
GROWTH POINTS

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Three Groups

Most people tend to find themselves involved in three different types of groups.

First is the “Primary” group.

The word “primary” indicates this group is first, principal, or of chief importance. The most tightly knit primary group, of course, is the family. Within a family people know, love, care, support, and protect each other.

A primary group is also found among people who spend a great deal of time together. For example, some smaller churches function like a primary group. Such a group exists when a person’s life is integrated with others. For example, if a person’s family, work, school, and social network is pretty much the same group of people, it is a primary group.

When people express fond memories of their experience in a smaller church where people knew everyone by name and cared personally for each other, they’re talking about a strong primary group.

Next is the “Secondary” group.

A secondary group is a little larger gathering of people around common goals or interests. They are less emotional than a primary group, and of a limited duration. For example, scouting groups, sports

teams, and book clubs are types of secondary groups. They are goal-oriented or task-oriented, and, when they are finished, people always return to the primary group. There are some expectations, such as reading a book in a book club, but a low level of commitment.

Last is the “Tertiary” group.

“Tertiary” refers to something that is of a third rank in importance or value. Such groups can be larger in size, such as a university, but can be small, such as those who gather at a coffee shop.

The concept of a “third place” is similar to a tertiary group in that it is a place where people spend time between their primary group and secondary group. Coffee shops are often referred to as third places.

Primary groups are private and intimate gatherings of close-knit people.

Secondary groups offer a more structured social experience, with rules and regulations on how to act or perform.

Tertiary groups, or third places, offer a relaxed environment where people can meet and interact in casual ways, with little commitment.

All three groups are needed for a balanced social life.

Three C's

The existence of three social groups are also found in healthy churches, but they go by the names Celebration, Congregation, and Cell. While they don't correspond directly to the three social groups noted above, they do reflect the necessity of involving people on three levels of social engagement.

“Celebration” refers to the largest gathering of the entire church, which is the worship service or services.

This large gathering provides a sense of excitement, vision, and joy. It is the place where the entire local body of Christ gathers for hearing the Word of God, the core values they all support, and the vision they are working to accomplish. In a sense, it is the “pep rally” of the church.

“Congregation” is the medium-sized gathering of people. It involves between 20 to 100 people, depending on the size of the total church, and is much like a secondary group in that it is built around goals or tasks. It is the Sunday school in many churches, or the seminars or classes that today's churches offer on various topics, like financial management, family living, or Bible studies.

“Cell” refers to the small groups found in most churches today. It is similar to the primary group due to the closeness that develops as people spend time caring, loving, and supporting one another. Cells provide the intimacy that people are desiring in their lives.

Together these three C's produce a balanced social life within a local church. People who are involved in all three levels—worship, task, and care—tend to remain faithful to the church.

Challenges

With churches now offering hybrid types of church (online and face-to-face) connecting people in all three levels is challenging. Healthy churches, however, find ways to get people connected to celebration, congregation, and cell whether it's in person or online.

Do you have all three C's available?

How are you helping people get involved at all levels?

How are you connecting online worshipers to the three C's?

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