

Small Groups Ministry



Guidebook and Checklist
for Parish Small Groups Directors

Letter to Parish Small Groups Directors

March 25, 2020
Annunciation of the Theotokos

Dear Parish Small Groups Director,

While we have been asked to stay home due to Covid-19, this doesn't mean that important ministry work must pause.

NEW ONLINE RESOURCES

So we've developed new videos and live-streams with youth and young adult ministry leaders from across the nation. You can find the full schedule at Y2AM.org/AtHome.

However, as a Church, we need to do more than simply connect people to online resources. We need to help our parishioners stay connected with each other. We need to bring people together for Christ-centered fellowship: into relationships where they can know each other and be known by each other.

To that end, we've developed resources to help you develop a small groups ministry in your community.

WHAT ARE SMALL GROUPS?

Small groups ministry is exactly what it sounds like. People can get lost in a big crowd. Small groups are made up of no more than eight to ten people who come together each week to learn together, pray together, and fellowship together.

It's an opportunity for personal support and connection which, in these strange days, is more important now than ever.

Shut out from the physical building of the Church, we hope to help people find new ways of being and gathering as the Church, even in a time when necessity separates us. Our hope is to help you build smaller communities of people who can remain connected to each other throughout this crisis. Such groups would be learning together, praying together, and growing in Christ together.

Parishes already have Sunday School Directors, Youth Ministry Directors, and other directors of ministry. You, as Small Groups Director, will direct and coordinate the creation of small groups in your community.

Many parishes across America have already begun developing a small groups ministry. We want to help you make this personal ministry available in your community as well.

The resources available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups will help you:

1. develop small groups in your community,
2. train parishioners to lead these groups, and
3. bring people together for personal, Christ-centered ministry.

And the great thing is, we can do all of that online. So it's easier than ever to come together.

And the more we come together, the more support we have during these tough times.

You can find the full set of small groups resources at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups.

May God bless you as you bring people together. We're here to support you every step of the way.

In Christ,

Steven Christoforou
Director, Y2AM

Why Small Groups Ministry?

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

We often measure the success of a ministry based on how many people attend.

But bigger isn't always better.

Big groups of people have a place in our ministries, but they don't necessarily help bring people together. It's hard to be vulnerable and share difficult things in front of a big group. It's hard to be heard and seen when the room is stuffed full of people.

And it's even harder online. It's far too easy to get lost in a crowded online chat.

Small groups give us an opportunity to foster more personal connection. Everyone has a chance to speak and be heard. Everyone has a chance to be seen. Everyone has a chance to be more than a passive participant in a crowded presentation.

NORMAL HUMAN INTERACTION TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL

Small Group is simply the application of normal human interaction for the purposes of spreading the Gospel, and caring for the people of God.

Our job and purpose in small group discipleship programs is to foster deeper relationships, and stronger commitments for those desiring them in all categories, and to move everyone to a higher level of commitment and spiritual experience.

There is no magic involved and whenever you have groups of people there will be a learning curve, mistakes, and great growth in depth and numbers. Loving and praying are what make small group leaders successful.

-Father John Peck
Parish Priest, All Saints of North America Orthodox Church (Sun City, AZ)

What is Small Groups Ministry?

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL GROUPS

- Weekly meetings (one hour long) of 6-8 participants
- Led by a Small Groups Leader
- Can either be based on existing ministries (for examples, Smalls Groups made up of only teens or young adults) or can bring together parishioners of different ages and backgrounds
- Begin with a prayer and introduction to the topic by the Small Groups Leader
- Time for discussion and reflection moderated by the Small Groups Leader
- End with a prayer and wrap-up by the Small Groups Leader

CORE PRINCIPLES OF SMALL GROUPS

INTENTIONAL: very clear goals and objectives

FACE TO FACE: designed for interpersonal relationship

3-12 PEOPLE: for interpersonal communication and support

REGULAR TIME SCHEDULE: groups meet once a week

COMMON PURPOSE: agreed upon contract that explains goals and objectives

DISCOVERING: the group is for people who are open to Christian teachings

GROWING: the group is for people who are looking for a deeper growth in Christ

POSSIBILITIES: willingness to stretch, dream, and share openly outside of your comfort zone

-Lyman Coleman
Training Manual for Small Group Leaders

Responsibility of Parish Leaders

STEP 1: ASSIGN PARISHIONERS TO SMALL GROUPS

Ideally, small groups should consist of not more than 8-12 people.

You may choose to assign parishioners based on their participation in an existing ministry (for example, if you have 30 teens participating in your existing teen ministry, you can divide them up into 3 groups of 10).

However, smalls groups ministry also offers an opportunity to connect people across generations and existing ministries.

STEP 2: SELECT SMALL GROUP LEADERS

People with existing leadership roles in your parish ministries (youth group leaders, Sunday School teachers, etc.) already have experience that will help them be good Small Group Leaders.

However, this may also be an opportunity to empower people who don't yet have a leadership role. For example, some of your older teens may make good Small Group Leaders.

STEP 3: MINISTER TO SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Jesus had a core group of disciples around Him (most obviously, His 12 Apostles). He taught and prepared these people to go and minister to others.

You, as Small Groups Director, will give your primary attention to your Small Group Leaders. You can be the Leader of one or more groups made up of your parish's Small Group Leaders. By ministering to them every week, you prepare them to connect with a wider circle of parishioners and fellow Christians.

Available Resources

Small Group Leader Training

We are preparing a live Small Group Leader training webinar which will take place the week of March 30, 2020.

This webinar will offer basic instruction on :

1. the role of a Small Group Leader;
2. how to facilitate discussion;
3. encouraging participation by all members; and
4. resolving potential conflicts in the discussion.

The link to access this webinar is: Y2AM.org/SmallGroupLeaderTraining.

If you or your parish Small Group Leaders cannot attend this live webinar, a recording will be available on our YouTube channel: YouTube.com/Y2AM.

Small Groups Curriculum

Small Group times tends to be structured as follows:

1. opening prayer and introduction;
2. breaking up into small groups; and
3. coming together again for wrap-up and closing prayer.

We will be offering weekly curricula for Small Groups based around the Sunday Gospel and Epistle readings. We will offer materials to help Small Group Leaders offer intros and wrap-ups for their groups, as well as three questions to facilitate personal discussion and reflection.

These materials will be available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups.