

# Valuing your small group leaders

Lin Ball

*Does your church care for those that care? Train those that train? Nurture those that nurture? Give to those that give? What I really mean is: does your church value your small group leaders – and show it?*

Here's a checklist you might like to think about in terms of supporting small group leaders:

## 1 GIFT GROWING/TRAINING

Does your church have the active intention – however informally expressed – of seeking out and growing those with leadership, pastoral and teaching gifts? Is there someone on the leadership team or diaconate who has the task of identifying embryo skills within the church family and working to develop them? There are many burned-out or besieged church leaders who have a real problem with delegation; or who think they are too busy to conduct a skills audit of their flock. I would suggest that they are too busy NOT to pay attention to mentoring others to share the ministry. It's a really wise investment to spend time identifying individuals or couples with natural qualities for home group leadership. If you don't have the resources to train them within the church, pay for them to get valuable input on a leadership training weekend or conference, among which are some excellent events put on by Willow Creek. A home-grown alternative would be to use a course such as SMALL GROUPS GROWING CHURCHES (by Mike Law, published by Scripture Union) which provides flexible training material from which to put together training in any number of different time slots.

And don't forget that training is not a once-for-all-time pursuit. Think about refresher courses from time to time, or send them on an annual weekend retreat. Do the group leaders also understand that it's part of their role to train and mentor other potential leaders within their group?

## 2 AFFIRMING

Once appointed, does the church family continue to support and affirm their small group leaders? Most people don't want big bouquets – but an occasional 'thankyou' doesn't go amiss. Are the home group leaders affirmed publicly by being mentioned occasionally with warm gratitude from the pulpit or in the church bulletin or magazine? Or affirmed privately with a word of appreciation or a handwritten note expressing confidence in their leadership? Are their ideas welcomed? Their hard work noticed? Does the whole church celebrate the achievements of the small group – whether it's the completion of a study programme or involvement in a social action project or a successful outreach event? Failing to affirm your home group leaders may well mean disillusionment and a high turnover – which communicate their own messages to the church family. An ounce of encouragement goes a long way.

## 3 INSPIRING

Does your church leader or leadership team include home group leaders in the overall planning and 'big picture' strategy of the church? Doing this will ensure that home group leaders see where they need to play a vital role in the overall mission and vision of the church within the community. Involvement will grow them and remind them of the importance of their ministry. The inspiration that they catch will 'trickle down' to their group members.

## 4 FEEDING

As well as more formal training, do you allow opportunities for home group leaders to share together informally, for fun, worship and fellowship? Do you encourage them in their personal discipleship? Provide them with appropriate accountability? Actively support them in personal Bible reading? Remind them of the centrality of prayer? Make sure they are nurtured in the faith by reading good Christian books and periodicals? Home groups will bear fruit as the leaders deepen their own faith experience, so do all you can to feed that. Set the leaders challenging but attainable goals and regularly review them.

## 5 PRAYING

Are your home group leaders regularly prayed for – publicly in the church services but also privately? Is anyone likely to notice when a home group leader has a personal or family crisis? Is it acceptable for them to be given a sabbatical or temporary leave from leadership?

Putting these positive actions and attitudes in place within your church family will ensure that small group leaders feel – and continue to feel – valued, encouraged and inspired to share in the important task of growing the kingdom.

### **Feel free!**

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