

Best Practices for Small Christian Communities

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I belong to an SCC based in my home parish and I guide the SCC's of St. John's in Columbia. I see every week that SCC's come in all sorts of flavors and it's hard to identify principles that can be applied to all of them. My experiences give rise to these suggestions - but they certainly are not exhaustive and may need to be fine-tuned in your situation. Let's look at 'best practices' for an SCC with an overall rubric of 'balance.'

We ought not to take balance for granted. The gymnasts who competed in this past summer's Olympics did amazing feats! I fall over trying to put my socks on! Fortunately, achieving a modicum of balance in your SCC does not take so much practice, physical flexibility, and youth. But it DOES take some work and reflection.

Look for **balanced participation, duties and leadership among members**. Generously distribute the burdens of organization, cleaning up one's house, buying snacks, reading out loud, facilitating the reflection time, and other tasks. Allow no-one to leave your time together routinely feeling that they are doing a lot more work than others are. Just as important – ensure that everyone knows they are an important contributing part to the success of the whole.

Does your gathering **balance the elements of the process that you use**? Is there time enough to catch up with one another's lives? Is there sufficient time spent in silence? Time spent in intercessory prayer? Time spent hearing and meditating on the Word? How much time is spent in discussion? Balance in this area doesn't mean equal time for each element but means that each element gets its due. The session doesn't feel rushed. It doesn't run on and on until exhaustion sets in.

Some groups can't bring themselves to change anything while others seem to reinvent the whole process with every meeting. Look for some **balance between keeping the traditions of 'how we do this' and a thoughtful and measured introduction of 'new' things**. Dim the lights and light a candle for prayer. Sing a hymn / play some music from CD. Use input from a DVD program. Have food if you normally don't or change the way you do it: a potluck lunch or dinner, ordering pizza or Chinese delivery, have deserts only. There is a comfort in our traditions that we need to respect but there is also a need to try other ways of doing things in order to enhance our experience. As a rule - don't spring big surprises on folks, discuss changes in advance and get buy-in from everyone.

We are all trying to balance faith, families, and work. Many of us over-commit. As hard as we may try to schedule around our SCC times we will find major conflicts coming up during the year. Strong SCC's find a way to **balance the need for a consistent schedule of meetings with responding to members' varying work / family needs**. Be willing to adjust meeting dates and times to help members stay with the group and participate – but don't become so erratic that no one is sure when the next session will be.

Perhaps the hardest thing to attain is **balance in the membership in the group**. Ages, sexes, incomes, point of view. There is a lot of comfort in being with others who are “just like us.” There is some uneasiness in being stretched, to consider faith issues from a somewhat different perspective. Your group is your group – but, as members depart, ask everyone to look outside your current circles of friends for appropriate potential members who may be interested.

Good balance will enhance your SCC experience. We may not be doing flips and twists on the balance beam next year – but you will be stronger, healthier, and move confidently together into the future!