**BMi SALTS COURSE**

**Small Group Ministry**

**Introduction**

Basic to all gatherings of Christians is fellowship. In large groups we can experience fellowship in breadth whilst in small groups we experience fellowship in depth.

The church is called to fellowship or communion, with God and then fellow believers (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3-7) and this may best be facilitated in small groups. Jesus, when ministering to a large mass of people, had them relate in smaller groups. Mk 6:39-40

These small groups may be called Home Fellowship, Care Groups, Cell Groups, etc., with each term intended to convey something of the nature of the group.

There are four aspects of fellowship; relationship, fellowship, partnership and friendship.

Fellowship (Greek - ‘koinonia) means, communication, communion, contribution, participation (a shared life) and distribution.

These small groups typically gather in homes (Acts 2:46, 5:42; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col 4:15; Philemon 2). The members of such groups meet primarily because they are believers. Such meetings may include prayer, discussions, praise and worship, Bible study, ministry to members, social interaction or a number of other elements. Groups that meet for the purpose of evangelism take on a different character to cater for unsaved folk.

There are numerous advantages when meeting in smaller home groups. A conducive atmosphere exists where the unity in the Holy Spirit can freely develop, people can enter into fellowship in depth, whilst the level of commitment to one another is able to increase. The group can look after the various needs of its members and members have opportunities to develop gifts and ministries. Openness, honesty and responsibility develop under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit and the group’s leadership.

**The Leader**

The key to the Home Fellowship meetings is the leader’s commitment, faithfulness, enthusiasm, example, maturity, submission to authority and caring (pastoral ministry).

**a. Stability of character;** Is. 33:6. The leader’s life is established in foundational truth. Heb. 6:1. He will know and walk in the ways of God and respond in faith and obedience, (James 1:6-8) with a settled, undivided heart, Eph. 4:14, an untroubled heart John 14:1,27, an unoffended heart, an unmoved heart I Thessalonians 3:3; Colossians 1:23; Psalm 16:8; Psalm 62:2,6.

**b. Show an Example**  In 1 Timothy 4:12 NKJV there are six areas in which one who is a leader should show example. Our Ultimate example is Christ. 1 Peter 2:21.

1) Speech, leaders manifest integrity in speech. One who loves truth in the inward parts and speaks the truth in love Ephesians 4:15. There must be no coarse, suggestive or loose speech Colossians 4:6.

2) Conduct. The leader should demonstrate loyalty and dignity, 1 Timothy 2:2. His actions must be accountable both to God and man. Loyalty is the result of a submissive heart, c.f. Joseph, David, Moses, Daniel. It includes a team spirit; Philippians 1:27. It seeks to have one spirit and to move as one soul, Phil. 2:2. It seeks a unity of one mind and one judgment 1 Corinthians 1:10. Disloyalty is caused by an independent spirit, which in turn is caused by lack of brokenness and submission.

3) Spirit. A necessity for imparting life to others is a teachable spirit, manifested by humility and meekness; Psalm 25:9; Matthew 11:28­-29. Steadfastness and balance are necessary requirements.

4) Faith. Faithfulness in small things must precede faithfulness in much, Luke 16:11-12, 19:17. A leader is expected to be faithful in attendance and in the event of circumstances arising which would prevent his attendance he should notify the responsible person.

5) Love, will manifest itself in many ways; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Corinthins 13, but especially in compassion and in practical serving 1 John 3:17.

6) Purity, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Revelation 22:11; I John 3:3, 7-10. A leader is required to adopt scriptural standards of morality into his personal life. Romans 13:14.

**c. Discernment** enables a leader to know the condition of his sheep. Discernment will also enable a leader to guard the sheep against error that may be propagated by false teachers or “wolves in sheep’s clothing”; Phil. 1:9; Col 1:9; Heb 5:11-14. A man of spiritual maturity will be a man of the Word and of prayer, with a spirit of discipline, of love and with a sound mind.

**The Meeting**

Home Fellowship meetings will contain a number of elements (not necessarily all of them at any one meeting - thankfully)

a. praise and worship

b. teaching (to suit type of group)

c. prayer, intercession

d. discussion and sharing

e. testimonies

f. ministry to members

g. evangelism, outreach

h. training as disciples

i. sharing a meal or social event together.

The primary aim of these elements is to stimulate fellowship and build relationships through walking in the light, caring, healing, encouraging, correcting, exhorting, admonishing, comforting, mutual ministry, talking and listening.

All parties in the group need to be committed to contribute, be sensitive to one another, strive for an atmosphere of love, be sacrificial in prayer, demonstrate compassion, kindness, and gentleness, bring a positive contribution (beware of problem-centred people who delight to hold the floor with their problems - shows in talk and prayers).

Practical aspects relating to Home Fellowship meetings:

a. the room is to be prepared and ready for meeting to start on time;

b. greet people as they arrive and observe obvious needs;

c. when talking after meeting include all people; don’t have some people sitting by themselves;

d. keep to time limit;

e. visit or phone when member is missing and the reason is not known;

f. arrange transport (or assign to another); and

g. report to pastor (or responsible elder) any problems, difficulties, needs for further counselling, follow-up, etc.

**Pastoral Care**

The small group leader is responsible for the care of his group, as he is the shepherd, some commentators suggest this was the meaning of *pastor* in scripture. He will guard, feed, rule and care for the sheep.

Shepherding includes the following elements:

a. teaching, counselling, correcting, caring and maturing lives;

b. development of mutual loyalty;

c. concentrating on relationships;

d. helping group members with real life situations, family, finances, work ethic, character development, development of ministry, etc.

e. preparing to serve and

f. developing a ministry of encouragement.

Considerations for meetings:

a. monitor contributions so that talkers do not monopolise;

b. teach how to handle conflict resulting from diverse opinions of group members and

c. seek to develop the “one-another” ministry.

Guard against:

a. abuse of spiritual gifts;

b. super spiritual language, e.g. “The Lord told me ( showed me)’; ‘The Lord said”, etc Rather use “I believe’; “I have considered the matter and I would like to.......;

c. indiscriminate, unrestrained, indiscreet, undisciplined speaking.

Take care to avoid offences which can produce many detrimental side-effects:

a. resentments and bitterness;

b. hostility and tension within a church;

c. distrust, suspicion and misunderstanding among the brethren;

d. unforgiving spirit which is quick to see the faults in others and equally as quick to condemn;

e. grieve the Holy Spirit and quench the ‘fruit of the Spirit” in our lives;

f. generate slander, backbiting and gossip which further contribute to the cycle of offence;

g. critical, judgemental attitude towards those who have wronged us;

h. harden our hearts against others and God, and produce a callous spirit which rejects conviction;

i. instil a sense of guilt and nagging condemnation in our hearts because of the unresolved sin and

j. create physical, mental and emotional problems as a result of the inner stress from unresolved offence.