was only one option.

Table 8.  
Question 18 responses

Question # 18	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	Total responses
Member pre	6	7	52	4	0	79
Leader pre	4	0	6	7	0	17
Member post	9	4	48	22	0	83
Leader post	0	1	4	3	0	8

Questions 2 through 17 were seeking perspectives related to different areas of small groups. These questions were written to reflect the seven principles discovered in Chapter 2 from Acts 2:42-47. A Likert scale with 5 points of reference was used in the survey. The survey responses were designed to indicate if the respondents preferred either Sunday School, Home Small Groups or if they were open to both being used in the life of the church. The design also allowed for a response of unsure if the participant did not have an opinion or could not determine a preference in their choice. A response of

neither was provided to determine if participants showed a bias completely away from any type of small group participation.

Table 9.  
Percentage of Survey Participants

	% of Total Pre-test	Total Pre-test responses	% of Total Post-test	Total Post-test responses
Unsure	4%	96	3%	91
Both	54%	96	60%	91
SS	26%	96	23%	91
SG	12%	96	14%	91
Neither	0%	96	0%	91

The following table shows the questionnaire results which reveals the comparison statistics between the pre-test and post-test perceptions. Questions 3, 11 and 12 (-NC-) indicates that the percentage of those that selected that response between the pre and post-test results registered no change.

Table 10.  
Questionnaire responses

Question Number	Answered Both	Answered SS	Answered SG	Number of responses
1- Pre	30%	67%	3%	96
Post	39% (+ 9%)	47% (- 20%)	10% (+ 7%)	91
2- Pre	57%	33%	.01%	96
Post	72% (+15%)	24% (-9%)	.04% (+.03)	91
3- Pre	-NC-	-NC-	-NC-	96
Post				91
4- Pre	54%	27%	13%	96
Post	67% (+13%)	20% (-7%)	11% (-2%)	91
5- Pre	51%	13%	34%	96
Post	59% (+8%)	12% (-1%)	29% (-5%)	91
6- Pre	57%	27%	13%	96
Post	71% (+14%)	15% (-12%)	11% (-2%)	91
7- Pre	61%	17%	14%	96
Post	75% (+14%)	14% (-3%)	11% (-3%)	91
8- Pre	47%	42%	.06%	96
Post	55% (+8%)	27% (-15%)	14% (+13.4%)	91

Table 10 – Continued. Questionnaire Responses

<u>Question</u>	<u>Answered Both</u>	<u>Answered SS</u>	<u>Answered SG</u>	<u>Number of responses</u>
9- Pre	50%	21%	34%	96
Post	53% (+3%)	12% (-9%)	26% (-8%)	91
10- Pre	23%	67%	.03%	96
Post	28% (+5%)	59% (-8%)	.02% (-.01%)	91
11- Pre	-NC-	-NC-	-NC-	96
Post				91
12- Pre	-NC-	-NC-	-NC-	96
Post				91
13- Pre	67%	13%	14%	96
Post	69% (+2%)	.07% (-12.93%)	21% (+7%)	91
14- Pre	61%	36%	.03%	96
Post	71% (+10%)	21% (-15%)	.01% (-.02%)	91
15- Pre	58%	36%	.03%	96
Post	60% (+2%)	30% (-6%)	.03% (NC)	91
16- Pre	78%	14%	.03%	96
Post	86% (+8%)	11% (-3%)	.01% (-.02%)	91
17- Pre	67%	.08%	20%	96
Post	67% (NC)	.03% (-.05%)	26% (+6%)	91
18- Pre	10%	75%	.06%	96
Post	.05% (-9.5%)	57% (-28%)	26% (+25.4%)	91

Question 19 asked the question, “Can both Sunday School and the small group models effectively be used simultaneously in the life of a church?” The pre-test results showed that the leader group agreed that they could both be used by a 94% yes, 0% no, and 6% unsure response. In the post-test results that moved to 100% yes. The members who answered this question said yes 86% in the pre-test, 0% no response, and 14% unsure response. The post-test results moved to 90% yes, 0% no, and 10% unsure. This indicates movement toward the desired outcome which was to see the church accept the idea that both Sunday School and Home Small Groups can exist in the same church and be effective. While there was a strong belief that both Sunday School and Home Small Groups can be used effectively in the same church, the results show that this attitude was strengthened through the project training.

The questionnaire results show that the training done with the leaders and then the training done with members did change perspectives in the direction of believing that

both models should be used in the same church setting. This can be seen in the information in Table 8. In all but four of the 18 questions in the survey, there was an increase in the percentage number of people who answered both which was the desired outcome of the research. Four of the questions (3, 11, 12, 17) showed no change.

While there is slight evidence of some movement between the pre-test and post-test, the statistical analysis using the t-test for independent samples reveals that there was not a statistically significant change to validate that the training had the desired result ( $t_{(185)} = .78, p > .05$ ). This researcher must therefore conclude that in this setting the training component of the project did not significantly change the perceptions of the participants. This could be due to the training component not being strong enough or it could be due to the perceptions of the participants already believing that both models are valid forms of small group ministry. This researcher must conclude that the major reason would be due to the church already believing that both Sunday School and Home Small Groups are valid ways to involve adults in Bible study as seen by the results of the pre-test on question 19 (see Table 11).

Table 11.  
Pre-test results on  
Question 19

	Yes	No	Total Responses	% of Responses Yes
Question 19	16	1	17	94

### **Evaluation – What Was Learned?**

The strength of this project is in the Biblical research and the discovery of the seven small group principles in Acts 2:42-47. Much was learned from this research which is found in Chapter 2. The comparison of Sunday School principles and Home Small Group principles is also a benefit which shows where the similarities are in these

two models in light of the Acts 2:42-47 passage. The strength of the training and the group teaching was also a benefit to this project. The major strength is showing the consistent principles found in the Acts 2:42-47 text and how they give a biblical foundation for Sunday School and Home Small Group practices.

There was also a potential weakness in the training segment of the project. The training time was challenging due to the time allotted. The time frame was agreed upon in consultation with the pastor and small group leader where it was believed that three hours would be best. It was perceived that the best way to conduct the training would be to get the leadership group together in one sitting and not do the training over a few weeks' time frame in order to train the same group and not miss some leadership participants. Because of the limited time frame more time was spent on the Biblical research than the sociological research. More time and information in the training and small group teaching time could have strengthened the overall outcome of the participant's perceptions. This could have moved the perceptions from a 10-15% increase to a possible 20-25% increase.

One outcome of this research has been the desire to look further into the influence of the group facilitator/teacher/leader and how their personality traits and their teaching style affects the group that they lead in a stronger way than the principles of Sunday School or small groups do. The group should be formed based on solid biblical, Sunday School and small group principles, but then the group can take on its own personality based upon the leader. A second research avenue could be to examine the authors of Sunday School and Home Small Groups and their personality traits and teaching style to see if these influence their preference as to the two models researched here. It could be interesting to research the influence that a person's personality style has on a preferred teaching style and if that influences their preferred group style (Sunday School, Home Small Groups).



How do these influences affect the way that they organize their group and lead their group? Are some of the Sunday School and Home Small Group principles easier to follow depending on the leader's personality, learning style and giftedness?

One principle conviction that did not change during this research, but was in fact reinforced, is the conviction that people need to be in a group of one type or the other. People should have the opportunity to experience the seven principles of Acts 2:42-47 as did the followers of Jesus Christ in the early church.

## APPENDIX 1

### TEACHING PLAN

#### SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47 7 PRINCIPLES OF BALANCED SMALL GROUPS

This plan is for a three week Adult Teacher Training Program that will be conducted at the Northside Baptist Church in Indianapolis, IN, during March of 2012.

- Training Title:** Sunday School / Small Group Training on Acts 2:42-47  
7 Principles of Balanced Small Groups
- Training Purpose:** To prepare and equip the Adult Sunday School and small group teachers of Northside Baptist Church, to teach 7 Sunday School / Small Group principles discovered in Acts 2:42-47.
- Training Goal:** Learners will demonstrate an understanding of the seven principles of a healthy small group in Acts 2:42-47. These principles will be taught to the regular Sunday School and small group participants during the first three weeks of March, 2012. The goal is to see participants and leaders attitudes toward the two models become one of appreciation for both models.
- Training Indicators:**
1. Participants will take a designed survey at the beginning of the training to show their current attitude toward the two models.
  2. Participants will participate in the training experience.
  3. Participants will teach this material to their Sunday School / small group over the first three weeks of March, 2012.
  4. Participant's perspective about Sunday School and Small Groups should move from believing one model is best to an attitude that sees both models as valid.
  5. Participants will take the survey a second time at the end of the teaching, to discover if attitudes have changed.
  6. The emphasis in the church should increase participation in Sunday School / Small groups.

Continued

**Teaching Plan:**

February 12	Train teachers to teach the material
March 4	Intro: Survey: Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking Bread
March 11	Prayer: Expectation
March 18	Community: Evangelism
March 25	Survey # 2 during the normal, on-going group time and use regular curriculum

SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**March 4**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research on Content</b> – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47 is contained in this column.	<b>Research</b> on Sunday School and Small Group principles is contained in this column.
<b>Welcome and Purpose</b>	Welcome Survey: as participants enter ask them to fill out the survey and turn it in. <b>Welcome and thank everyone for attending.</b> <b>Define Purpose of the Training:</b> Our goal for this training is to make us all better teachers and small group leaders and to improve the overall adult Sunday School small group experience for participants at Northside Baptist Church. To impact people in 3 ways. Salvation, growth, serve. <b>Rainer quotes</b> , the importance of small groups. <i>“Assessments use small groups as measurement for health in church”</i>	<b>Church Health Assessment Instruments</b> Natural Church Development Church Central MAP Church Transformational Church
<b>Northside Small Group Core Values</b>	<b>Northside Small Group Core Values</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Bible is the core</b> curriculum with others approved by Chad. We will use Bible story telling as modeled by Avery Lewis and Real Life Ministries</li><li>• <b>Reproducing small groups.</b> Groups begin with the clear expectation of reproducing. IF the group hasn’t reproduced then we will check with leadership to see why and what needs to</li></ul>	As we go through this material, we will see current principles about Sunday School and small groups that are used today. These principles combined with the 7 principles found in Acts 2:42-47 give us a foundation to build a

Continued

- be done so that they can be reproducing
- Each **facilitator has an apprentice** who will begin the next group (THIS IS CRICALLY IMPORTANT)
  - **Care director** to check on each member and follow up on pastor care needs
  - **Service/ministry project** each month. Groups meet to serve not meet for self
  - Small groups include SS groups and can **meet anytime except Wednesday nights** which is reserved for deeper study and new members

healthy small group ministry.

### **What was happening in the first NT church?**

Are there principles that we can learn from them? Can we live out today what they experienced?

What if Acts 2:42-47 could be recreated today! In our church!

John MacArthur notes that the early church *“manifested spiritual duties and spiritual attitudes, and the result was spiritual impact”*

Let’s see what these duties and attitudes are and apply them to our church.

Let’s examine that great passage and the principles found in the text along with what authors tell us about how to have healthy Sunday School and small groups.

### **Acts 2:42-47 text**

*“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved”* (Acts 2:42-47, HCSB).

**We are going to examine 7 principles of a**

We will look at scripture

Continued	<p><b>healthy small group found in Acts 2:42-47.</b></p> <p>We will also intersperse researched principles on healthy Sunday School and small groups and see where they are similar. These are the 7 principles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Fellowship</li> <li>• Breaking Bread</li> <li>• Prayer</li> <li>• Expectation</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Evangelism</li> </ul>	<p>and how Sunday School &amp; Small Groups should and does meet these 7 objectives.</p> <p>Combined with current Sunday School and small group principles.</p>
Background	<p><b>Background of Acts 2:</b></p> <p>Polhill points out that the book of Acts <i>“is a triumphant story of how the early Christian community in the power of the Spirit saturated their world with the message of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ”</i></p> <p><b>First 4 Principles have one thing in common:</b></p> <p>They were devoted to these!</p> <p>Devoted: <i>“v. 42 pictures the community life in itself, verses 43-46 deals with the life of the whole Christian community”</i></p> <p><i>devoted is προσκαρτερεο (proskartereo)</i></p> <p><i>“a verb that is a common one that connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action”</i></p>	
What just happened? Acts 2:1-41	<p>Pentecost: 3000 saved in Acts 2:1-13</p> <p>Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:14-40</p> <p>People of Jewish backgrounds and non-Jews were coming to Christ.</p>	
Transition	<p>In the midst of this, people were accepting Christ and the Apostles were pulling them in to the life of the new church, ministering to them, assimilating them, and experiencing the following 7 principles. Principles that can and should be experienced by modern day followers of Jesus.</p>	
Discussion Questions	<p><b><i>What perceptions do you bring with you in relation to the Acts 2:42-47 passage?</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Describe the church in Acts 2:42-27, from your perspective and compare it to today’s church?</i></b></p>	<p>These questions are designed to help you see what the current understanding is of Acts 2:42-47</p>

Continued

SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**1. The Principle of Teaching: Acts 2:42a**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research on Content</b> – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47	<b>Research</b> on Sunday School and Small Group principles
<b>Teaching Defined</b>	<p><b>Principle 1, Teaching</b> <i>“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching”</i> Teaching: is διδασκαλία (didache), means “doctrine, instruction or teachings” <i>“used for the early Christian preaching, and appears in a variety of phrases: ‘the apostles’ teaching’ (Acts 2:42); ‘the teaching of the Lord’ (Acts 13:12); ‘new teaching’ (Acts 17:19); all these expressions, in the mind of Luke, denote the testimony of the apostles to Jesus Christ”</i> <i>“the apostolic teaching was authoritative because it was the teaching the Lord communicated through the apostles.”</i> The new believers, who were coming to Christ, wanted to learn from the men who actually lived with Him.</p>	
<b>What were they teaching?</b>	<p>Teachings that were being passed on from the disciples were undoubtedly the oral tradition of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus which Longenecker explains, “was thought of in terms of a Christian ‘tradition’ παραδοσις (paradosis) that could be passed on to others” (Longenecker 1981, 289). Polhill contributes to this idea by stating, “it would have included such subjects as His resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus’ earthly ministry and teachings” Result of the teaching was, as Barrett notes, “the apostles’ teaching means (a) that the Christians listened to the apostles whenever</p>	<p>Teaching is a main component of Sunday School, “When we think ‘Sunday School,’ we think ‘Bible study’” (Caldwell 1982, 40).</p> <p>Max Caldwell describes the importance of teaching in Sunday School, “Teach</p>

Continued	<i>they taught and (b) that they assiduously practiced what they heard”</i>	<i>the Bible to win the lost and develop the saved”</i>
<b>Importance of teaching</b>	importance of teaching is seen throughout the New Testament in passages, such as “ <i>Romans 6:17; 12:7; 16:17; 1 Cor. 11:2; 14:26; 2 Thess. 2:16; 3:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 3:1</i> ”	The importance of teaching is one of Hemphill’s key points to a healthy Sunday School as he notes “teaching is at the heart of the Bible study program of the local church. The teacher must also be the catalyst and leader who pulls together the Great Commission strategy of the Sunday School class. Every teacher should establish clear goals for his or her teaching ministry” (Hemphill 1996, 146).
<b>Intent of Teaching</b>	We see in Paul’s teaching in 2 Tim 3:16-17 that scripture is valuable for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Rebuke</li> <li>• Correcting</li> <li>• Training in Righteousness</li> <li>• To equip for good work</li> </ul>	
<b>Where were they teaching?</b>	“Some of the teaching was done in the synagogue (Solomon’s Colonnade cf. 3:11,” Longenecker. Those coming out of Judaism were used to going to the synagogue. They kept that pattern. Teaching was done <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in the synagogue, (large group)</li> <li>• in homes, (small groups)</li> <li>• at meals, (intimate groups)</li> <li>• in relationships (as you go)</li> </ul> Teaching was taking place in the synagogue, in homes and even during their meals <i>“implying that their meetings regularly involved instruction, (table) fellowship, then the Lord’s Supper and prayers. However, vv. 44-47, appears to be an expansion on this initial summary, and some of the things mentioned there clearly took place at different times and in different places”</i> (Peterson 2009, 160).	

Continued

Discussion Questions    ***What did the early church teach to these new believers?***  
***How is this different from what today's church attempts to teach?***  
***How does today's Sunday School or Small Groups attempt to teach the same things?***  
***The early church attempted to teach in 4 ways, in the synagogue, homes, at meals, in relationships. How and where do Northside groups attempt to do the same?***

SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**2. The Principle of Fellowship: Acts 2:42**

Theme	Research on Content – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47	Research on Sunday School and Small Group principles
Scripture	<i>"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, <b>to the fellowship</b>" (Acts 2:42)</i>	
Fellowship Defined	<p>Devoted: <i>"a verb that is a common one that connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action"</i></p> <p><i>"fellowship, which is the Greek word κοινωνία (koinonia) meaning "communion, fellowship" (Kubo 1975, 103).</i></p> <p>As one studies this text, you see that these 7 principles run into each other, support each other and give strength to each other, like Redwood trees that lean on each other for strength. Or a t-pee.</p> <p>Each principle happens because of the other principles.</p> <p>They shared meals together, they spent time together, and the fellowship they experienced made the lost community desirous of what they shared together.</p> <p>Fellowship also has a deeper meaning in the context of the early church. Longenecker points this out by noting, <i>"the definite article τε, (te) in 'the fellowship' τε κοινωνία (te koinonia), implies that there was something distinctive in the gatherings of the early believers."</i></p>	Relationships



Continued (Longenecker 1981, 289). This is the *“only use of the word koinonia in all of Acts, but is used fifteen times in the NT, fourteen of which are in Paul”* (Bock 2007, 150).

**Culture of the day**

The first followers of Jesus were *“driven together by the pressure of a hostile nation, these first converts realized this, as we do not do. But our need of it is as great as theirs; and we all have to fight against the dividing influences, in modern churches, of diversities in rank, culture, and opinion. Where fellowship is weak, faith cannot be strong”* (MacLaren 1959, 24). The early church had a reputation in the community as *“the fellowship,”* (Longenecker 1981, 290) which attracted people to their faith, their hunger for God’s Word, their way of life, and to their life sharing fellowship.

Arthur Flake talks about *“Knowing the possibilities”* in growing a Sunday School. Possibilities are numerous as we look at our relationships and circles of influence.

Donahue’s writing on small groups, he believes that relationships are a key to small group health, so much so that he writes *“you cannot pursue a life of transformation – sanctification in Bible terms – on your own.”*

**Primary fellowship is in Christ**

Robertson adds that the word *κοινωνος* (koinonos) means *“partner, sharer in common interest and this from κοινος (koinos) what is common to all. This partnership involves participation in, as in the blood of Christ (Phil. 2:1), or co-operation in the work of the gospel (Phil 1:5)”* (Robertson 1930, 37).

**Discussion Questions**

***Describe the “fellowship” at Northside.***

***How does your Sunday School or Small Group seek to help participants build stronger relationships?***

***How could your class or group improve relationships with your group members?***

***How could we be better at leaning on each other and loving each other so that the community around us would describe Northside as “The Fellowship?”***

Continued

SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**3. The Principle of Breaking Bread: Acts 2:42, 46**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research on Content – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47</b>	<b>Research on Sunday School and Small Group principles</b>
<b>Lord's Supper and small groups?</b>	Individual churches have their own polity about serving the Lord's Supper. Northside has traditionally reserved that practice for church wide worship services. This study is not promoting that the Lord's Supper begin to be part of individual Sunday School or Home Groups.	
<b>Scripture</b>	<i>"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house"</i> (Acts 2:42c, 46).	
<b>Defined</b>	Refers to the practice of sharing meals together and the inclusion of partaking of the Lord's Supper. The text does not indicate that this was a regular occurrence, but as Bock points out the reference to the Lord's Supper is probably a more broad meaning than they just shared meals. Part of the regular practice was to eat a meal in their home and then acknowledge Jesus by taking the Lord's Supper as part of the meal experience.	
<b>Agape Meal</b>	The agape meal is referred to as the <i>"love--feast"</i> (Robertson 1930, 39). Longenecker describes the <i>"agape feast as something that emphasized the joy of communion with the risen Lord and of fellowship with one another"</i> (Longenecker 1981, 289).	Ellison adds that it should be a normal process in a Sunday School to <i>"plan fellowships to intentionally engage everyone"</i> (Ellison 2009, 109).
<b>Early Church Practices</b>	The new disciples, many of whom were coming out of Judaism and were accustomed to worshipping in the synagogue, continued in that practice and now were following the apostles teaching and remembering Jesus'	Breaking bread is part of small groups in homes because of the natural principle found in Acts

Continued	sacrifice through the Lord's Supper. Maclaren points out (referring to the new converts), <i>"they frequented the Temple as devout Jews, they gathered more privately 'at home' as Christians, to observe the Lord's Supper in connection with their ordinary meals. To these believers it was but part of their daily meal, sanctifying that by remembering the Lord's death. Thus beautifully did religion and family ties blend. Thus it was the alliance between the most sacred and the most trivial acts"</i> (Maclaren 1959, 25)	2:42. People seek to be with other people and to be in relationships with each other and to share meals with each other.
Discussion Questions	<i>How do you picture the early church as they shared meals together? Describe that scene. How do you see Northside "breaking bread" together in the normal avenues of life?</i>	

WEEK 2  
SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**March 11**

**4. The Principle of Prayer: Acts 2:42**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research on Content – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47</b>	<b>Research on Sunday School and Small Group principles</b>
<b>Scripture</b>	<p><i>"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers"</i> (Acts 2:42c, 46).</p> <p>Robertson translates the phrase <i>"the prayers"</i> as <i>"ταῖς προσευχαῖς (tais proseuchais)"</i> (Robertson 1930, 38), which he believed referred to <i>"services where they prayed as in Acts 1:14, in the temple Acts 3:2, in their homes 4:13"</i> (Robertson 1930, 38).</p>	<p>Leaders in Sunday School should follow the example of Jesus in regard to prayer as Parr notes <i>"many teachers will go through an entire year (or many years) without ever applying the principle of praying about and directly enlisting others to be a part of the</i></p>

Continued

Barrett points out the influences to their prayer life would have been their Jewish background and teachings, Jesus' teachings, and spontaneous prayer.

*"Luke gives no hint elsewhere of a Christian set of prayers, and it is likely that (unless the plural is an intensive – they prayed more than others were accustomed to do) the prayers were familiar Jewish prayers; cf. 3.1; 10.9, . . . Stahlin (57) thinks of the Psalter; the Eighteen Benedictions; the Lord's Prayer; new Christian psalms and hymns; all plausible guesses, no more"* (Barrett 1994, 166).

The mixture of Jewish traditions and teachings about Jesus they were receiving from the apostles probably caused them to practice their new faith by mixing *"formal prayers, probably both Jewish and Christian, in addition, it is not difficult to envision the earliest believers using extemporaneous prayers built on past models such as Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), Zechariah's Song of Praise (Luke 1:67-79), or Simeon's Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:28-32)"* (Longenecker, 290).

**Discussion Questions** *Describe what your Sunday School / Small Groups do to involve people in prayer? What are some ways that prayer could be improved in our Sunday School and Small Group experience?*

*group as Jesus did"* (Parr 2010, 43).

*"the group may focus their prayers on persons with special ministry needs. Included are the sick, the sorrowing, and the needy. At another time the prayers may be for absentees and at another time they may be for persons the group is trying to enroll in Sunday School. Prayer for the lost should be part of every meeting. The lost should be identified by name. Included may be those enrolled, family members of those enrolled, friends and neighbors, persons with whom the workers are employed, and persons on the group's prospect list"* (Piland 1990, 167).

Howerton notes that *"one of the most vital roles small groups can play in the life of a Christian is to teach people to pray. Not only can group members hear prayer modeled, they can also pray themselves"* (Howerton 2007, 122).

Continued

SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**5. The Principle of Expectation: Acts 2:43**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research on Content – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47</b>	<b>Research on Sunday School and Small Group principles</b>
<b>Scripture</b>	<i>“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. <b>Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles</b>” (Acts 2:43, HCSB).</i>	Healthy Sunday School and small groups will exhibit expectations that God is at work in the lives of those who are in the group. Hemphill affirms this idea as he writes that “ <i>we need teachers who teach from supernatural empowering</i> ” (Hemphill 1996, 47).
<b>Background</b>	What was the atmosphere like in the early church? What was happening on a regular basis that would have shaped their daily lives as they were being taught the meaning of following Jesus? The examination of Acts 2:43 will show how the early church lived every day with the expectation that God was moving through the lives of the apostles and will present answers to these questions.	People experiencing life change is what leads to an atmosphere of expectation.
<b>Defined</b>	The phrase “ <i>signs and wonders</i> ” used in Acts 2:43, “ <i>is probably a reference to the prophet Joel which Peter had quoted at the outset of his address declaring that the ‘great and notable day’ would be heralded not only by ‘wonders in the heaven above’ but also by ‘signs on the earth beneath’ (Acts2:19:f). Among the signs on the earth may surely be reckoned the ‘mighty works and wonders and signs’ (Acts2:22)</i> ” (Bruce 1980, 80). These “ <i>signs and wonders</i> ” (Acts 2:43) worked	

Continued	to give credibility and authority to the apostles' ministry just as they did for Jesus, " <i>which God performed through Jesus of Nazareth, thus accrediting His messianic office. And just as the miracles of Jesus when He was on earth were 'signs' of the kingdom of God, the miracles performed by His apostles partook of the same character</i> " (Bruce 1980, 80).	
<b>Acts 2</b>	The apostles were carrying out the work that Jesus assigned them. Peter has just preached and Pentecost was experienced (Acts 2:14-41) and now new believers needed to be cared for and taught. People began to believe in Jesus and their lives were being spiritually changed and for some physically changed as we see " <i>one such miraculous sign in Acts 3:1-10.</i> "	
<b>Examples in Acts</b>	<p>Evidence of these "<i>signs and wonders</i>" being done through the ministry of the Apostles is found in;</p> <p>Acts 3:1-10 in the healing of the lame man,  5:1-11 where God dealt with Ananias and Sapphira,  5:11-16 where more signs and wonders were witnessed,  9:1-11 Saul was blinded and called,  9:23-35 Aeneas was healed,  9:36-43 Dorcas was restored to life,  10:1-8 Cornelius received a vision,  10:9-16 where Peter receives his vision,  12:6-14 the angel rescues Peter,  13:1-3 Barnabas and Saul are called,  13:6-12 Paul confronts the sorcerer,  14:8-13 lame man from Lystra is healed,  16:16-18 Paul casts the demon from the slave girl,  16:25-30 Paul and Silas are delivered by an earthquake,  18:8 Crispus is converted,  19:11-20 miracles at Ephesus,  21:30-36 Paul delivered from a mob attack, and in  28:7-10 Publius father is healed.</p> <p>God was showing himself to be real so that people would believe. The early church was also experiencing these examples of God's work in their lives.</p> <p>The Word "<i>everyone</i>" is a reference to "<i>those outside the Christian community who were awed</i>"</p>	<p>Healthy Sunday School classes and small groups should experience God's movement in the lives of the participants.</p> <p>How do you see God moving today?</p>

Continued	<p><i>by the apostolic miracles (cf. 5:12-13)” (Polhill 1992, 120). The result of this awe by those outside the Christian community could be what is seen in verse 47 where people were being added to the church on a daily basis.</i></p> <p><i>The atmosphere described in this passage is one of expectation. The believers in the early church were experiencing God’s activity through “signs and wonders” on a regular basis, which caused the church to expect God to demonstrate His power through the apostles. Longenecker confirms this by writing that “the verb γινομαι (ginomai, to be) in the imperfect tense denotes that the awe ‘was’ and the miracles ‘were’ no momentary phenomena but continued to happen during those early days” (Longenecker 1981, 290).</i></p>
Discussion Questions	<p><b><i>Tell us a time when God demonstrated His power in your life?</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Tell us a time when you saw God demonstrate His power through your Sunday School or Small Group?</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Describe expectations” that you would like to see happen in and through Sunday School and Small Groups?</i></b></p>

WEEK 3  
SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**March 18**

**6. The Principle of Community: Acts 2:44-45**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Research on Content – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47</b>	<b>Research on Sunday School and Small Group principles</b>
<b>Scripture</b>	<p><i>“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as</i></p>	<p><i>Yoakum writes that “today, people hunger for relationships and friends. Many people live apart from their family and need friends. A</i></p>

Continued	<i>anyone had a need</i> " (Acts 2:42-45, HCSB).	<i>Sunday School class can provide these relationships</i> " (Yoakum 2009, 100).
<b>Community defined</b>	The word community is defined by Webster's as the " <i>condition of sharing or having things in common</i> " (Webster's 1997, 155). The Acts 2:44-45 text will live up to this definition by showing how the first church did share with each other and how they had things in common. The first disciples would have experienced community because of the following influences.	Cho writes " <i>a third ingredient of our cell meetings is ministry to one another</i> " (Cho 1981, 114). They see meeting needs as being part of community, but the overall belief is that relationships is the major part of community.
<b>Community was driven by unity.</b>	This concept is revealed in the text by the use of the phrase; " <i>all the believers were together</i> " (Acts 2:44, HCSB). " <i>The unity of community is empirically demonstrated by their sharing of all possessions</i> " (Parson 2008, 48). " <i>The early church found unity in their new understanding and acceptance of Jesus as Savior and their bond with fellow believers. The phrase "επτ το αυτο (ept to auto) is an important one, . . . it refers to a gathered group in harmony with one another</i> " (Witherington 1998, 161). These factors pulled the church together as they shared their lives, meals and possessions with each other.	
<b>Community means being willing to share all you have with the family of God.</b>	The Holman Christian Standard Bible reads, " <i>they sold their possessions</i> " (Acts 2:45, HCSB), while the New American Standard translates this phrase as, " <i>they began selling their possessions</i> " (Acts 2:45, NASB). The Interlinear translates it " <i>and the possessions they sold</i> " (Green 1985, 843). The word " <i>sold επιπρασκον (epipraskon) means a habit or custom from time to time</i> " (Robertson 1930, 39).	A great picture of how small groups should function and experience an Acts 2:44-45 community is presented by Cho who writes, " <i>it's a wonderful communal life. Each one is helping the other. When a member belongs to a home cell group, he knows he is loved and cared</i>



Continued

for” (Cho 1981, 54).

**Community  
was found  
in  
persecution.**

The early church shared what they had with those who were in need, *“this sharing of material things in common is not a required communalism but a voluntary, caring response to need”* (Bock 2007, 152).

The experience of being persecuted would have been evident from the Romans, the Jewish religious leaders and from the community which Wells points out, *“in the early period, persecution was initiated partly by Roman emperors and partly by mobs”* (Wells 1981, 766).

Many were converting from Judaism to follow Jesus and others were converting from believing nothing to living for Jesus. Polhill points out that *“the favor of the people was overshadowed by persecutions from the Jewish officials”* (Polhill 1992, 122).

New believers who were converting from Judaism would have participated in worship practices in the Temple and the Synagogue as was their normal routine; therefore they continued to practice some aspects of their previous faith in connection with their new faith in Jesus Christ.

Jewish leaders would have watched Jews, who were one day practicing Judaism, turn their affection and loyalty to following Jesus. These activities bothered the Jewish leaders to the point that they would have been one group who would have reason to persecute the early church. Acts 13:45 records, *“but when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to oppose what Paul was saying by insulting him”* (also 13:50, 14:2).

Longenecker points out that *“while Acts implies that overt persecution of Christians came somewhat later, in certain instances economic and social sanctions were undoubtedly imposed on the early believers”* (Longenecker 1981, 290). The early church would have been persecuted by religious leaders, by local people and by political leaders who were not appreciative of the new zeal seen in the lives of the early followers.

Continued  
**Community  
was found  
because  
needs were  
met.**

The Greek word for need is “*χρηεια (chreia)*, which means a gap in the life” (Vines 1940, 787). People found themselves with a gap in their money, or food, or transportation, or other normal demands of daily life. When these gaps were present, the church would come to remove the gap or meet the need. The church would meet these needs as they sold personal possessions to fill the gap for others.

The healthy small group will help those in and outside of the group as Cloud describes, “*groups take over where the weak person gives out. They provide love, support, advice, and encouragement when the person just doesn’t have the resolve to do something that seems difficult or even impossible*” (Cloud 2003, 90).

The church was responding to people as needs would arise. They met needs, or filled the gap in order to show lost people the love of Jesus Christ through His church. It was through the teaching of the disciples, through the practices of breaking bread and remembering Jesus through the Lord’s Supper, through their fellowship and through prayer that this community was driven to meet people’s needs by sacrificing their own property to help others.

**Community  
and  
eschatology**

The followers of Jesus were also driven by the strong belief that Jesus Christ was going to return soon (Matt. 24)! With this eschatological view being so strong, holding on to personal goods would not make sense. Parson refers to the early church “*as the eschatological community of God*” (Parson 2008, 58). They believed that their destination was in the next life and that Jesus said He would be returning soon, so there was no need to hold on to this life and the possessions that are available here on earth (Matt. 5:12, 6:20, 10:7, 19:21).

**Discussion  
Questions**

*Where do you see “gaps” in people’s lives at Northside? (Not mentioning names, just needs)*  
*What are some practical ways that Northside could live out this principle?*

Continued

SUNDAY SCHOOL / SMALL GROUP TRAINING ON ACTS 2:42-47  
TEACHING PLAN

**7. The Principle of Evangelism: Acts 2:47**

Theme	Research on Content – Biblical research on Acts 2:42-47	Research on Sunday School and Small Group principles
Scripture	<i>“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. Every day they devoted themselves [to meeting] together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47, HCSB).</i>	Arthur Flake strongly believed this. He wrote that <i>“all Sunday Schools have the same constituency – men, women, and children; they have the same textbook – the Bible; they have the same objective – winning the lost to Christ and winning the saved to service”</i> (Flake 1923, 9).
Word study	<p>The Greek Interlinear translates this phrase <i>“and the Lord added those being saved from day to day to the church”</i> (Green 1986, 843). The Codex Bezae translates this phrase <i>“praising God and having favour with all of the world, the Lord added daily those being saved to the group united in the church,”</i> while the Codex Vaticanus translates the same phrase <i>“praising God and having favour with all of the people, the Lord added daily to the united group those being saved”</i> (Rius-Camps 2004, 195).</p> <p>The minor difference between the two is Codex Bezae refers to <i>“favour with all of the world”</i> while Codex Vaticanus, <i>“favour with all of the people.”</i> Codex Bezae refers to <i>“adding those being saved to the group united in the church”</i></p>	

Continued

**Evangelism  
and the Great  
Commandment**

and Codex Vaticanus, “*the Lord added to the united group those being saved.*”

The beginning of v. 47, “*praising God and having favor with all the people,*” implies two things, “*the first phrase relates to God and the other to the people*” (Kistemaker 1990, 114). This comment is supported by Bock who writes “*a vibrant community extends itself in two directions: toward God and toward neighbor*” (Bock 2007, 154).

**Evangelism  
comes from  
followers living  
Christ daily**

The responsibility and privilege of witnessing to the lost world is given to the people of God. He empowers them through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) to carry out this witness. The early church lived, believed, behaved and witnessed in front of their world in a way that was infectious to those who watched them. The result of their lives is seen in 2:47, that God through His sovereignty, added to His church.

Evangelism should take place in the natural flow of life. Followers of Christ should have a regular desire to tell others about the life changing event that has taken place in their own life.

It was an ongoing experience, seeing people come to know Jesus as Savior “*every day*” (2:47). It would have been like “*a continuous revival, day by day*” (Robertson 1930, 40). Those who were being saved, “*σοζο like σωτηρια (sozo like soteria) is used for ‘save’ in three senses (beginning, process, conclusion), but here repetition is clearly the point of the present tense*” (Robertson 1930, 40). There were lost people, and religious people who were being saved through the witness of the early church.

Parr notes, “*you will observe that congregations that are more intentional in engaging nonbelievers are blessed to see more people come into a personal relationship with Christ than congregations that are evangelistically passive. The same is true for groups within a congregation such as Sunday School classes and small groups*” (Parr 2010, 122).

Continued  
**Where  
Evangelism  
comes from!**

The phrase “*the Lord*” is the Greek “*ὁ κύριος*” (*ho kyrios*), *that it is the Lord himself who adds to his church*” (Longenecker 1981, 291). The latter part of this phrase in Greek is “*τοὺς σοζομένους*” (*tous sozomenous*) *which is translated those who were being saved*” (Longenecker 1981, 292). Bruce adds “*it is the Lord whose prerogative it is to add new members to His own community; it is the joyful duty of the community to welcome to their ranks those whom Christ has accepted (cf. Rom. 15:7)*” (Bruce 1980, 81).

Caldwell’s writing as he states “*the ultimate objective of a balanced program of Sunday School work is to win the lost to Christ. The ultimate objective of your church’s Sunday School is to win the lost to Christ*” (Caldwell 1982, 55).

**Effect of a  
healthy  
community**

The word “*added is προσετιτελει*” (*prosetitheai*) *is imperfect active, kept on adding. If the Lord only always ‘added’ those who join our churches. Note verse 41 where the same verb is used of the 3,000*” (Robertson 1939, 40).

When the people of God respond to God in a way that glorifies God, they become a contagious people. When the first six principles are alive and being experienced, it creates an atmosphere and culture where people can come to know Christ as their Savior because they are seeing Him in the lives of His followers.

“*Clearly at this stage the followers of Jesus are being portrayed by Luke as true, messianic Jews, attempting to rescue other Jews so they might be part of a righteous remnant of Israel, the eschatological people of God*” (Witherington 1998, 163).

He adds that in his small groups “*the meetings are required to be evangelistic*” (Cho 1981, 114). Howerton believes that “*small groups are one of the most effective ways we can reach an unbelieving humanity*” (Howerton 2007, 114).

**Discussion  
Questions**

*Sunday School and Small Groups are designed to be evangelistic. How could Northside’s groups be more evangelistic?*  
*From going through this study, what would you say needs to happen for evangelism to take place at Northside like the early church experienced?*  
*What steps need to be implemented in your*

**Conclusion**

The seven principles discovered in the text of Acts 2:42-47 present a potential Biblical foundation for small group ministries in today's church. While the principles do not create a definite prescriptive formula for the results experienced by the early church, they do present strong evidence that there is potential for life change. This could be experienced today when the people of God hunger for the teaching of God's Word, when they love being with each other, sharing meals, remembering Jesus by taking the Lord's Supper together, by not allowing material possessions to become more important than helping someone in need, when expectation exists that God is real and ready to demonstrate His power in the daily pattern of life, and when God's people will tell others the story of Jesus and how He has changed their life.

Sunday School and small groups have many similarities. This is seen in the previous pages. The five principles discovered in the section on Arthur Flake are also found in some form in Caldwell, Donahue, Cho and the other authors.

Each relies on strong pastoral leadership whether that is direct leadership (Cho) or more subtle as other authors advocate (Stark). The pastor must be supportive of the small group system to champion the system, to make sure resources, calendar, budget and priority are given to system.

Sunday School and small group authors write that the groups must be evangelistic and groups must understand their purpose. Healthy groups will have a balanced approach as they strive to accomplish the seven principles found in Acts 2:42-47. Donahue's writing about the influence of opposites is true in small groups and Sunday School. Healthy groups will have a strong emphasis on Bible study and discipleship on one end of the spectrum and care, nurture and relationships on the other end.

The conclusion of this research is that healthy small groups need to be based on the truth of God's Word. The seven principles discovered in chapter two provide a Biblical foundation that small groups can follow. Churches should engage a small group

system to provide health for a balanced church ministry. As a church chooses a small group system the leaders of the church can choose either Sunday School or small groups and be confident that they will be choosing a system that is Biblically based and can help the church fulfill the purposes discovered in Acts 2:42-47. Churches that currently use Sunday School or small groups need not change their system to provide small group opportunities for the church. In fact churches can and should use both whenever possible to provide different settings and opportunities for healthy small groups.

## APPENDIX 2

### TRAINING EVALUATION RESPONSES

This document lists responses from participants in the February 12, 2012 training event where small group leaders received three hours of training and the training materials that they presented to their small group during March of 2012. An email was sent to each of the participants. There was a brief four question survey in the email. This represents three of the responses returned.

#### Comments from Respondents:

Respondent 1: "First, thanks for an information packed session."

Respondent 2: "thanks for last night. I think the material is good and will certainly help in presenting it to the classes. I can see it creating a lot of discussion since in 2000 years not too many things have really changed."

"The benefit of course is when you can get people, thinking, talking, and participating, then they are experiencing something new. This should do just that."

Respondent 3: "Thank you for leading this study."

#### Question 1: Did you get new information?

Respondent 1: "Yes, even though I have read the verses in Acts previously, the way that you broke them down and applied them in defining elements of small groups/Sunday school was new and very helpful to me."

Respondent 3: "I do think the material you provided will be of great help with my teaching. Our small group is in week four of a seven week study of Acts.(Blackaby) I am a little nervous at the prospect of "re-teaching" some of the study, however, after looking at your outline I am confident we could take the study a little deeper."

#### Question 2: Will the material given out help you teach?

Respondent 1: "Definitely, as it was well organized and allowed me to take notes that were specific to my situation and elements of the overall material that I wanted to focus on, instead of trying to take notes on all of the material you verbally presented."

#### Question 3: What do you see as the benefit of this study?

Respondent 1: "Individually, I will be more aware/sensitive to the need for fully addressing the 7 basic elements for effective small group/Sunday school. I also believe that since you provided this training to the entire teaching group at our church, this will encourage a more consistent approach to teaching and even more sharing/learning between individual groups."

Respondent 3: "What the training showed me is that there may be some misconception about the small group study. I think the perception is that is overly casual, when in fact, ours is just the opposite. Whether it be Sunday School or Small Group, there has to be a clear understanding of what this time is, what is going to take place and what is not."



Question 4: Did the training change your perspective about small groups and Sunday school?

Respondent 1: "The discussion during your Q&A helped me to get past some pre-conceived ideas I had regarding the differences between small groups and Sunday school (especially in terms of structure, teaching and evangelism)."

Respondent 2: "I'm not sure the training changed my perspective about small groups. Going over the survey last night most of my answers were "B". To some extent this terminology has been confusing to me. It seems we had gotten away from referring to Sunday morning at 9:00 as having small groups. I'm glad to see maybe we are again calling it Sunday School, since that's what it is. And in my mind small groups are groups meeting other than Sunday morning, in or out of church building."

Respondent 3: "The benefit of this study will be, hopefully, the understanding of how the early church was drawn together, overcame a wide range of obstacles and grew to not only serve Christ but each other. The comparisons to us are clear. It boils down to letting go of what we know as earthly and turning what we have over to him. Sometimes all we have. (I am reading Radical now and this study is an interesting parallel!)"

## APPENDIX 3

### PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

#### NORTHSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH - QUESTIONNAIRE

**Agreement to Participate** – The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate attitudes related to Sunday School and home small groups at Northside Baptist Church. This research is being conducted by Steven M McNeil for purposes of project research in the D. Ed. Min program. In this research, you will fill out the following survey and return it to church leadership. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

**Please respond to the following questions by checking the box with your preference.**

Male ☐ Female ☐ Age Group: 18-29 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60-69 ☐ 70+ ☐

In the following questions, please check the box that indicates your belief about Sunday School and Home small groups. If you believe that Sunday School is the better way to accomplish the question, check the (SS) box. If you believe that Home Small Groups are the better way, check the (SG) box. If you believe that both can accomplish the question, check the (B) box. (U) – indicates you are not sure, and (N) indicates you believe that neither one is effective.

**(U) Unsure (B) both (SS) Sunday School (SG) home small groups (N) neither**

	<b>U</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>SG</b>	<b>N</b>
1. Which do you prefer, Sunday School or small groups?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Which is more effective for teaching God's Word?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Which is more effective at providing fellowship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Which is more effective at providing an atmosphere of prayer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Which is more effective at building relationships with people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Which is more effective at creating an environment where God can work in a person's life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Which is more effective at helping people?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Which provides a better Bible study atmosphere?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Which provides a better atmosphere to reach the lost?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Which has a better organizational structure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Which would you invite a friend to attend?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Which enables people to study the Bible?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. Which enables people to bring lost people to study the Bible? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
14. Which enables people to know Bible doctrine? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
15. Which enables people to get involved in ministry? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
16. Which enables people to discover application of God's Word? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
17. Which enables people to develop deep friendships? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
18. If the church had to use only one ministry, I would pick? ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
19. Can both Sunday School & small groups models be effectively used simultaneously in the same church? Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Sure ☐

Additional Comments related to Sunday School and Small Groups:

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## APPENDIX 4

### MEDIA EDUCATION CONTENT MATERIALS

#### Sunday School / Small Group Information

Information for the general church membership will be provided in two forms.

1. PowerPoint slides to be played before and after the Sunday morning worship service and at any other time in the building where the church leadership believes it would be beneficial to run the slides. This will be done for the weeks of March 4, 11 and 18.
2. Informational pieces to be used in the worship bulletin on the same Sunday's as above.

#### Week 1: March 4

Being the Church! How Acts 2:42-47 directs us to be the church today!

What we do in the church should be driven by what we know in God's Word. There are many great passages in the New Testament that show us what God's expectation is for His bride the church (Matt. 28:18-20). The Bible records what happened when the New Testament church began and we learn that there are 7 principles that today's church can imitate. These are found in Acts 2:42-47. Northside's adult Sunday School and Small Groups are teaching through these 7 principles over the next 3 weeks.

This week's study from Acts 2:42-47 deals with Teaching, Fellowship and Breaking Bread.

Does Sunday School or Home Small Groups provide a way for Northside to accomplish these three principles? The answer is yes! Both accomplish all three. Research shows that the Sunday School and Home Groups are designed to teach (didache) people the Word of God, they are designed to build relationships through fellowship (koinonia) and to share meals with each other through breaking bread. The example is the early church where they did these things together. They taught in the synagogue and continued the teaching as they built relationships and shared meals together. As people were coming to follow Jesus as their Savior there was a natural need for them to learn the Old Testament teachings, the oral traditions and the teachings of Jesus. So that these new followers knew what it meant to really be a follower of Jesus Christ.

Sunday School and Home Groups are designed to accomplish these principles. How are you involved in accomplishing these in your Sunday School and/or Home Group? Are you involved in a Sunday School and or Home Group? It is up to us, "the church" to be these three things to each other and to new believers. We can do that through Sunday School or Home Groups.

Northside Baptist Church, Bulletin Insert

Media Content  
Week 2 and 3  
March 11 and 18

Week 2; March 11

“The Prayers”

In the first New Testament church which is found in Acts 2:42-47, we discover seven principles that give direction to healthy small groups/Sunday School. Last week we discovered the first three principles which are teaching, fellowship and breaking bread.

This week we discover prayer and expectation.

The early church “devoted” themselves to “the prayers.” Many of these new converts were believing in Jesus as the messiah from their Jewish tradition. “They were keeping the formal prayer hours of Judaism in the temple and sharing in prayer in their homes.”

Sunday School and home groups should be committed to prayer as a vital aspect of their group life. Praying for the needs of those in the group, praying for new believers who are coming to Christ, and praying for lost people who do not know Jesus as their savior.

“Expectations”

Luke refers to “signs and wonders” as he reports that these early believers were seeing God at work. People were discovering new life in Christ which is the greatest act of God that a person can experience. Others were seeing miracles through the disciples. Prayers were being answered and lives were being changed. The people were continuing in this expectation that God was not only working, but that He was going to continue to work

Sunday School and home groups will experience these acts of God as they are “devoted to teaching, fellowship and breaking bread.” When a Sunday School class or home group shares the love of Jesus with lost people and they see God work through salvation, their expectation level will rise!

Week 3; March 18

“Community”

This principle differs from fellowship this way; fellowship deals with relationships and community adds to those relationships a greater depth to the point where people share life with each other and even share material possessions with each other.

Community came about in the early church due to persecution from religious leaders, government and people. These believers were driven together by the persecution, by their new life in Christ and by the understanding and belief that Jesus was returning soon. When Jesus is coming back any minute, one does not need material possessions.

In a healthy Sunday School or home group, those who participate grow together, pray for each other and they sacrifice for each other to meet the needs of those in the body of Christ.

### “Evangelism”

The text tells us that “the Lord added to the church.” One might assume that if a church or Sunday School or home group would prescribe to teach, fellowship, break bread, pray, expect, be in community with each other, THEN, people will accept Jesus as savior. These principles do create a culture of people who are living alive in Christ and that does influence people to come to Jesus. BUT, in the study of the text, the opposite is true and it is cyclical. The early church was busy telling people about Jesus and because those individual were believing in Jesus, they needed to be taught what it means to follow Jesus. That leads to the church praying, fellowshiping, eating meals together, sharing the Lord’s Supper, seeing God work, sharing possessions and yes, the Lord adding to the church. It’s a beautiful picture of the church alive and God changing lives through His people.

Sunday School and home groups will come alive when evangelism becomes the primary purpose for their existence.

Table A1  
Questionnaire Results on Individual Questions

Question # 1	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	Number of Responses
Member pre	0	22	48	1	0	80
Leader pre	1	10	3	3	0	17
Member post	2	32	39	9	0	82
Leader post	0	5	2	1	0	8

Question # 2	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	5	41	24	1	0	80
Leader pre	1	14	2	0	0	17
Member post	0	60	20	3	0	83
Leader post	0	7	1	0	0	8

Question # 3	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	1	42	7	20	1	80
Leader pre	1	8	0	8	0	17
Member post	0	43	11	30	0	84
Leader post	0	5	0	3	0	8

Question # 4	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	4	38	19	9	1	80
Leader pre	1	13	1	2	0	17
Member post	1	57	17	9	0	84
Leader post	0	7	1	0	0	8

Question # 5	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	0	36	9	24	1	79
Leader pre	1	11	0	5	0	17
Member post	0	49	10	24	0	83
Leader post	0	3	0	5	0	8

Table A1 – Continued. Questionnaire Results on Individual Questions

Question # 6	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	2	40	19	9	0	79
Leader pre	3	11	1	2	0	17
Member post	2	60	13	9	0	84
Leader post	0	7	1	0	0	8

Question # 7	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	5	43	12	10	0	79
Leader pre	2	9	1	5	0	17
Member post	0	63	12	9	0	84
Leader post	0	7	0	1	0	8

Question # 8	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	3	32	28	4	0	79
Leader pre	1	6	8	2	0	17
Member post	2	47	23	12	0	84
Leader post	0	4	3	1	0	8

Question # 9	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	5	35	15	24	1	79
Leader pre	0	7	0	10	0	17
Member post	6	45	10	22	1	84
Leader post	1	4	0	3	0	8

Question # 10	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	4	16	46	2	0	79
Leader pre	1	4	12	0	0	17
Member post	8	24	50	2	0	84
Leader post	0	5	3	0	0	8

Question # 11	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	1	49	12	8	0	79
Leader pre	0	11	2	4	0	17
Member post	1	<b>48</b>	19	15	0	83
Leader post	0	8	0	0	0	8



Table A1 – Continued. Questionnaire Results on Individual Questions

Question # 12	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	0	55	13	2	0	79
Leader pre	0	15	1	1	0	17
Member post	0	66	13	5	0	84
Leader post	0	8	0	0	0	8

Question # 13	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	3	47	9	10	1	79
Leader pre	0	12	0	5	0	17
Member post	2	58	6	18	0	84
Leader post	0	5	0	3	0	8

Question # 14	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	0	43	25	2	0	79
Leader pre	0	13	4	0	0	17
Member post	3	60	18	1	2	84
Leader post	0	5	3	0	0	8

Question # 15	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	1	41	25	2	1	79
Leader pre	1	10	5	1	0	17
Member post	4	51	25	3	1	84
Leader post	0	7	1	0	0	8

Question # 16	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	3	55	10	2	0	79
Leader pre	0	16	0	1	0	17
Member post	1	72	9	1	0	83
Leader post	0	7	0	1	0	8

Question # 17	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	2	47	6	14	1	79
Leader pre	0	9	0	8	0	17
Member post	2	57	3	22	0	84
Leader post	0	7	0	1	0	8

Table A1 – Continued. Questionnaire Results on Individual Questions

Question # 18	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	
Member pre	6	7	52	4	0	79
Leader pre	4	0	6	7	0	17
Member post	9	4	48	22	0	83
Leader post	0	1	4	3	0	8

Question # 19	Y	N	U			
Member pre	61	0	10	71		79
Leader pre	16	0	1	17		17
Member post	76	0	8	84		84
Leader post	8	0	0	8		8

Table A2

T-test Results from Questionnaire

Question 1	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	0	22	48	1	0	0.86
Member Post	2	32	39	9	0	
Leader Pre	1	10	3	3	0	0.40
Leader Post	0	5	2	1	0	

Question 2	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	5	41	24	1	0	0.87
Member Post	0	60	20	3	0	
Leader Pre	1	14	2	0	0	0.57
Leader Post	0	7	1	0	0	

Question 3	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	1	42	7	20	1	0.83
Member Post	0	43	11	30	0	
Leader Pre	1	8	0	8	0	0.43
Leader Post	0	5	0	3	0	

Question 4	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	4	38	19	9	1	0.84
Member Post	1	57	17	9	0	
Leader Pre	1	13	1	2	0	0.54
Leader Post	0	7	1	0	0	

Question 5	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	0	36	9	24	1	0.83
Member Post	0	49	10	24	0	
Leader Pre	1	11	0	5	0	0.47
Leader Post	0	3	0	5	0	

Table A2 – Continued. T-test Results from Questionnaire

Question 6	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	2	40	19	9	0	0.84
Member Post	2	60	13	9	0	
Leader Pre	3	11	1	2	0	0.48
Leader Post	0	7	1	0	0	

Question 7	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	5	43	12	10	0	0.85
Member Post	0	63	12	9	0	
Leader Pre	2	9	1	5	0	0.42
Leader Post	0	7	0	1	0	

Question 8	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	3	32	28	4	0	0.77
Member Post	2	47	23	12	0	
Leader Pre	1	6	8	2	0	0.34
Leader Post	0	4	3	1	0	

Question 9	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	5	35	15	24	1	0.94
Member Post	6	45	10	22	1	
Leader Pre	0	7	0	10	0	0.47
Leader Post	1	4	0	3	0	

Question 10	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	4	16	46	2	0	0.81
Member Post	8	24	50	2	0	
Leader Pre	1	4	12	0	0	0.50
Leader Post	0	5	3	0	0	

Question 11	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	1	49	12	8	0	0.84
Member Post	1	48	19	15	0	
Leader Pre	0	11	2	4	0	0.51
Leader Post	0	8	0	0	0	

Table A2 – Continued. T-test Results from Questionnaire

Question 12	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	0	55	13	2	0	0.87
Member Post	0	66	13	5	0	
Leader Pre	0	15	1	1	0	0.61
Leader Post	0	8	0	0	0	

Question 13	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	3	47	9	10	1	0.84
Member Post	2	58	6	18	0	
Leader Pre	0	12	0	5	0	0.51
Leader Post	0	5	0	3	0	

Question 14	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	0	43	25	2	0	0.85
Member Post	3	60	18	1	2	
Leader Pre	0	13	4	0	0	0.54
Leader Post	0	5	3	0	0	

Question 15	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	1	41	25	2	1	0.83
Member Post	4	51	25	3	1	
Leader Pre	1	10	5	1	0	0.46
Leader Post	0	7	1	0	0	

Question 16	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	3	55	10	2	0	0.89
Member Post	1	72	9	1	0	
Leader Pre	0	16	0	1	0	0.62
Leader Post	0	7	0	1	0	

Question 17	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	2	47	6	14	1	0.84
Member Post	2	57	3	22	0	
Leader Pre	0	9	0	8	0	0.49
Leader Post	0	7	0	1	0	

Table A2 – Continued. T-test Results from Questionnaire

Question 18	Unsure	Both	SunSch	SmGrp	Neither	T-Test
Member Pre	6	7	52	4	0	0.83
Member Post	9	4	48	22	0	
Leader Pre	4	0	6	7	0	0.32
Leader Post	0	1	4	3	0	

					Total	23.90
Q # 19	Y	N	U	T-Test	Avg t-test	0.66
Member Pre	61	0	10	0.89		
Member Post	76	0	8			
Leader Pre	16	0	1	0.64		
Leader Post	8	0	0			

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING A COMPREHENSIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY FOR THE ADULTS OF THE NORTHSIDE BAPTIST CHURCH OF INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

Steven M McNeil, D.Ed.Min  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012  
Chairperson: Dr. Michael Wilder

This project provides a comprehensive plan for adults to participate in Bible study and in small group settings. The overall goal is to see that the people of Northside Baptist Church understand the similarities and benefits of Sunday School and Home Small Groups. Chapter 1 presents the purpose, goals, history and context of this project. Chapter 2 examines the seven Biblical principles examined in Acts 2:42-47 and how these give insight, purpose and boundaries related to the small group process.

Chapter 3 examines research from authors of Sunday School and home small groups. The sociological principles found were then compared to the biblical principles discovered in chapter two. Chapter 4 is a description of the implementation of this project and how it works in the local church. Chapter 5 is an evaluation as to whether this project was successful or not and what was learned from the project.



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