



The Benefits of Local Fellowship Groups

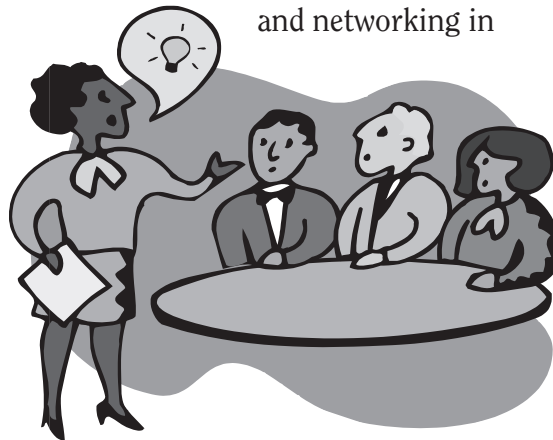
A good friend of mine—another children's pastor—invited me to dinner. As I understood it, one other couple who were also children's ministers would join us. Since our schedules tended to be so hectic because of our ministry, we made our plans about a month and a half ahead of time to ensure no conflicts and make it a priority.

Several days after making the plans, I got a phone call from my buddy who was hosting the meal. He announced to me that he had several other couples who worked with children joining the group. The meeting had been moved to my friend's church because there were over twelve of us. Then we just decided to invite anyone and made an event out of it. We sent out several flyers and a few e-mails and made a couple of phone calls.

By the time I arrived to help with setup, the dinner had been moved to the church's gym and we had to hire a caterer. Over 80 people showed up that night, hungry for fellowship.

The night consisted of several presentations. One of the original couples presented a

puppet skit. I presented a flash object lesson. Our host showed a highlight video of some of his ministry to children. We invited several resource dealers to set up booths, and many companies sent catalogs and brochures of resources to give away as freebies. What does this tell me? It tells me that people are starving for fellowship and networking in



ministry to children. If this is the felt need, why not meet that need?

Advantages

Support

Let's face it, there just aren't a whole lot of folks in your church who really know what you're doing with those kids. They don't understand the countless hours or the lack of funds. They don't see your dedi-

cation to meeting the needs of every child. And you and I know that no one could ever pay you enough compliments for you to feel appreciated.

Wouldn't it be nice to share your frustrations with someone else and get the encouragement you need? Is there a lack of funds or workers? Prayer with someone in similar shoes will mean so much more to you. Maybe God will use you to encourage and edify someone else.

Many people become discouraged and quit ministry to children. You might be the key to loving them back and helping them to create momentum once again (see Ephesians 4:29).

One time, when I was complaining to a pastor that he never showed me any appreciation for all the work I'd done, he responded with, "Well, Jamie, you should know by now that ministry is not all about getting a pat on the back every time you turn around."

I thought I would box his ears, but I didn't. What he said, while painful and true, could have been improved upon. It's true that ministry isn't all about getting a pat on the back, but a pat would sure feel nice once in

a while. And a pat on the back from someone who really understands will stick with you.

Networking

Secondly, fellowship groups will give you the opportunity to share ideas. “My ideas are never any good,” some may say. That’s a lie from the devil. God gave you your mind, and He will give you ideas. If you share the ideas God has given to you, then your ideas are excellent.

Don’t let the thought that you are at a small church stop you from giving your latest ideas. In the same way, don’t let the thought that you are at a big church stop you from gathering ideas from others. Just taking notes about a project may be helpful. Ask others, “How would you handle a certain problem?” and, “What would you do to teach a particular topic?” and, “Is there someone who will let me come to his church to see how the ministry operates?” Use

people’s ideas and invite them to use yours. I’ve found out that if you’re responsible with a simple idea, God will bless you and give you an increase.

I have a very good friend who is a children’s pastor. He had a great idea for a resource in children’s ministry, but he never told anyone about it and didn’t want anyone to steal it and take the credit. In my mind he was being somewhat selfish with the ideas God had given to him. Several months later, that same idea was used to create the same resource, and my buddy never got the credit anyway. He hid his idea away and God took it and gave it to someone else (see Matthew 25:24-29). Who cares if someone else takes the credit? At least you’re being responsible with God’s idea!

Sharing Resources

Finally, the most resourceful part about being in a fellowship group is the trading. Where else

can you find others who are willing to let you borrow puppets, music, books, or lesson materials? Not having to buy \$200 worth of lesson material because you can borrow it from someone else could make you a celebrity to your senior pastor. At the same time, you need to be a blessing to others by making your materials and resources available (see Luke 6:38). If you do this, God will bring an increase to your ministry.

So get out there! If there isn’t already a fellowship group in your area, start one! Call some folks you know and some people you don’t know. Start small and let it grow. Set a date and put together an agenda. Encourage others to participate in the above elements and you’ll find your ministry to children moving and growing with new ideas and resources!

Questions for Further Study—

1. In what ways would a fellowship group benefit you?

2. If you are not already part of a fellowship group, what steps can you take to get one started?