

LAUNCH *into* Community Life

Building a master plan
with your small group

*A book of small group agendas
by Michael Mack*

Published by Cell Group Resources
PO Box 7847
Houston, Texas 77270 USA
(713) 884-8893 • Fax (713) 742-5998

Copyright © 2008 by Michael C. Mack

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, sorted in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Printed in the United States of America.

Series cover design by Don Bleyl
Edited by Randall Neighbour

International Standard Book Number: 0-9788779-5-0

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

Do not make illegal copies of this book. But you may ...
make as many copies as needed from the appendix of this resource, which is designed for duplication. Making copies of any other pages violates copyright laws and is considered theft. Call 800-735-5865 to buy this agenda book in quantity at a substantial savings off the retail price.

Cell Group Resources is a book-publishing division of TOUCH Outreach Ministries, Inc., a resource, training, and consulting ministry for churches with a vision for holistic small groups.

Find us on the web at: www.touchusa.org

To visit the author's website, visit www.michaelcmack.com

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Prepare to Launch	7
First Meeting Checklist	8
How to Use This Book	11
Week One: The Key to Success: Organization	13
Week Two: The “Perfect” Small Group	23
Week Three: Radically Real Christian Community	33
Week Four: Going Forward Together	39
Appendices	48
Our Small Group Master Plan	55
Our Small Group Prayer Journal	59
Scripture Memory Master Sheets	60

Introduction

You are about to embark on a journey that is totally counter-cultural.

Our culture drives us toward isolation, even when we are surrounded by lots of people. Our workplaces, homes, churches—the whole American culture—is disconnected and disengaged. Some small groups could be described in the same way. Randy Frazee, a pastor and author, calls it “crowded loneliness.” Our busyness, computers, and TV sets are all ordered to separate us from one another. And that is not good.

This book of small group agendas flows out of my passion to help people discover—or rediscover—authentic biblical community. This kind of community is in sharp contrast to what we usually describe as community in our world today. It’s far different and far *better* than what you see on TV programs, in movies, and in most churches. The problem is that over the past 1700 years, our culture has moved us far away from the ideal that was expressed in the church Jesus founded. It’s going to take some passionate intentionality to restore it!

The kind of community I’m passionate about takes a lot of adjectives to describe. Here’s a few: deep, radically real, intentional, organic, everyday, self-sacrificing, unconditionally loving, Christ-indwelling, body-building, world-changing relationships. I believe that in the days when the New Testament was written they could simply use the one word, “community” (*koinonia*). Everyone instinctively knew *exactly* what was meant.

Jesus modeled this kind of community for them. They say that “last words are lasting words.” Some of Jesus’ last words to his followers the night before he went to the cross were about his deep desire for them (and us) to be one, just as he and the Father are one (John 17:20-26).

This kind of community is world-changing! But the opposite is also true. When we are not in unity with one another and separated, segregated, segmented, self-indulged, and self-seeking, the world looks at us as irrelevant.

That’s why I wrote this book.

I have personally witnessed hundreds of small group launches, many of which were successful. Unfortunately, I’ve also seen many failed launches, falling apart soon after liftoff. That is a tragedy. As a small groups pastor, I’ve had the opportunity to learn, mostly the hard way, how to successfully launch a group. Through the use of these guides, you and your small group

will learn and experience together how to become a small group—but not just any kind of group. You will learn together how to be a group deeply devoted to radically real Christian community.

While other guides in the *Community Life* series contain six lessons, this one contains only four. I've learned by experience that four sessions is long enough for your group to start planning your future together, but brief enough to avoid "paralysis of analysis." God-centered planning is vital to a healthy, world-changing group. However, your group must *apply* those plans into real life! This guide will prepare you to do just that.

The most important aspect of a great small group launch is a committed leader ... a leader committed to God and the members of the group. An uncommitted leader insures a botched launch or, maybe even worse, an aimless, endless journey.

You are launching into a journey much like the journey of the early church that Jesus founded. As you as a group look at and discuss your journey, you will have the opportunity to plan a similar journey, one that can change your culture and the world!

— Michael C. Mack

Prepare to Launch

(Read this before you begin)

Launching your group will take at least four weeks. Don't rush the process. Make sure that you follow these steps:

1. Pray. Remember that this is God's group. He is the true Leader and Shepherd and he has called you to lead as an act of stewardship. Ask for his direction and wisdom as you get started.

2. Build Your Team. Start with a team of 2-4 people with whom you will meet, plan, and share ministry. Let each person use his or her spiritual gifts and strengths as part of the core leadership of the group.

Team Members:

1.

2.

3.

3. As a team, create your mission and purpose. Together you will need to know why you are meeting and what this group will be about. Later, you will build ownership of the mission with the rest of the group.

4. Throw a party in your home. Before your first official meeting, the core team should plan a party. At this party, potential members will get to know one another and hear about your plans for a group. The goal is to have fun and provide an opportunity for people to meet some new friends. Each team member should personally invite one or two people they know who are interested in joining a small group to learn more about God or deepen their walk with Christ (both believers and unchurched people can be invited). Consider what you'd like to share about the new group launch, remembering to keep it brief. After all, you don't want to turn a great party into a boring business meeting!

5. Launch the group using the four lessons in this book to help you become a healthy, holistic, fruit-bearing small group.

A Checklist For Your First Meeting

- Pray. Lift up the people you've invited, their friends, and yourself.
- Don't worry needlessly. Do your part in the planning and meeting facilitation and leave the results to God. Read Matthew 6:25-34.
- Don't do it alone. Develop a core team with whom you can pray, plan, lead, and review your progress. Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12.
- Provide alternatives for childcare. This is one of the greatest concerns for interested parents.
- Decide on a gathering place. Find a comfortable place – big enough for the number of people invited, but not so big that the group loses its sense of intimacy. Homes work well, but aren't required.
- Think about how people will get to the meetings. Does everyone have transportation? Do you need to provide maps to the location? Is parking adequate? Are you meeting in a place that is accessible for people with disabilities?
- Send a postcard or short letter to everyone you've invited a week before your first meeting. Remind them of the time and place of the meeting, anything you'd like them to bring, childcare options, and anything else you think is important. Include a map if necessary. Be creative ... get them excited about the meeting!
- Check the atmospheric conditions. Is the temperature of the room comfortable? Remember that when more people are in a room, the warmer the room will become. Ensure the room is properly ventilated as well. Fresh air will increase participation.
- Check the lighting. Good lighting not only helps people see their Bibles and each other, it can provide a sense of warmth.

- ❑ Decide on a room. The living room and family room are warm places. The kitchen or breakfast area gives a feeling of family and unity. A back porch provides informality. What atmosphere do you want to create?
- ❑ Make a circle. Seating should be in a circle, whether around a table or not. Some people feel a table puts up a barrier between people and is therefore bad for communication; others think a dining room table adds a feeling of family, reminding some people of family conversations around their table as kids. A dining room table is great for Bible reading, not to mention a great place for coffee cups, soft drinks, or snacks.
- ❑ Provide comfortable, face-to-face seating. Provide enough chairs so everyone can remain on the same eye level and no one has to sit on the floor. Avoid the use of long couches, which require those on the ends of the couch to talk across those sitting between them.
- ❑ Eliminate distractions. Put pets in another room. Keep televisions off. If you play worship music as people arrive, keep the volume low and turn it off before you start the meeting. Turn off the ringer on your telephone, including your cell phone. Invite the members to do the same.
- ❑ Plan the time of the meeting. One of the biggest problems group leaders experience is losing track of time. While your objective is not to “get everything in,” you still need to know how much time you want to spend on each activity. Remain flexible, but keep things moving. If you don’t manage your time, you could end up spending an hour on one good activity and miss a great one!
- ❑ Don’t forget the food! It’s really not the food itself, of course; it is what happens as folks relax and talk as they are eating. Try to be like the early disciples, who “ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46).
- ❑ Plan to plan. There are many other things you’ll learn to plan for as you lead the group. Remember this: the best planning includes prayer with your team.

How to Use This Book

Devotionals

Each agenda begins with a personal devotional for you, the small group leader. The best way to use this devotional is to meditate on it each day between your meetings. For example, if your group meets on Thursday evenings, use the next week's devotional to begin your daily time with God on Friday morning, meditating on the scripture each day until the next Thursday. Ask God how the truths discovered in the scripture and devotional should shape how you facilitate the meeting and work with your group members one-on-one.

This Week

The devotional is followed by a brief overview of the agenda, goals for the meeting, and instructions. Reading this insures you will understand the point of the agenda and you'll be prepared.

Agendas

The agendas are organized around four W's, which are *Welcome, Worship, Word, and Witness*. These four areas are designed to help your group experience Christ's presence, embrace his power, and understand his purposes for your lives to the point of practical application.

- **Welcome:** An opening question to get your group members involved in the weekly meeting.
- **Worship:** Practical ways for your group to enter into Christ's presence.
- **Word:** Applying God's Word to your everyday lives that results in member-to-member ministry in and out of your meetings.
- **Witness:** "Putting feet" on what you've discussed so your group can live out Christ's purposes for your lives.

Leader's Notes and Tip Boxes

Throughout each agenda, you will find helpful tip boxes and author's notes under many of the discussion questions to help you understand their meaning. Read through the agenda a few times in the days before your meeting to grasp the direction and outcome of each agenda. *Use the notes and tips to prepare, but don't read them aloud during your meeting.* They have been placed within the agenda to help you become a better facilitator.

Questions in the Word section

Each numbered question in this section of the agenda has been written so you can simply read it to your group. To increase involvement, write the questions on individual slips of paper and distribute them to various members of your group to read aloud in smaller groups. If you feel these questions should be rephrased to better fit your group or make the meeting more powerful, go for it!

Unless otherwise instructed, keep the last questions in each agenda for yourself as the main facilitator. These are ministry questions that usually require follow up.

Between-the-Meetings Options

Because healthy small group life is more than a once-a-week meeting, it will be important for you to look over these ideas, possibly share them with your group, and then determine which option or options will help your group grow.

If you find implementation to be especially challenging, remember these practical things are what make small group life so powerful and different from other kinds of groups you may have led before. Work as hard at your between-the-meetings activities as you do preparing for your weekly meeting and you'll see growth in yourself and your group.

Scripture Memory Verses

Each agenda ends with a scripture verse, which we highly recommend your group members memorize. There's nothing like scripture memory to keep your mind on glorifying God! Feel free to copy this verse and pass it out to everyone as your members walk out the door after each meeting. To make it fun, offer a small prize (a candy bar, etc.) for the first person who can recite the verse to you when you next meet. When you celebrate scripture memory, everyone will join in.

At the back of this book you'll find an appendix with each week's scripture verse on a time-saving, easy-to-duplicate page. This is one area of small group life that you can easily delegate. Ask a member to duplicate the scripture verses and distribute them for you for the next four weeks as the meetings conclude.

Your Devotional

“But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.”
(Psalm 33:11)

In 1961, President John F. Kennedy announced, “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth.” Some thought his vision was lunacy. But it was a vision that eventually ignited the imagination of the American people.

A space mission begins with an immense, often presidential, vision. Then NASA begins an intense, thorough planning process that takes years before an eventual launch.

The Bible reveals the vitality of vision and wise planning, but it also differentiates between human planning and God-originated planning. Solomon wrote, *“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails”* (Proverbs 19:21).

As we will see in this study, the early church launched with a God-given vision, a God-sized mission, and God-shaped plans. It began with leaders who were unschooled and ordinary, but who had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). The Jewish council did everything it could to try to stop them, to no avail. Even one of their own teachers advised them to *“Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God”* (Acts 5:38,39).

God has a plan for you and the small group you are launching. His plans are bigger than your plans ... way bigger, greater than you can even ask or imagine! His plans are to give your group incredible hope and an inconceivable future together.

Spend time “with Jesus” every day, listening to his voice. Commit yourself to launching a group with a God-given vision and a God-sized mission. Remember, if it is from God, your group will not fail; it cannot be stopped. It will achieve immeasurably more than you can even imagine!

This Week

The Objective

This lesson will help your group:

1. Identify the vision and mission of the early church.
2. Understand the importance of having a vision and mission statement.
3. Formulate an initial vision statement.

The Point

Before the disciples launched the church, Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for the power that God promised. While they waited together in the upper room, they took time to pray and plan. But mostly, they waited for God to move.

Waiting is not an easy thing to do. We want to get into action and make something happen, often missing God's purposes. Small groups often launch without much planning or discussion about God's vision or mission for those in the group. Within a few months, the members wonder why they have accomplished so little or why the group is falling apart.

You can learn a lot by studying the launch of the early church as described in the Book of Acts. Moreover, you can apply what you learn as you launch your small group.

The point of this inaugural meeting is to help your group launch well. To be successful, your group must begin with core values and a vision that will help your group accomplish a mission bigger than you can even imagine!

Preparation

1. Create blank name tags and markers available for the *Welcome* part of the session.
2. Make copies of Appendix 1, "What a Holistic Small Group is NOT." Distribute this sheet at the end of your meeting.
3. Ask your pastor for copies of the booklet, *Community Life 101* by Randall Neighbour (purchasing details found on page 64).
4. Secure a white board or poster board and markers for the Witness time.
5. If your church has a vision statement, write it here:

The Agenda

Welcome

As people arrive, give each a name tag to wear for the evening. Instruct them to print their first name vertically down the left side of the tag. Then, write a word or words for each letter describing themselves. The tag will look something like this:

Mountain biker
Imaginative
Kid's dad
Excited about this group

Create your own name tag before others arrive. As always, you should be the first to model this for your group.

As everyone gets settled, invite each person to introduce themselves and share why they chose the words they put on their tags.

Worship

Worship is not just an optional add-on in a healthy small group. It is really the essence—the heart—of what a holistic group is and does. Why?

- A holistic small group meets in Jesus' name (Matt. 18:20), rather in the name of anything or anyone else.
- The group belongs to God. He is the true Leader and Shepherd over your group. The designated leader leads out of an act of obedience and stewardship.

Tip:

The role of the worship leader is one of many roles that you can—and should—share with other group members. Ask someone with a passion for worship to lead this portion of the meeting each week.

Week 1: The Key To Success: Organization

- The purpose of the group is God's purpose. Its goals are his goals. It's mission is his mission.
- Whenever the group meets in Jesus' name, Christ is *literally* present. *"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. Our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1:3).
- God's presence moves us to worship him.

The worship leader should share this statement with the group:

"We worship God in many different ways, not only through singing. At this meeting, take a moment to recognize and welcome God's presence, inviting him to reveal himself through the meeting time and then surrendering your own expectations and plans to him."

Allow the members of the group to sit quietly and reflect on Christ's presence among them. Then, invite members of the group to pray aloud, voicing a sentence prayer inviting Christ to be an active part of the meeting and work in and through the members of the group.

Word

Begin the Word part of the meeting by reading this to your group:

"This guide will help us learn how to become a healthy small group. We will examine how the early church experienced life together by reading passages from Acts 1-6. Then, we'll create our own 'Master Plan' for our group based on what we see in God's Word.

The Book of Acts is a historical documentation of the first 30 years of the church. The author, Luke, wrote this account to present an accurate record of a very important time in history. The church in Acts is the prototype for the church Jesus founded and intended."

Now ask someone to read the first chapter of Acts aloud (or break it into sections and have several people read parts).

1. Consider verses 6-9. If you were one of the disciples standing there that day, what word would you use to describe your feelings after Jesus spoke? Why?

Wait for group members to respond. If they need some prodding, suggest a word or two to them: Would you have felt dazed? Abandoned? Overwhelmed? Empowered? Enthusiastic? Something else? Don't forget the follow-up question, "Why?" The "why" is most revealing.

2. Who were the people involved in Acts 1?

The 11 remaining apostles, the women who had followed Jesus, Jesus' mother and brothers.

3. What were they doing after Jesus left and went back to Heaven?

They did what Jesus told them to do, waiting in Jerusalem. They prayed and they selected a replacement for Judas.

Tip

Questions 2 - 4 don't require multiple answers, so don't spend much time here.

4. How would you describe the atmosphere and their mood?

5. A *vision* is a simple snapshot of a preferred or imagined future. It explains why a group exists. It has more to do with who or what we are than what we do. What vision does the group in Acts 1 receive?

They would be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

6. A *mission* is the business or operational task with which a group is charged. It explains what a group does, what actions it will undertake. What mission does Jesus give his group?

Especially in this case, a vision and mission are integrally tied to one another. The mission was that they would go from Jerusalem and all Judea to Samaria and the whole world to make disciples (see also Matthew 28:16-20).

7. Why do you think it is important for a small group like ours to talk about vision and mission?

Vision and mission are essential for any group. They are the first ingredients of an operational plan. They answer the questions "Why are we here?" and "What are we going to do together?"

8. Look through the passage again. What other examples of planning do you see?

They chose a new apostle to replace Judas.

Your Ministry Time

Read this aloud to your group:

"One of the values that was vital for this group was prayer. Throughout the book of Acts we see them meeting continuously for prayer. Prayer puts our group and our plans in God's hands, not ours."

9. As we plan our future together, how should we plan to make prayer an essential part of our process?

Prepare the group for your ministry time by emphasizing the vitality of group prayer. Stress to them that while praying for other people we know is important, this time in the meeting is set aside to share where we personally need healing or provision from God.

10. Does anyone have a personal need they would like to share with the group so we can pray for you?

Use the Prayer Journal in the back of this guide to keep a record of prayer requests. Jot down the requests after the meeting so you can remain focused on ministry to the person asking for prayer.

Look Upward!

At the end of your ministry time tonight, close with a prayer. Ask God to reveal his vision for your group and voice your own surrender of control or plans. While this won't be easy, it's necessary!

Witness

11. Let's begin brainstorming a vision for our group. This is a snapshot of a preferred or imagined future. What do we (and God) want our group to look like . . .

a. Six months from now?

b. One year from now?

Write it out

Use a white board or poster paper carefully taped to a wall. Write out the ideas your group members share.

Six months to a year is close enough for most people to be able to imagine but it's distant enough to dream big dreams for God.

12. Now lead the group to formulate your group's vision statement from your brainstorming exercise. Write it below.

OUR VISION:

The best vision statements are short—usually just one sentence. It should be clear and to the point. Lead this discussion gently but firmly. You want the whole group to buy into the group

vision, but at the same time, your responsibility as the leader is to envision your group and help keep them focused. Your group's vision should flow out of Scripture and your church's vision. Encourage participants to move beyond a merely human-sized vision towards a "God-sized" vision ... something so

Tip:

A vision describes why a group exists and who your group is or will become together.

big that if God is not in it, it is destined to fail. Remember that God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Eph. 3:20).

Week 1: The Key To Success: Organization

Distribute copies of Appendix 1, "What a Holistic Small Group is NOT." Ask group members to read the descriptions. When you call group members through the week, engage them in discussion about these statements. Ask, "Do any of the statements surprise you?"

If you have not done so already, take time now to complete the "Our Group" roster found on page four. Use this roster to keep in touch with one another throughout the week. (Make enough copies of the completed roster for everyone and distribute it next week.)

Between-the-Meetings Options

Read all the options aloud to your group. Allow each member to tell the group which two options he or she will do this week.

Option #1

Read chapter 1 of *Community Life 101* entitled, "What is Biblical Community?" The chapters from this pocket-sized booklet correlate closely with the topics of your studies and will accelerate the learning curve for your group members.

Leader's Homework:

In upcoming weeks, you will create your "operational plan." Call or email group members this week to encourage them to think about your group's vision and what the mission will look like when the group has fully embraced it.

Option #2

Invite a person from the group to your home or out for a cup of coffee before the next meeting. Find out what they like to do for fun, and where they grew up, sharing what they learned with the group next week.

Option #3

Each day this week, pray for the persons sitting on your right *and* left. Be sure to ask both people for specific prayer requests!

Option #4

Most everyone can tell you where he or she would like to be financially in one or two years from today (out of credit card debt, more saved for retirement, able to purchase a home, and so on). However, few believers think about where they would like to be in their spiritual walk in the same time frame. This week, take time to pray and ask God for some spiritual goals for yourself and be ready to share them the next time the group meets.

Scripture for the Week

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do and your plans will succeed."

(Proverbs 16:3)

Leader's Weekly Journal

A strong, committed group begins with a leader who is committed to God, to God's calling and vision, and to the group. My level of commitment this week could be described as ...

My initial impressions about this group are ...

When I think about this new group, I feel ...

**We hope you enjoyed this book preview!
To order this resource, [click here](#)
Or, call 1-800-735-5865**

What's Next?

The balance of the *Community Life Series* of small group agendas is as powerful as the one you just completed! We encourage you to continue down the path to small group maturity and ministry by using them to build momentum for ministry in your group.



Looking Upward (Six lessons) by David Finnell

The lessons in this guide will help your group members develop a supernatural relationship with God. Over the course of six sessions, your group will examine common misconceptions about prayer and God's nature and eliminate obstacles to intimacy with the Father.



Connecting Inward (Six lessons) by Mark Collins

The lessons in this book will move your members from a meeting mindset to one of deep relationship characterized by daily contact. This opens the door for deep interaction, confession and personal transformation in the lives of your members!



Reaching Outward (Six Lessons) by Jim Egli

Evangelism is both fulfilling and exciting when done through relationships! The lessons in this book will help your members band together as a relational team to reach friends, family members and co-workers for Christ.



Moving Forward (Six Lessons) by Michael Mack

The lessons in this book will introduce discipleship and mentoring to your group members, then help them clearly see they need to grow up spiritually and "move out of the house." Each lesson is powerful, interactive and produces deep discussion and a new way view life as a believer.



Community Life 101 by Randall Neighbour

This pocket-sized book will help your small group members understand their role as an active small group member. After they read it, they'll understand how important it is to interact with other members between meetings and pray for members and unchurched friends each day. It also has a short, powerful chapter on how to fully participate in meetings (to share deeply, but not over-talk; to pray with power by waiting on God; and how to edify or build up other members of the group).

Call 1-800-735-5865 or visit www.touchusa.org to order these resources at a substantial savings off retail price. Quantity discounts available.