

## **Planning Your First Group Meeting**

The length of a Small Group Semester can vary slightly, but typically will average 12-14 weeks, allowing ample time for significant study/discussions on spiritual topics as well as time built in for socials, a missed week for a holiday, etc.

While leaders should always be open to promptings of the Holy Spirit, an intentional and purposeful plan for weekly gatherings will bring stronger relationships and greater spiritual fruit than a group that limps along aimlessly week to week.

To get started, consider these suggestions for your first Meeting:

### **Have Fun, Get Acquainted & Set Expectations**

#### **Food & Fun**

Goal #1– Get them back to Week 2! (*Smile*).

Your first meeting should be designed as a fun, relaxed gathering for folks to simply get acquainted. Anything involving food is always a winner. Keep energy and lighting high and your background music upbeat!

#### **Use an Icebreaker**

Being prepared with a couple of ice-breaker questions in case you need them to spur on the conversation is wise, but approaching this evening without a driven agenda is fine. Making everyone feel they are a part of your group is the key tonight. If conversation lags, try one of these questions. Participants will begin to connect with other's stories right away.

- How long have you been attending I Am and how did you come to be attending with us (invited by a friend, mailer, sign, etc.).
- What is it about I Am that has kept you coming back?
- If money, education, and time were not object, what would you like to do?
- What are you really, really, [really!] passionate about?

#### **Discuss Expectations**

People come into I Am and into a Small Group with all kinds of past experiences; some good, and some bad. Some folks are church-ed, some are not. Some have been in Sunday school, some in Bible Studies, and some in Small Groups. Any of those experiences, or lack thereof, can create false expectations of what might happen in this new group. Take significant time to ask each person to share their expectations.

Try writing their answers on a flip chart or poster board as they are shared, so you are building a visual composite of expectations for all to see. If your own values are missing, ask if they expect some of those things as well, such as encouragement, authenticity, accountability,

prayer and the big one – commitment! Be sure everyone understands that commitment is a decision and necessary in the journey. Ask them for commitment to the group and to your meetings.

To promote trust and respect in your group, it's helpful to agree on a few ground rules. Mention these, and you'll likely get quick affirmation while setting the stage for a safe environment for sharing:

- A safe place where confidentiality is maintained\*
- Not confessing the sins of others
- Healthy conflict resolution; (Mt. 18:15-17)

\*Exception: If you sense a life is in danger, inform your pastoral staff immediately

### **Share Leadership / Promote Ownership of the Group**

Discuss that this group is led and facilitated by you, but that everyone's input is needed in order to have a successful group experience. You are not here to teach every week, but rather to lead them in the journey.

### **Close with Prayer**

Offer the opportunity for others to speak out a prayer and close your first evening by giving thanks to God for all things, asking Him to guide your group as together you seek to create a Small Group environment that will foster the spiritual growth you each desire.

### **Between Meetings**

Invest in developing these new relationships. Take time to call them, check in on any serious prayer request issues, ask about family members, invite them to Sunday lunch, and express sincere interest in their lives. Let them know you enjoyed getting to know them and look forward to seeing them the following week!