

Reaching the Unreached in Urban Centers

Introduction

“The stranger has big eyes but does not see everything.” *Ghanaian Proverb.*

I believe that one key to unlocking the urban areas of the world to the gospel is found in home group ministries. Small groups, if you will are both strategic and Biblical. As we will see, people are reached through home groups who would be inaccessible through other means. Through network contacts, and sustained contact, a person has time to develop relationships that will bear fruit, “... fruit that will remain.” While some Christians are involved in dynamic and effective home group ministries other Christians, equally sincere and godly, are seeking to reach cities with the gospel through home groups with little result. Can it all be simply because of spiritual reasons? While we must always be sensitive to spiritual factors that same sensitivity should lead us to look to other possibilities.

A hospitality metaphor might help us to better understand some of these other possibilities. The stranger looks at everything but misses much. Having looked with big eyes in many places at how people do small group ministry, I have had the advantage of seeing through the eyes of the local people.

In each place my wife and co-researcher traveled, people wanted to honor us as their guests, as researchers on a project they deemed important, and as older Christians, fellow travelers on the journey of faith. They did so but in a way that reflected the unique cultural values of each.

- **In Chicago** we were treated as equals along with the other home group members. We were Mike and Karen to them, served popcorn out of the same bowl, and people showed interest in our project.
- **In Mumbai** (Formerly, Bombay) people offered us chairs when everyone else was sitting on the floor but allowed us to sit on the floor. We were usually expected to speak to the group, to bring a message from God’s Word. That is what a Christian guest does.
- **In Accra** they placed us in a special area, usually in front of the group, with the pastor. We were often the only people in the group who were given a soda. They gave us the best they had to offer.

Showing honor to guests was present in every culture but how that honor was expressed in a home group context varied greatly. Other important elements of home group ministry also varied across cultures.

I will briefly review the process of the research, but primarily speak on the results of the research. The research uncovered eight factors which were common to home group ministries. These eight factors were expressed differently in the different cultures. Even in terms of home group ministry, culture matters.

Preliminary to beginning the discussion I would like to give my definition of a home group ministry. This definition comes from my own experience with God in developing a home group ministry in Madagascar. Consulting with many home group ministries around the world has also enhanced it. The recent research project has helped me develop it further. My current definition for a home group is the following:

A home group consists of 5 to 15 people meeting together regularly to fulfill the one-another commands of Scripture, while being integrally related to a local church or congregation, and having an outward focus on the world with the overarching purpose of glorifying God.

1. Purpose of research:

To find similarities and differences in effective home group ministries in diverse urban cultures with a view to helping people develop church or congregation related home group ministries that are biblically based and culturally relevant.

2. Parameters of the research:

2.1 Church or congregation related home group ministries. (Not campus based or Para-church based)

2.2 Evangelical home group ministries. (Not self-help, AA, or dealing with social issues.) These topics may be discussed in a group but they are not the focus of the group. The Bible and its life applications are the focus of the groups we researched.

2.3 Urban churches in greatly diverse cultural contexts. (Not suburb or rural) Note use of Hofstede as one major factor in site selection.

2.4 Sites selected: Chicago, Mumbai, Accra, Caracas, and Moscow.

3. Framework for the research:

3.1 Bible Framework - The Bible is the guide and basis for all we are and do as Christians. It is the final authority for any study. I briefly surveyed the Old and New Testaments seeking to demonstrate the biblical foundations for home group ministries. It is worth noting here the degree to which home groups (or small groups) were instrumental in God's work as written both in the Old and New Testaments. Family and other types of small groups have been important, as God has sought to communicate His will to people.

3.2 Network Theory Framework - Urban Sociologists are beginning to understand how cities function by studying the ever-expanding circle of networks that make up its subcultures and cultures. If we are to reach the city with the gospel we should know something of how cities work. Studies such as those done by John Gulick and Claude S. Fischer are helpful in that domain.

Insights come from understanding how home group members relate to each other, and to the leaders. Home group leaders relate to other leaders, to the church or congregation, and to those outside any Christian structure. Understanding how overlapping networks combine to form subcultures can be instructive in maximizing home group ministry effectiveness.

3.3 Culture Framework - Geert Hofstede's works were heavily used as a basis for site selection. Power Distance (high and low), Collectivism—Individualism, Ambiguity Avoidance (high and Low), and Gender Role Separation (Masculine versus Feminine dimensions) were the four variables he used to compare cultures. These four variables were important factors in my site selection. I sought cities and churches and congregations within those cities that reflected opposite ends of these continua.

Edward T. Hall and Donald K. Smith's works were the basis for identifying culturally related communication elements. The importance of such things as time, space, mono/diachronic cultures, high/low context, communication signal systems, and cultural aspects of networks are reviewed in the study.

4. Methodologies of the research.

4.1 Participant observation. Attending as many home groups as possible in each church studied, Karen and I took copious notes on everything we observed. These notes were later compiled and analyzed.

4.2 Interview. We interviewed home group leaders, regional leaders, pastoral staff, and people in the home groups. These notes were also compiled and analyzed.

4.3 Questionnaire. A questionnaire was created and given to a sampling of people in each church in the study. The questionnaire was translated into Russian and Spanish for use in those areas. This data was tabulated and analyzed.

The results of the above three methods revealed eight factors extant in all the home group ministries researched which are discussed in the summary of research results.

5. Some characteristics of the churches researched. Local churches were researched thus the "church" designation but the principles, I believe apply to churches and congregations.

5.1 All home groups were part of a larger urban church body.

- 5.2 The churches were broadly evangelical and included churches which were charismatic, non-charismatic, denominational, and non-affiliated.
- 5.3 All churches were growing faster than other churches in their local cultural context.
- 5.4 All churches had visionary, dynamic, gifted evangelists as senior pastors.
- 5.5 All churches had started their rapid growth BEFORE becoming home group based churches.
- 5.6 Evangelism was the principle growth factor in each church studied.
- 5.7 Only 4 of the 11 churches studied owned the buildings they used for worship. Most have decided to invest in workers rather than property and buildings. This characteristic cut across culture and theological stripe.

Summary of Research Results

1. Vision.

The importance of vision to reaching the urban areas through home group ministry can hardly be overstated. The vision and the way it is communicated to others varied widely. While vision is a characteristic which comes from God to the people of God it is also closely tied to culture.

In his definition of vision Burt Nanus (1992:8) states, "A vision is a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization." George Barna also defines vision. "Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances." (1992:28) Leaders of home group ministries have a clear picture of what that "preferable future" for their church will be.

All leaders in this project articulated a clear and simple vision. Vision includes home groups as an integral part of a larger congregation. To the degree the vision is understood and accepted by the congregation it becomes reality. Members' acceptance of the vision and their involvement in it depend on the senior leadership's ability to communicate it.

Vision grows and develops over time. Consequently, it is never totally accomplished. The senior leadership's vision of the church or congregation is a function of that church's or congregation's development. Development includes home groups and how they contribute to all aspects of congregational life. Vision encompasses the form and function of the congregation.

Culture affects vision and its expression. Some examples: Mumbai is an example of an antagonistic context with a strong Hindu and Roman Catholic presence. Christians believe a major persecution is near. Some 400 people groups, 15 million people, live in Mumbai. In addition some 6 million people commute into the city everyday. A great diversity of languages and socio-cultural groups exist within a small geographical area. They have responded to their context in their vision for church: House based groups as satellites around worship centers. This church, consisting of over 250 places of worship and 1200 home groups, owns no buildings. Even their office space is rented. If persecution comes there is no property to demolish. Positively, this approach allows them the agility and mobility to reach the multiplicity of language and culture groups around them.

The Chicago church comprises a youthful Generation X population. The caring/relational aspect of the congregation is important. Home groups are basic to their vision for through them people are brought into a loving, caring larger fellowship of worshippers. Their vision has grown to where they are asking the Lord for 1% of the Chicago population. For an urban based population of generation Xers, caring is key.

Expressing vision is important and is accomplished in different ways. The Chicago church has a vision statement that is well known and understood. Even relatively new home group attendees can paraphrase the vision. It is published, quoted from the pulpit, and memorized.

Contrast Moscow where slogans speak too much of an era when propaganda was printed and slogans were numerous. People in the Moscow congregation know the vision. Senior leadership communicates the vision but does not print it or have it reduced to a slogan. The Moscow congregation is young, perhaps the youngest in the study.

Vision must derive from the leader's clear biblical understanding of church with home groups seen as an integral part of church. While God is the source of vision, and His power makes it happen, its roots are a part of the reality of the local context.

2. Structure.

Structure gives feet to vision. An appropriate structure allows the vision of home group ministry to take shape and produce results. It answers the question. "How are we going to accomplish the vision?" Most books on this type of ministry focus on this dimension.

The One Minute Manager co-author and management specialist Ken Blanchard responded to the question, "Is vision overrated?"

I don't think it is. But vision alone can't get it done. Too often we spend all our time on vision and none on implementation. At some point you've got to move. (Leadership Magazine: Spring 1996:118)

Churches researched and observed are aware of their organizational need. Structural differences can be a matter of scale with smaller congregations such as Dios Admirable in Caracas and New Life Community Church in Chicago having 'flatter' administrative structures, allowing leaders to be more in touch with each other and more accessible to those outside the leadership structure. The New Life Fellowship of Mumbai and the Deeper Christian Life Ministry in Accra, being spread out over a large area with huge numbers of home groups, are more hierarchical in their structures. However, every congregation has an organizational structure that meshes with local culture. It can be surmised that when home group type ministries fail, and many do, one major reason is the organizational structure does not quite fit the local context.

Moscow's Rosa Church at the time of the research shows the least amount of evident structure. This loosely organized church was young, about five years since it's founding, and youthful with the average membership age in the mid-twenties. It may be a reaction to highly structured government as well as the traditional church structures that caused this church to be relatively unstructured.

An example at the opposite end of the structured continuum is seen in the Deeper Life Christian Ministry in Accra. Because so much work in the home group church is done and supervised by unpaid lay people, the organization must be such to empower them and to keep their workload manageable. The hierarchical nature of the culture makes this not only possible but necessary. People in home group ministry know to whom they are responsible and who is responsible to them. A well-organized structure enhances and empowers their service.

In the Chicago, Christians in the home groups are encouraged to disciple newer Christians, one on one. North Americans are more individualistic. This individualism has been harnessed for the Kingdom within the home group context. The Chicago congregation is unique in using a one on one discipleship process.

By contrast the African churches are culturally collective. One on one contacts rarely happen. The amount of time spent on activities that are outside the home group meeting but occur as a result of the home group ministry are group oriented. These include special discipleship, leadership training, and baptismal classes.

The New Life Fellowship in Mumbai is a dynamic example of the multi-site church (multi-congregation church). About 1200 home groups aggregate around 250 worship centers. While structure is important for a church of this size there is room for organizational change. As home groups multiply they change location. The combinations of home groups that form congregations are also fairly fluid, changing as rented quarters move. Meetings also exist that are larger than the home group and may pull in some people from several home groups. The all night prayer meeting is one example.

3. Leadership Development.

Development of new leaders takes advantage of home group ministry (learning by observing and by doing in a small group) in conjunction with large group formal training. I was surprised by the highly developed training structures for home group leaders in each congregation.

In every case leaders are expected to commit greater amounts of time and energy to the ministry than those not in leadership. This usually means being involved several nights a week, weekends, and other discretionary time blocks.

Effective senior leadership builds up and encourages ministry rather than dictates and controls. Rev. Fred Deegbe, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Accra, has written a manual for home group leaders. His statement about leaders is balanced and sums up the basic truths of home group leadership.

Leadership is needed to accomplish a purpose, to get something done. An important part of God's plan is that His work will be done by people, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. God chooses people, and gives them specific tasks to do, in order to accomplish His purpose. (Deegbe: n.d. page 1, unpublished document)

Leadership development comes out of the vision for the church or congregation and how the home groups relate to that vision within the structure. Differences in leadership development styles reflect culture.

In Chicago leadership is more egalitarian. People of different educational and social backgrounds are considered equal. Discussion is encouraged and each person's ideas are normally taken seriously. That people take part, enjoy the experience, and relate to others are at least as important as any cognitive input. Leaders are trained to facilitate that process. Leaders trained in North America, who minister in a different culture, often try to train others to minister in the same egalitarian process.

In Caracas leadership is often shared. One person is the home group leader, another the Bible study leader, and still another is the outreach supervisor. The Bible study discussion seems much like one in North America with many people sharing. However, in a crisis situation, according to the survey, the leader would more likely be expected to take charge than in North America. A strong leader more tightly controls home group decisions.

Accra congregations showed stronger or more directive leadership than either of the above. While their sense of collectively remained intact, people followed their leaders. When I asked about what sort of sins house group leaders had been disciplined for, one answer was, 'disobedience.' I was able to contact people because I approached the organization from the top. When the top leader gives a command every effort is made to obey it. I had entrance to these leaders through one highly respected, older leader. In the home groups an older man may be the "supervisor" while a younger man leads the group. Each home group has both a supervisor and a leader.

4. Teaching/Discipleship.

Applying biblical truth to everyday practical living is the primary purpose of home group teaching and discipleship. As the Holy Spirit works through God's word in the lives of people each day, change will take place. Home groups consist primarily of non-professionals (lay people) who meet together around the Word to obey the "one another" commands of Scripture. Jane Vella, a specialist in adult learning and with wide experience around the world encourages peer learning, a basic factor in home groups. She states, "A major fact in motivation is that advice or praise from a peer carries more weight than advice, correction, or praise from an outsider or a manager. (1994:108)

The fact that home groups usually have high levels of commonality enhances learning. More mature Christians have dealt with similar things that newer Christians face. They can model, mentor, and encourage these people in their Christian walk. Learning is interactive and immediately practical. Interpersonal relationships are developed which further enhance learning. Sustained relationships are key to discipling.

When a mono-directional style is used in a home group there is usually high interaction in its other dimensions such as sharing, praying together, and contact during the week.

Learning styles vary over the cultural landscape. Cognitive teaching has a high value in the Caracas context. Both congregations studied have well developed programs to teach people both in and outside the home groups. Teachers, including home group leaders, are assumed to be people with superior knowledge of the subject under discussion. Most of the home group time is used to teach and discuss the applications.

No other church gives as much time to teaching in the home group as the Caracas churches. Other congregations teach and disciple using other means. The Rosa Church in Moscow uses most of their home group time to pray. As prayer requests are reviewed and praises given for answers to previous prayers, principles of Christian living are modeled through the medium of prayer. Bible study is a part of the Rosa Church home groups but less time is given to it. Two of the three-hour meeting is given to prayer while about 30 minutes is given to Bible study. Much of the teaching in the Moscow church take place in a weekly larger group meeting when the pastor teaches the leaders.

Caracas and Moscow are at the two extremes on the more formal teaching continuum but other locations instruct us in the way they communicate truth. The Chicago congregation demonstrates the importance of caring. They are reaching people who have been on the street, involved in gangs and drug use. Some are dysfunctional needing much care. As care is demonstrated through the home groups people learn how to care for others. The Chicago church has a high view of teaching and training teachers but it often finds it's outworking in practical street ministries.

The Mumbai congregation is in a context of Hinduism. Shrines are seen nearly everywhere one looks. In that context we find that home groups spend significant time in worship. Praise, singing, prayer, communion, and personal testimonies are a part of the home group meeting. The worship activities instruct as people participate in them.

In Accra, congregational leaders agreed that the home groups were the most efficient way to communicate biblical truth. Their hierarchical model brings teaching from higher to lower levels. People respect those over them and are willing to learn from them. Home groups in Accra all progress through the same material together. The higher-level leadership decides what will be taught in the home groups and take responsibility to furnish the teaching material. One primary issue in the home groups concerns fetishes and their hold on people. Bible teaching engages this challenge.

5. Evangelism.

The congregations in this study are fast growing and that growth comes largely through evangelism. In some contexts, like Mumbai, over 90% of the growth is conversion growth. No congregation has less than 50% growth through conversion. One reason for the evangelistic growth is that senior leaders are committed to evangelism. They model and teach it. Most senior pastors are gifted evangelists or church planters. This attitude permeates the entire congregational structure to the home group level.

Evangelism is seen as a process making the home group an effective outreach vehicle. People can follow their personal networks bringing relatives, friends, and colleagues into home group contact and through that to new life in Christ. The large group and home (small) group work together to enhance evangelism. A look at some examples will demonstrate cultural differences. One important factor here is the in-depth involvement over time that opens avenues of fruitful evangelistic outreach. People who may not be reached through casual street contact may respond to this approach.

In Mumbai the models vary within the city. Evangelism is the key to everything. Christians in New Life Fellowship see evangelism as the ultimate activity. Evangelists, whether full-time or not, are the heroes of the church. Everyone speaks of the evangelistic activity.

Street and door-to-door evangelism take place as teams go into different parts of the city. When people receive Christ, or desire to know more, their names are taken and house groups are formed. It is quite likely that the person selected to lead the group may come from outside the immediate area and not know the

people in the group. That leader will stay until someone in the group or from the area is prepared to lead the group.

A second method is that Christians are in touch with their neighbors. When a crisis arises in the neighbor's life such as problems with children, severe illness, job loss, or marriage problems, the Christians come with help. They ask if they can pray for the people. Most people are pleased to have someone pray for them. When the Lord dramatically answers their prayers, as He often does, people take notice. Many people have come into the Kingdom in that way. At times the Lord heals the sick miraculously. While everyone rejoices, the Christians do not mistake that for salvation. The unsaved still need to receive Christ into their lives. An evangelist told me that about 20% of people who were miraculously healed actually received Christ.

This church is also able to make use of evangelistic campaigns. One of the 5 senior church leaders, Rev. Kalliampur, is a gifted evangelist in large group campaigns. They use campaigns effectively as people pray, witness, and work for the fruit the Lord gives.

Mumbai which probably has the most outward persecution also has the most dynamic evangelistic outreaches. Believers make use of personal networks, near neighbors, localized campaigns, mass evangelism, and institutional (i.e. in the leprosy colonies) evangelism. Most of these evangelism efforts take place simultaneously in the various neighborhoods.

A pastor in Caracas, Rev. Liévano, has a burden for church planting and evangelism. He came to the city from another part of Venezuela and to the denomination from another denomination, with a burden to plant churches in Caracas. He is a man of much wisdom and experience. In a booklet he wrote for the home group leaders in his church he stated that one of the key functions of home groups is evangelism. "In evangelization the GBDC (home group) is a strategic base for the evangelization of the area." Rev. Liévano sees home groups as strategic in church planting. His church has helped plant five others in Caracas in the five years since he came. He expects five more to be planted in the next three years.

Because many of the people in Caracas are not accessible to the casual door-to-door approach they find other ways of reaching people. Most people brought to home groups are the result of personal friendship or family networks. A high crime rate and the level of distrust in the general population toward strangers make this approach imperative. Many people do not want people they do not know well to come into their apartments or homes. They might be thieves posing as seekers of truth. That attitude is not unique to Caracas as we found similar attitudes to some degree in all cities. What makes Caracas unique is the near impossibility of making initial contact with new people. That forces evangelism to move along social network structures.

We asked people in the home groups we visited in this study how long they had been believed in Christ. While times varied, something like one week to one month was the rule for the newest Christian in any given home group. Sometimes we got answers like, "yesterday" or "this week."

While culture plays a role in the way evangelism is carried out in the different sites all of the home group ministries are involved in intentional, aggressive evangelism. Rev. Sam Olson of Caracas said that home groups allowed them to focus on the city rather than on the congregation. Congregations see their home groups as bands of spiritual guerrillas, strategically placed, bringing light into the spiritual darkness.

6. Prayer.

A.W. Tozer said, "A praying Christian is a constant threat to the stability of Satan's government. The Christian is a holy rebel loose in the world with access to the throne of God." (1964:71)

Prayer cannot be separated from other home group activities. While discussed separately, it integrates with evangelization, teaching, care, leadership, worship, and is essential to knowing God's vision for the work. Prayer is a part of every activity in the Christian life. Because prayer is so evident in the home group ministries we observed a section is given to it.

Specific and extended prayer happen the home groups. People are together to grow spiritually, to evangelize the lost, and to give or seek care. All of this happens in a context of prayer. Home groups are the

basic units for prayer. Many congregations have other prayer structures but none that consistently involves so many people over time.

Prayer is the defining quality of the home groups of the Rosa Church in Moscow. The home groups spend their first hour in prayer, take a break for tea, and spend another hour in prayer. Bible study usually follows prayer. Each person in the group shares and is prayed over. Prayer reaches beyond the people in the home group as they pray for their congregation, their government, and people they know without Christ.

Even in the larger worship context the prayer time is significant. Pastoral led prayer often takes 15-20 minutes and there are times of special prayer throughout the service. Prayer is an integral part of all aspects of this congregation's life.

Caracas churches spend much less time praying in the home groups. Their prayer times usually varies from 10 to 20 minutes. However, that does not mean they do not pray. I was told how resistant the city is to the gospel and the only way that resistance can be overcome is through prayer. Mirtha, a sector leader for the Las Acacias church, told me about the south part of her sector in which they had no home groups.

The prayer strategy used to open that part of her sector, which now has eight home groups, is typical of the prayer program there. It is three fold: All home group leaders meet once a month for prayer. All leaders fast one day per month. Several Christians and the home group leaders from other parts of her sector have prayer walks in the target neighborhood. Prayer walks are scheduled into the church's home group ministry on a monthly basis. Three prayer coordinators are working together continually in her sector to develop strategies. They have 14 prayer home groups devoting themselves to prayer for reaching the lost.

The home group supervisor from the Dios Admirable church also focuses on prayer. Beyond the prayer that happens in the home group, every second Sunday from 2:00 to 6:00 PM people meet at the church for prayer. Every Friday from 6:30 to 8:00 PM they pray through a list of published prayer requests. They have all night prayer meetings on an occasional basis from 9:00 PM to 6:00 AM. January is a month of prayer. The home groups spend the January sessions in prayer.

When a new home group starts, believers pray for one month in the home where the group is to meet before it opens. The leader, assistant leader, and host person as well as the supervisor and perhaps other home group leaders meet each week during that month to pray. At times, a home group did not open within the month. They kept praying until the home group opened weeks, and at times, months later.

Senior leadership models prayer. In Mumbai, the congregational senior leadership meets regularly for sustained times of prayer. These may consist of a day of prayer and fasting to retreats of several days. Likewise the Chicago church senior staff leads the congregation in prayer strategies. The leadership along with several others participated in a 40-day prayer and liquid only fast leading to Easter and a city wide evangelistic campaign. Various home groups prayed and fasted for different lengths of time. They also organized prayer walks as they sought to break the spiritual bondage in their neighborhoods.

Structures vary but prayer is significant in the home groups. The other ministries are vitally tied to prayer. Prayer demonstrates the unity of the home group with the larger body. It is necessary for spiritual growth both personally and corporately. Prayer frees people from their burdens allowing God to work in them. It is a necessary foundation for home group ministry.

7. Caring.

The caring element demonstrates the truth of John's words, "Dear children, let's not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:18) Many "one another" commands of Scripture involve different aspects of caring. Caring is a function of need and culture.

Trust is a key factor in building caring relationships. Caring is the demonstration of an Incarnational ministry. As Christians identify with others and their difficulties they are able to help meet them. Through caring relationships many are brought into the Kingdom.

Some differences in caring reflect cultural differences. In Chicago the caring is relational and personal. Telephone calls, personal visits, and personal prayer are involved as people care for one another.

Through sharing times in the home groups problems are discussed and prayed for. Caring in the African context, in Accra, takes on a more material aspect. Home groups take offerings that are put with the offerings of other home groups. When a home group member has a need, he or she approaches the home group. If the home group approves then money can be made available. Funerals and weddings are important places to show care in Accra. Money is also used to help members start small businesses.

The home groups offer a Christian context for the natural collectivity of the African culture. In interviews people told us they felt special in the home group. It is a social and fun meeting of friends. At the same time others commented that they helped each other with their “blind” spots. In the home group atmosphere that kind of tough love helps people grow. In Accra, a couple who desires to marry must receive home group approval to be married in the church.

Home groups in Moscow’s Rosa Church often provide a family for the new Christians. One person responded on a questionnaire, “As a Christian I came because of the need for fellowship. I had many difficulties which the home group helped me to solve. The group is my family.”

Caring involves dealing with practical needs in a given context. In Mumbai, Reggie told a story about the evangelistic team returning from an outreach when their van came across a terrible accident. They stopped their van and offered help. The police were surprised that someone would do that. They prayed for the sick (in Urdu as they had an Urdu speaker with them), took people to the hospital, and gave money. They told the injured people they would contact their relatives. The people they helped were Muslims. That kind of caring impresses the lost and gives contact where many later come into the Kingdom.

Caring may deal with needs at material, emotional, or spiritual levels. It requires Christians in general and leaders in particular to be sensitive to the needs. Home groups in all the cities in this study have penetrated the darkness with the light through the building of caring relationships and meeting felt needs.

8. Worship.

Caring is the integrative factor of home group ministry and worship the soul. I was surprised to discover that worship had such an important place in the home group ministry. It may be in worship as much as any factor that the relationship between large group and small group is observed. William A. Beckham gives some insight about this when he says,

Large group worship provides a setting for inspiration, information, revelation and celebration. Small group community allows application, edification, incarnation and preparation.

Those experiencing true worship while celebrating God’s greatness will be drawn back into the experience of God’s love within warm, intimate cell meetings. This is the rhythm of worship between cell and celebration that is possible in the cell church (1995:76).

Small group and large group worship reflect two attributes of God, immanence and transcendence. Transcendence speaks of God as high, holy, lifted up. Immanence speaks of His relationship to his people. He dwells in us, wants to fellowship with us, and sent His own Son so that we might be His children.

In the large group we tend to focus our worship on His transcendence and in the small group, His immanence. These aspects are culturally conditioned. I used Donald K. Smith’s twelve signal systems to analyze worship styles. He says, “Usage of the signal systems are a function of culture and thus they are used differently in cultures” (1992:144). How worship is expressed varies greatly in different cultures.

Congregations in Accra demonstrated worship in body, soul, and spirit. Body movement, dance, as well as singing and drums were all a part of worship expression. Even in the home groups worship was dynamic. Worship in the Accra churches seemed to be a mix of spontaneity and careful planning. In the home groups as well we observed that same mix. People who would sit quietly during the Bible lesson discussion

would enthusiastically participate in worship. In other cities dancing or body movement is also involved in worship but expressed in quite different forms.

Home group worship in Mumbai involves an instrument, usually a tambourine. People sit on the floor as they sing, give testimonies, and praise God. In Caracas and Chicago the guitar is the instrument of choice but worship and singing could occur with no instrument.

In Mumbai and Accra Christians live in a society surrounded by other gods. Large amounts of time in both large and home group are spent in worship. Worship brings a peace and spiritual balance to the gathered group drawing them close to God. Communion was part of the home group worship in those two cities.

I am left with the impression that worship is the front line of spiritual warfare against outward satanic enemies, and inward sins. As such it is a powerful witness to believers to live godly lives and to unbelievers as an invitation to the household of faith. Worship is the soul of the home group meeting.

Conclusion.

While all eight factors are present in the congregations studied, at least one factor was outstanding in each context. Also, congregations in the same type of urban context often have more in common than congregations of the same denomination or theology in different contexts. The implication for practitioners is to find an effective home group ministry in a similar context and study it for useful ideas.

Home group ministries are diverse. Because of the diversity it is difficult to make one type of small group ministry fit into all situations. Many books and seminars exist dealing with home group methods. However, the best help may come from someone nearby who is having a fruitful home group ministry. One reason that is true is that culture affects the way home group ministry is done even as it affects all ministries. I do not believe culture is everything, but it is something that should be considered. Too often it is not. My plea here is that it should be considered as an important part of understanding how we can reach the urban areas with the Good News of the Kingdom of God.

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