

Making Connections

Seacoast looks to small groups to build relationships

Everything centers around small group at Seacoast – greeters, workers in the infants room, Bible studies, volunteers on the multimedia team – all are considered small groups. As a matter of fact, there are over 300 small groups at Seacoast! “Any church with over 100 people really needs small groups,” says Sam Lesky, Mt. Pleasant Campus Pastor. When Seacoast made the decision to emphasize small groups, they decided not to do Sunday school. As Sam put it, “There is not enough class room for effective Sunday school and it doesn’t provide the care aspect for the people in the group.” The key to keeping people involved is not just giving them more information, but helping them build relationships as well.

Seacoast has a designated pastor to help people find a small group in which they will feel comfortable. Sam says, “**We focus on getting people here and getting them connected to small groups and growing. If we don’t get them connected to a small group, they will dwindle away. That’s our job: to get people connected.**” Small groups are where relationships are built within the church, and as Sam says, “It is the relationships that make the difference: building relationships and building family together.” Because of Seacoast’s desire to connect people in relationship-building, many small groups are based on interests and not just age.

What Small Groups Look Like at Seacoast

Every small group is set up differently with an average size of ten to twelve people. If the groups become larger, they are encouraged to break into subgroups during discussion times. Seacoast has found that many people are in more than one small group; for example, they could be in a service small group (such as greeter) and in a couple’s Bible study at the same time.

Seacoast prints a Small Groups guide once a trimester to help newcomers easily find a small group based on interest,

age, campus location, etc. The guide also gives more detailed information on Seacoast’s small group philosophy, guidelines and descriptions of their growth and leadership tracks.



What Makes Up a Small Group?

All Small Groups Must:

- Meet more than once a month
- Include one or more of the following: prayer, worship, Bible study, testimonies, teaching, outreach or service
- Welcome new people in their meetings (unless otherwise specified)
- Have coaches to support, equip, and empower group leaders and members
- Develop group members into future leaders
- Have 2 or more people attending
- Invite people who are from outside Seacoast Church
- Have their topic completed by the end of the trimester
- Grow: Growth is the sign of a truly healthy group. Leaders are to encourage members to grow spiritually.



Building a Small Group Culture

Seacoast Shares tips on starting a small group ministry in your church

- Get everyone in a small group
- Plug people in with someone that will help them grow
- Recruit from pockets of people
- Pastor and the leadership must be behind small groups, giving support and training.
- Start by discipling 5 or 6 people on how to lead a group; have those people start the first groups.
- Let the numbers naturally grow; don't try to start too many small groups at once.
- Use a discussion-oriented book. Last year, Seacoast went through Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*. A lot of small groups and leadership came from that series.

Leading a Small Group

A person must attend a small group for a trimester before they may lead a small group. To begin the process, members file a Leadership Application, which contains the Leadership Covenant, Seacoast Church's statement of faith, and gathers general, education, personal, and legal/lifestyle information of the applicant. Once the applicant is approved, they go through the Seacoast Leadership Institute. When they are ready to lead a group, they will be assigned a coach – a lay leader who has completed the Institute.

Each new small group leader is encouraged to seek others who can lead. All leadership training events are open

to anyone in a small group. Leaders are even asked to bring their whole small group to some training events. It is hoped that new leaders will emerge

out of each small group. Leadership appreciation dinners and parties help encourage and motivate Seacoast's leaders and nearly 1,000 volunteers. ■

Newcomer to Active Member: Seacoast's Personal Growth Track

Step 1. Newcomers – Seacoast encourages everyone new to attend the Newcomers class. Pastor Greg and his wife Debbie (or the campus pastor) lead this informal gathering the 1st weekend of each month. The Newcomers class is designed to share Seacoast's vision and purpose. To encourage fellowship, they serve a complimentary meal at the class.

Step 2. Finding Your Purpose – Seacoast is passionate about helping people find purpose. The second step for newcomers at Seacoast is to attend a three week course to help them become fully devoted followers of Christ.

Step 3. Small Groups – Seacoast has found that one of the most effective environments for life change is small groups. This is the third step in getting connected at Seacoast. They offer hundreds of different groups for a variety of interests: marriage, singles, sports, support groups, prayer and much more!