

Group Life

In some ways church groups are like all groups, in some ways they are not. Most groups are people gathered because of commonly valued goals and tasks. Church groups are different because they want what they do to be pleasing not only to the group but to God as well. Vital church groups meet the task, relational and religious needs of their members.

Common Practices

Church groups have three kinds of needs: They need to get something done (task), the people in the group need to work well together (relational) and they want to relate what they do to their beliefs and faith (religious). What people do in groups serves to fulfill these needs.

Functions Related to Task Needs

Getting something done is important to a group. It doesn't matter whether the task is planning a meal, patching a roof or studying Ephesians, people want to "get on with it" when they get together. They feel good—vital and effective—when the task is accomplished. Some ways people in a group help accomplish the task are:

- **Clarifying.** "Our task is" "Did I understand you to mean ...?"
- **Seeking or providing information.** "Does someone know anything about ...?" "Here are some statistics about"

- **Seeking or offering opinion.** "What do you think about ...?" "When looking at this, I think that"
- **Elaborating.** "Another way of understanding that is" "I know what you mean. For instance"
- **Coordinating.** "Kim's and John's ideas really build on each other because"
- **Summarizing.** "Thus far, it seems we have seen that"
- **Tracking.** "It seems we're moving to another issue. Am I right?" "Are we talking about two different things at the same time? It sounds as though we"
- **Testing for decision.** "Let me try. Our decision is that" "I move that we"

Functions Related to Relational Needs

People need to know that they belong and are accepted by the group. There are things you can say and do that help the relationships go smoothly:

- **Gatekeeping.** "Tom's been trying to say something. Tom" "Let's make sure that everyone has spoken to this before we move on."
- **Expressing group feelings.** "I think that we need to take a brief break because" "I'm not sure whether we're happy or sad, but we"
- **Relieving tensions.** "Look, I respect Bill but the problem I have with his idea is" "A funny

thing about us sometimes is that we"

- **Affirming and honoring.** "I like the way we" "Pat, you were really helpful to us when"
- **Cooperative listening.** "Let's hear Jose out on this one ..." "Nancy, I'd like to build on what you said by"
- **Harmonizing.** "It seems that though you differ on ... you still appear to have ... in common. Is that so?" "Where are we together? ... Okay, what can we do with where we differ?"
- **Evaluating.** "How are we doing at working and being together?" "I like ... but I hope still that we can"

Functions Related to Religious Needs

Your church group does some things differently from other groups because it is a faith community. There are things you can do as part of a group to meet the religious needs.

- Value clarification. "Looking back at what we've said and done, I'm not sure how we're any different from" "How does this square with the conviction that ...?"
- Theological reflection. "What does our church believe about this sort of thing?" "This reminds me of something in the story of Abraham when he"
- Prayer. "This is a particularly joyous moment of accomplishment. I think it would be good to offer a

prayer of thanksgiving and especially to include" "Tonight we face some difficult decisions. Let's pray for"

- Worship and devotional period. "Now that we're here, let's awaken the sense of who we are and whose we are by" "The reading for this evening is"

Being in a group is a little like being a juggler with three balls in the air. While the religious, relational and task needs are always in motion, one may be higher than the others at any one time. As a group member, you have to discover which need is foremost and help fulfill that need. If everyone in the group is aware of these needs, the group can get the task done, enjoy being with one another and feel part of a faith community.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Pass out 3" x 5" cards with the name of each of the functions related to task, relational and religious needs. Have a "make believe" meeting. Ask each person to "play out" the function on the card during the meeting. After 30 minutes have people (a) guess what function each was playing and tell why they think so and (b) talk about the value of the functions and the timing of their use.

- Make a tape recording of one of your group meetings and then listen to and analyze it from the perspective of the three need areas. Set goals for the upcoming meetings.
- Read “Attentive to God: Spirituality in the Church Committee” by Karen Marie Yust (The Chalice Press, 2001). Order information is at www.chalicepress.com.
- Read “Leading Small Groups: Basic Skills for Church and Community Organizations” by Nathan W. Turner (Valley Forge PA; Judson Press, 1996). Order information is at www.judsonpress.com.

do they come into play in the life of your group? What functions need more attention?

- Review the illustrative remarks for each function. What are some other remarks that could be used?

Issues Facing the Church

- Some church groups deal almost exclusively with one need. That is how the group is perceived by other church members and why people join. How can task, relational and religious needs be balanced?
- Who is responsible for balance? Is it the pastor or chairperson who often is held accountable?
- Can a church group meet two of the three needs and still be a church group?

Questions

- Review the three categories and related functions. How and when