

From Small Groups to Clusters: A Prophetic Story for Winchester Vineyard!!

This was NOT a handout but actually my notes from the evening so forgive them being a bit informal – but they might help as you listen through to the story!!

A&B: Group Leaders
C&D: Experienced in ministry but in need of a break...
E: Been around the church 2 or 3 years, can play guitar a bit
F: Friend of E also been around for a while..
G: New to the church, distant christian background, lots of questions..
H&I: Regulars in church but busy jobs & lack of babysitters mean they alternate in group if at all.

Forming: meals together, socials, icebreakers, fairly simple teaching / topics, maybe pick up on some of the Sunday themes.. E starts to lead some simple worship (encouraged by the leaders). The leaders don't talk too much about outreach & growth except to drop in every now & then that they have a vision to see the group grow & plant out as well as thinking & praying about how each person can share the life of the group with those outside...

Storming: Possible points of frustration as the group grows. G always has questions doesn't see things the same as others (they are genuine but it can be frustrating), C&D seem to be confident & know a lot but are not keen to take much responsibility.. E only knows half a dozen songs!! A&B feel that they are 'doing everything'..

Norming: Over a 4-6 month period, the leaders take time with each group member to encourage them in their faith journey and their participation in the group. They send E on a worship leading for small group leaders course (run at winvin) where E learns 6 new songs & a few guitar patterns... They also encourage others to lead the worship slots or ice breakers.. Eventually, C&D start to relax & are persuaded to lead the teaching a couple of times... During this time, they regularly (at least every other group) spend time in 2's & 3's praying for each other's friends who are not part of the group or church, and also join in with one or two community/outreach events. One or two new people (J&K) join the group & one of them can also play guitar & sing so he joins in with E.

Performing: As the group continues to grow, the leaders encourage some of the original members to actively spend time with the new members outside the group time. They gather some of the original members one time for a 'core' meal where they talk through their ideas for the next stage of the group. They chat (appropriately) about how different group members are getting on and hear back from the core with their ideas. They make a rough plan for the next term together which includes helping the whole group start to think about planting a new group.

PLANTING PHASE:

As well as the 'core' meeting the leaders have been specifically talking with C&D about the possibility of starting a new group, about some specific training & a timescale. They have been giving them more responsibility & even asked them to lead the meeting in A&B's absence a couple of times. At the right moment, A&B announce to the group that in 4-6 weeks C&D will be starting a new group and that people should start asking God which group they might be with. A&B also speak to key people in the group who they believe could be part of the new core & encourage them to pray. Most people feel a little unsettled but also excited at the momentum being generated. C&D make sure they share their vision publically & with anyone who asks. Within a couple of weeks, A&B meet with C&D to share who thinks they will go &/or stay. C&D gather their new core (including one of the worship leaders) separately to pray & share vision. As the time draws near, the whole group celebrates sharing testimonies of how people have grown etc and then the two groups pray for each other and C&D & their team are 'sent out'. They are also prayed out from the front of Sunday church, which leads to a few new people getting in touch to try out the new group.

CLUSTER:

Although the two groups are meeting separately most weeks, they have formed a 'cluster'. A&B still coach C&D in their leadership & together they decide what would be the most meaningful way of the two groups connecting. This could be for a joint meeting every 1 or 2 months at which they alternate between worship & intercession, and social / gathering events. Both groups now re-enter the forming phase with new people & start to ask God for fresh vision.

NEW GROUPS:

In time, each group re-plants again until the cluster has grown to 4 groups. Now, once every two months the cluster event has moved onto a Friday evening in the local pub function room/community centre and is gathering people who have never been to church before. The groups continue to meet most weeks to help people grow in their faith & outreach and most people (though not all) who are associated with the cluster come along to the main services at winvin. The group leaders get together as a cluster once a term for sharing, planning & peer coaching as well as attending central training & vision meetings once or twice a year at winvin.

One of the new groups meets 3x per month. 1x with children together on a Sunday afternoon and twice in the evening as grown ups. One of those 2 grown ups meetings is a 'great divide' where the guys & girls meet separately in different houses (which also helps with babysitters). The leaders have appointed one of the group members as 'group administrator' with responsibility for emailing & keeping their facebook details up to date so everyone knows where to go when!

One of the other groups has formed around 3 or 4 ex-students who like to meets in a coffee shop straight after work from 5.30 -7pm each week. They focus on sharing & discipleship mostly but make a big deal about praying for & inviting friends to the bigger cluster events every couple of months as well as certain central winvin events.

