

Multiplying Small Groups Begins at the Pulpit

Nothing is important until the pastor says it is important. I started to type, “Nothing is important until the pastor thinks it is important.” That’s not right. Nothing is important until the pastor says, and says, and says, and says it is important.



Josh Hunt
Author of *You Can Double Your Class in Two Years or Less*

*The following is composed of excerpts from articles published online at www.churchcentral.com. The original articles were written by Josh Hunt, the author of **You Can Double Your Class in Two Years or Less**. Josh speaks nationally on church growth and adult education.*

You can contact Josh at www.joshhunt.com.

It is the law of prime time. If you want to get anything to be a part of the culture of the church, you have to get it to prime time. Prime time, in church life, is Sunday morning. You have to get it to Sunday morning, and you have to get the pastor to say it is important. Whether it is prayer ministry, missions, evangelism, or doubling groups, if you really want it to happen, you have to get it to prime time. Nothing is important until the pastor says it is important.

How One Church Tripled in 10 Years

One church in Tallahassee, Florida, has an amazing turn-around story of tripling the congregation in the last decade. How did they do it? The pastor had a ready and simple answer. It contains three parts:

- **Dynamic worship**
- **Life-changing Bible study**
- **Intentional outreach**

I thought I had an idea of what he meant by dynamic worship and life-changing Bible study, so I asked how the outreach worked. Although they call it outreach, it is not going out into the community. It is taking really good care of the visitors they have.

In my book, *You Can Double*, I have a section on reaching the reachable. The most reachable people in town are the people who visit your worship service.

Most churches can grow just by taking really good care of their visitors. And this approach does have a positive approach on evangelistic growth, not just transfer growth. Baptism numbers went up as it started this approach.

The church also tracked people the first time they hit four absences in a row. This is a good thing to watch if you suspect you have a “back-door” problem. Churches that wait six months drop their chances of retaining members substantially. Churches that catch people after four consecutive absences have a good chance of getting them back.

Databases help churches do this. Their database generates a weekly list of people who had their fourth absence during the week. What do they do with the list?

“Give it to me. I will call them,” the pastor responded.

This is the point I want to make in this article: Note the pastor’s personal involvement in this process. The pastor was the first one to volunteer to make some calls. The pastor made calls every week. Personally. The pastor did not ask anyone to do what he did not do. The pastor embodied the vision. Whatever the pastor says is important, is important. It is the law of prime time.

Multiplying Small Groups Begins at the Pulpit

Another Church in Tallahassee, Florida, is a 10-year-old Willow Creek-style Southern Baptist church. Their services are very contemporary, seeker-driven, and “Willow Creekish.” They have not seen the growth that Willow Creek has, but they have grown consistently over the past 10 years. They built a building and laid a foundation for many years of effective ministry. Worship attendance is about double their small group attendance.

Recently they went through the *40 Days of Community* campaign, the follow-up to the *40 Days of Purpose* campaign. The 40-day campaign includes a video-based small group component. Rather than just be content with letting the existing groups go through the material, the church decided to take this opportunity to start a bunch of new groups. They asked people to

volunteer to do a home group once a week for 40 days. They provided a video-based curriculum so that all people had to do was what group leaders did at Saddleback:

- Heart for people
- Open their homes
- Serve refreshments
- Turn on the television

They didn’t ask people to teach for the rest of their lives – just once a week for 40 days. They didn’t ask them to do lengthy preparation – just turn on the television. They got 10 volunteers and started 10 new groups overnight. Most of them are continuing beyond the 40 days as ongoing groups. (I read on Saddleback’s Web page that they started 900 new groups in a similar way!)

Key point here: the pastor led this effort from the pulpit. It’s the law of prime time. Nothing is important until the pastor says it is important. Nothing is important until the pastor says it from the pulpit on Sunday morning.

Perhaps you are intrigued, as I am, with the possibility of doubling groups. A group of 10 can reach 1,000 by doubling every 18 months. It is happening in church planting movements all around the world. It is happening in Atlanta. It is happening in Bogota.

If it ever happens in your town, it will happen in cooperation with the law of prime time. The minister must say it on Sunday morning. Nothing is important until the preacher says it is important. Sunday morning is PRIME TIME. □

Online Resources

For information on:

- Attendance tracking and contact management, visit www.acstechnologies.com/products/people_suite.
- Small groups, visit www.acstechnologies.com/totalsolutions/smallgroups.
- And MORE, visit www.acstechnologies.com.

6 Ways Pastors Can Help Their Small Groups Succeed

From the ACS Technologies Implementation Team

1 Join a small group. There is no better way to communicate that you believe in a ministry than to participate in that ministry.

2 Preach it. The Law of Prime Time: It’s not important until the pastor says it’s important from the pulpit.

3 Feature it. Share success stories from your small groups. Mention them in your newsletter or Web page articles. Interview people who have been impacted through small groups in the worship service.

4 Keep a ministry perspective. If a key purpose of the church is to help people grow, and small groups play a major role in achieving that purpose, then asking people to get involved in small groups is a natural part of ministry. You’re not burdening them with additional commitment; you’re empowering them with additional resources.

5 Communicate expectation. Imply that involvement in a small group is the norm. Instead of “If you are in a small group...” say, “In your small group...”

6 Cultivate the culture. If you are making a ministry visit, invite the small group leader to go along. If a ministry need is expressed to the church, make sure that the need has been communicated to the small group.