

Three Reasons to Have a Small Group Covenant

What is a small group covenant? Small group covenants are valuable in helping to make what really already exists in a group, evident to everyone. Any group of people who come together will form a covenant even if it is unspoken. Example: Even folks waiting for an elevator really establish a unspoken, simple covenant, i.e. who should get on first, who will push the buttons for those in the back, expectations for how folks make way when other need to get off, personal space, what will be said/not said, how long they will be together, etc....

When a group of people agree to go deeper in their relationship (e.g. a Christian small group community vs. an "elevator group" :o), the need to be more intentional about this and make this more evident. This is important for at least three reasons:

1. To help avoid having your group “get sick” - most unhealthy conflict arises from incorrect assumptions and mistrust of other's intentions. An official covenant HELPS reduce (but unfortunately doesn't eliminate :oO) this type of conflict by having everyone involved know and consciously commit before others to what their assumptions are and to what their intentions are (e.g. "All things spoken here will be kept in confidence and not shared outside the group unless the individual specifically gives permission to allow this for reasons of helping to address the issue.")

2. To help your group see what a healthy group looks like - People need to see healthy Christian community clearly laid out for them so they can see what it really is/can be: Commitment, care, confidentiality, trust, patience, sacrifice, etc.... This will be hard for some to "sign up for" and exciting for others who "finally are seeing what they've always longed for". At either end of the spectrum, a covenant helps provide a practical way for people joining a Christian community to really see both the challenging aspects (e.g. "make a commitment") as well as they benefits (e.g. "Wow! People who really care about ME!") that come from being in community.

3. To keep your group healthy - a group needs to consistently revisit who they are, why they are together, and where they are going. By having a “baseline covenant” you can always come back to it to ask questions like, “Are we being who we set out to be?”, “Where are we seeing things work well?”, “Where could we let God do more in our group?”, etc... This builds an automatic “check-up” into your group’s lifecycle, e.g. “It’s September and as you recall we committed to always do a check-up on how our group is doing at this time each year.”