

# Chronicles of Diversity

*Your leadership weekly*



*Future Home of  
Posada Wonder Springs?*

## Community leadership

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Some years ago I had the opportunity to listen to a presentation on small church groups hosted by Gayle Erwin. After that discussion I had a brief opportunity to talk with him about the specifics of successful small groups and other applications of community sizes mentioned in the Bible. He mentioned a church in Southern California that was having great success with groups of fifties.

The Bible mentions groups of tens (our justification for small groups), hundreds, thousands frequently and occasionally the groups of fifty. Those references to fifties are found in Exodus 18, Deuteronomy 1, 1 Samuel 8, and Mark 6.

It is not the luck of the draw the American military, so successful in Operation Iraqi Freedom is organized along these same biblical prescriptions. Actually, the military organizational structure is based upon science, and that science flows out of biblical truth. Fifties is equivalent to the military platoon, where both power and authority come together. We will write more about the importance of this unit size as we continue this week and further.

I have read a number of books, attended presentations, and held small group discussions with many people other than Gayle over the years. But he was the only one who was aware of any other biblical attempt beyond small groups, cells, or any number of other names by which they may be called. But even in his words, I sensed there was sort of the undertone, that we don't do that here. The trouble is that in most cases small groups never reach their potential.

Under my name plate on my desk in the military I had hand written a card with my real job description, S.L.J.O. (Politically correct that stands for, Stupid Little Jobs Officer). In most churches the small group ministry is an assigned duty to one of the assistant or associate pastors as one of those stupid little jobs, which for lack of time and other resources, never seems to get much management attention.

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Now going back to organizational science that underpins our successful military, there is a very real reason the church militant never does much but assemble in mass on Sunday, and a few other nights of the week. Simply, it has no meaningful military, enterprise, or biblical organizational structure. It does have a structure, but not one to effect change in the world. It is organized as a herd of mixed sheep and goats with no means, or no thought on how to separate the two until the end of time when Jesus will do it once and for all. But does that end of time cutting mean it is OK to chill till then?

If my fifth job is to administer twenty to fifty small groups, realistically I might know the names of the group leaders, perhaps their spouse, and what they might do to pay the bills. And when I am feeling guilty about not spending enough time with my family, I can continue flagellating myself about my failing small groups, or think of more positive opportunities. We're all for good news.

Good news, at least in this fallen world, you are not wired to be that productive. You can only be productive in leading, effectively nurturing, or even favorably interacting with on average five (5) people in a particular setting. If you are just starting out with little training or experience you might be able to only lead two or three others. A really good leader might stretch to seven, a very experienced and gifted leader might stretch that to ten. But most of us are just kidding ourselves if we think we can lead more than five. And without a formal structure and real, meaningful leadership training and command support that number could evaporate.

This is your average flock of sheep, herd of goats baby.

Now if you overlay this struggling small group with some heavy purpose, like, "We have to have a Bible study", or "We have to pray for this or that group of people." you will quickly discover that the groups settles in to a party of dedicated regulars of about five people. Except when something exciting is happening and then others seem to come out of the sheep fold. Just human nature, but not rocket science.

Now all church group growth models are based loosely on the world's largest church pastored by Paul Yonggi Cho in Korea. Followers of his doctrinal theology attribute this to a great move of God, detractors point to it as a work of the devil, or the occult. It is really a somewhat well thought out organizational program that has the backing of management and the leadership. It works just like the military works, by design, hard work, and training. Just like the country of Korea. But why has the American church lost the American dream and become so lazy?

Within the development of a leadership structure you have units of fives joined together into tens or fifteens, and that joined together into fifties and up the organizational scale you go. Depending upon the type of expertise you need you can create your organization to fit the needs of the community, the discipline of your structure, and the goals you wish to achieve.

All effective leadership has two centers of importance. One from the bottom up, the other from the top down. To be effective these must function in proper tension. These meet in the military platoon and this is why the platoon is so important to military success. Jesus mentions in the Bible that all authority has been given to Him by the father. But really the power or ability to accomplish the goals of the church He has seeded in the hope of redeemed humanity.

In the same way, in the military you have commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers (NCO's). Commissioned officers are given their status by the official commissioning of the sovereignty of the United States government. Non-commissioned officers, within that structure, are promoted up through the ranks. In other words, the commissioned officers have the authority (they speak as God), but the enlisted community, headed by the NCO's has the power or the ability to make everything work as it should.

At times you hear taught in churches that power and authority are one. In the ultimate attributes of God that is true, but only in attributes. For if that was truly the way God functions in the world, mankind would not be needed. But instead the power of God is hidden in the work of man by God's design. That is why it is so sad that the church only goes through the motions of her designed work.

So what is the work of the church?

To demonstrate the love of God, through the humanity of the church working in community, with and for fallen humanity. To be effective at this work it might be a good idea if the church get with the program as God set it out and develop beyond a bunch of ruminant animals.

Bible studies can be a good thing, except no one really learns the Bible in a Bible study, in fact many times they may do more harm than good, when they are led by someone with limited or no training either in teaching or Christian doctrine. The Bible is really learned by the individual as God works to bring His word alive. In many a small group setting these studies degenerate into “what I think this means to me,” not what the biblical standard might be. When you get more than five people, half the group (perhaps all the group) shuts up and discussion is either quenched in some, or all must be forced to listen as the wantabe preacher preaches. True Bible studies should be left to those with the knowledge, the training and the calling to be teachers.

If all are not to be teachers, what is the church supposed to do? Everyone is to be what God created them to be, nothing less. That means they must use and develop those talents. But without a mechanism to develop that expertise how will they learn about those gifts, or the gifts of others?

Now there is some more good news. In a typical church about twenty percent of the people are in some way involved in the ministry. They take care and teach the children, usher, provide snacks, do maintenance, pray, and a whole host of jobs that serve the eighty percent who need to be served? Notice that this ratio is about the one in five we recently introduced. The problem is they are so busy ministering, they have no time to be church leaders.

In the Book of Acts the Apostles were too busy serving until they felt it necessary to appoint elders/deacons to do the serving. This, in our description, fits the leadership criteria of the fifties, hundreds, and thousands, provided they have specific ministry and leadership skills, or can be trained to administer them. This is true in some churches, in others they provide advice to the pastor and not much else, at least in a practical manner. Bringing this back to the military, these are supposed to be the commissioned officers, anointed from on high to have the authority to achieve the mission of winning the war against the forces of sin and death. But the same criteria is also true in the ministers, church NCO's, or the one in five.

There are two reasons why church leadership does not or can not perform its function. The pastor is too insecure in his position, to allow that authority out of his clutches, or he is not trained on how to develop the people into the leaders they are called to be by the body of Christ. However you slice and dice it, these twenty percent personalities must be the people that lead the thousands, hundreds, fifties, tens, or fives to make the church an effective ministry. This requires that the pastoral staff, deal with these anointed and appointed on a regular basis through some design.

Within the eighty percent of those who are ministered too, about ten percent think that they can be ministered to by the pastoral staff alone. The problem is that they take up considerable management time for only their own self gratification. If they truly had a significant problem they would be happy to be ministered to by anyone who would take the time to listen. One of the hardest steps in leadership is to say no. The problem is that you can't say no, without opening another door. That of course is humbling to the pastoral staff also, “I really think you need to see, John Doe about that. He is much better than I am in that area.” This of course doesn't work if you don't know any such John Doe and passing it up to the Lord is again true, it just doesn't add anything from the human perspective.

I once read in a small church leadership book, a sentence by the author that went something like, “My role as a leader is to do my job like Pope John would do it if he had the time.” If I had the time, I would have all those books destroyed. The Pope may be the Pope, but he is still human, with limitations. While greatly use of God, he can not do all things, for all people. Time has absolutely nothing to do with it. God's gifts and talents is what it is all about. If you can not do your ministry better than Pope John, you are not needed. Actually, you are in the way. A few wise people make it a point, perhaps even Pope John, to hire people to do specific jobs that are better in those jobs than the Pope with all his skills.

This brings me to an ancient Chinese engineering principle: “If you want it done (only) your way, then you better do it (yourself).” Sad to say, expecting others to do things your way, is perhaps the greatest restraint in all management, in any field. Give guidelines, delegate authority, provide the necessary resources, and in appearances get your sorry fat behind out of the way.

It has been my experience, that once you adopt this management style, once you are tested and not found wanting, you will have to come up with ways to slow people down. This is nothing short of

recognizing God given gifts and talents, and then letting the hidden nature (image of God) in all people do its personality thing.

But in order for this to work you can not just let the program evolve out of the unordered cosmos. It must be designed and implemented to achieve a purpose, and leadership is responsible for communicating those goals and aspirations, all the way down the chain of command. Whether that chain be formal as in the military, or more informal. The mission needs to be accomplished, and the power to accomplish that mission depends alone on the human relationships you establish with those who hold the power to bring that about.

Next week we will look at how these relationships are developed with those above, below, and round about you, in your job, in your ministry. But let us leave you with a question. Does your life (work, activities, family, ministry) run you, do you run your life, or does God run your life? The true blessing in this life, while extremely challenging is when God gives you a job to do, and then manages your life circumstances to allow you to be what you were created to be. His results are awesome to behold. He just gives everyone the appearance you are doing it on your own, it is just that you know the truth and the Truth as set you free. This becomes your testimony.

### ***Seeds for Prayer***

Two weeks ago, we made an offer on a former convent on the west slope of Queen Ann Hill in Seattle. It has set vacant for a long time and is an amazing building for an urban center to develop human relationships. It has nine small bed rooms and more than adequate common space. The non profit organization that currently owns it, is run by a board that must pass on everything, so the negotiations are taking a long time. But in this time the Lord has shown me a way to make the payments, other than just renting the rooms.

The pending offer is for the current owners to carry the real estate contract until such time as we are able to find other financing if desired, and to allow us to open the facility in early June. Please intercede for God's will as we continue these negotiations.

As this all works out, it is our desire to allow missionaries and other Christians an unique living and growing experience in this facility. So God willing, please see what you might do, bringing "Posada Wonder Springs" into existence and begin to minister to others.