

Over 50% of Concord Church Adults in Small Groups

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by Warren Bird

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Ideas to Implementation to Impact

Concord Church, Dallas, TX, (www.concorddallas.org) is using a mix-and-match, facility-based approach to small groups that has made them the “lifeblood” of its congregation of over 5,000 active attendees.

“For us, small groups are not an initiative,” says Concord small groups pastor Jeremy Williams. “It’s our way of life, it’s how we grow people.

“It’s not a fad—it’s the air, the oxygen to our church. It’s who we are,” he says.

That focus has translated into 50% of the church being involved in a small group—with 87 women’s groups, 55 men’s groups that meet at 7 a.m. on a weekday, 25 community groups and nine Sunday Schools. When an “Uplift” gathering for young adults recently grew to 60–80 people, it multiplied into seven groups.

“Small groups shrink the church in all the right ways,” says Jeremy, who has overseen Concord’s small groups ministry for the past two years. “Everything is literally a small group here – dance, choir, young adults and more.”

That includes Concord’s Wednesday night prayer service—which features large group teaching followed by



The men’s ministry sponsored a “How to Fix It Day” with professionals from The Home Depot to help men complete common projects without having to spend too much money.

breaking up into 25 groups throughout its Dallas location. After seeing the success of its Tuesday morning Men’s Fraternity, which uses a large-group-followed-by-small-groups format, church leaders decided to change the Wednesday night format and “make it like Tuesdays.”

“We have to kick people out some times,” Jeremy says. “One night we had to tell them, ‘There is a funeral happening in this room at 2 p.m. tomorrow.’”

Learning from Other Churches

Concord can credit its success to modeling—or in some cases not

adopting—components of its small groups ministry after several other congregations.

From Watermark Church (www.watermark.org) and Village Church in Dallas (www.thevillagechurch.net), Concord took the idea of leading groups, not just facilitating. Andy Stanley’s North Point Community Church (www.northpoint.org) reimburses small group childcare workers (won’t work at Concord), didn’t build adult classrooms (works at Concord) and deploys a start/stop rhythm for groups to have a defined beginning and end (also works at Concord).

“We have leadership focus groups all the time to ask how an idea will



Community groups, especially those that are externally focused, are extremely important at Concord. “Bless Dallas” is an outreach campaign designed to bring about spiritual and social transformation in the city of Dallas.



Women of Worth (WOW) is a Bible study for every woman at every stage of life. Their motto is “...to be Proverbs 31 women. Living life to positively impact our community, uplifting God’s kingdom while here on earth!”

apply best to us,” says Kason Branch, Concord’s pastor of congregational care and men. “And we learn, ‘that model fits us and that’s not us...we do like this book...but we don’t want to watch that video.’ ”

Creating a Movement

Small groups were initiated at Concord by founding pastor E.K. Bailey years ago, beginning as community groups in homes (similar to Sunday Schools), to help the church feel smaller after a growth spurt and relocation to a bigger sanctuary.

When Pastor Bryan Carter initially came to Concord as the discipleship pastor with a background as an educator, there were about 30 groups, mostly community based. Bryan wanted to make groups the main vehicle for discipleship and connection, so he preached on it and called for leaders to step up.

“From there, it was a movement and a push—if you want to see life change, you need to be in a small group,” Bryan says. His constant emphasis to the congregation was “Sunday is not enough.” To be connected and placed in ministry, “you have to do more than rely on Sunday morning,” he often states.

Pastor Carter drove the ministry from the front early-on and still does, realizing that “if you can change the person, you change the family, you change the job, and you change the community.”

Leadership Development is Vital

Church leaders around the U.S. would probably universally agree that the success of small group ministries hinges on leadership development. That’s why Concord’s push has always been to

sustain leaders “organically” through “dual core” leadership. Women’s groups have small group coaches who volunteer to circulate between groups, follow up with leaders and answer questions.

“If you’re leading at Concord, you’re also developing someone else,” Jeremy says. “There is a timeline of 18 months of intentionally walking alongside. People are invited into leadership. The training is to always have someone you’re walking alongside of as a leader.

“Small groups make leadership seem attainable.”

Care and Connection

Along with a burgeoning women’s small group ministry (called “WOW”) that is now outpacing the original men’s groups, a group of Concord men leads Authentic Manhood groups in prisons and have taken the program into local schools.

Many of the boys in the schools don’t have fathers, so men in the group give up their own “graduation” ceremony in the Authentic Manhood plan and “spend the money, energy and hoopla for the boys without dads,” Jeremy says.

A member of one of the men’s groups recently died, and the other members stepped in to care for the man’s widow with food, taking care of the house



The Inagural 33: The Series Class at Wilmer-Hutchins, a local High School in Dallas, TX. They were hoping for 8 graduates and ended up with 22 young men.

and speaking at the funeral. The member who died had been through Men’s Fraternity and the pastor read his “manhood plan” at the funeral, commenting on what a changed man he had become.

“We all have stories of how a group has stepped up to be the body of Christ,” Jeremy says. “That’s when we know a group is a success, when care is happening in groups before they call the pastoral care department.”

Concord’s rich history of Sunday School-type groups, using its facility to maximize the small group ministry and adapting the model over the years with ideas from other churches, has

resulted in what Concord leaders all acknowledge is the heartbeat of their church.

“This is how people get connected, and the small groups are our life blood,” Kason says. “We pray a lot—for leaders, leadership, and needs, leaving room for the Holy Spirit to lead as He will, since this is a move of God.”

About the Author

Warren Bird, Ph.D., research director at Leadership Network, is a former pastor and seminary professor, and is author or co-author of 24 books for ministry leaders, the most recent one with Jim Tomberlin: *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work*. Some of Warren’s recent online reports include “*The Heartbeat of Rising Influence Churches*,” “*Pastors Who Are Shaping the Future*” and “*A New Decade of Megachurches*.” Follow him on Twitter @warrenbird or contact him at Warren.Bird@leadnet.org.