

How to Host a Small-Group Meeting

Practical advice for group members willing to share their homes
- Randall Neighbor (Article from smallgroups.com)

If you've never hosted your small group in your home, I highly recommend it. Even if you live in a tiny efficiency apartment and your fellow small-group members will have to sit on the floor or bring a folding chair with them, it will be great. I've sat on hardwood floors many times during small group, and have seen God move powerfully in our midst.

There are a few things you need to know about hosting a meeting in your home. Some are practical considerations; others are spiritual.

Before the Group Arrives

Is the group meeting at your home this week? The day before the actual meeting, vacuum the floors in the room where the meeting will be held. If you do it a few minutes before members arrive, the dust a typical vacuum cleaner creates may affect some people. My wife, Etna, and I also look around the public areas of our home and move stray papers, shoes, and cups that seem to accumulate in our den.

Just before guests arrive, move the chairs or couches in your main room into a circle. We always bring in dining room chairs to ensure there's enough room for everyone plus a few visitors. Position the chairs and couches close together to make for an intimate gathering, and make the circle wide enough so that no person feels they have permission to sit outside the circle.

Also, find a box of tissues and set it on a side table or coffee table. This way, you won't have to search the house during ministry time if someone needs one. While we're on the subject of tissue, do remember to put a fresh roll of toilet paper in the bathroom and tidy up in there, too!

I also try to remember to turn off or unplug the phone extensions in the part of the house where we're meeting, and to turn down the volume on the message machine. This way, telemarketers and friends who call during the meeting won't distract me or other members with incessant ringing.

Etna and I always try to provide refreshments when the group meets in our home. We put on a pot of coffee and set out some chips, salsa, wedges of cheese, and crackers. Because our small group has "refrigerator rights" in our home, they know where to find soft drinks. If this is a financial stretch for you, just ask your small-group leader to help you contact other members and ask them to bring something to contribute.

If you have a dog or cat that will bother a member (allergies, a strong dislike or fear of certain kinds of pets, etc.) be sure to put them outside or in a spare room for the evening. Our golden retriever just loves our group and it's not a problem, but if a visitor is invited that would not appreciate the constant requests Lady makes for attention during a meeting, we'd gladly put her in another room. We love our dog, but we love to see our small group worship freely and grow even more.

There are two other very important things you must do before your small-group members arrive: work on both the physical and spiritual climate of your home. Ensure that it's cool or warm enough in your home by adjusting your thermostat. Remember that your house will be filled with people, and the collective body heat will raise the thermometer within 20 minutes of the meeting's official starting time.

To adjust the spiritual temperature of your home, take five minutes to sit in the room where you will meet and ask God to fill

your home with his peace, leaving no room for anything evil such as strife or discord. Invite him to come in power during the meeting. Sometimes, I will play praise music softly and pray for each member by name, asking God to touch him or her in a special way that night. If you've ever walked into a room and felt you could cut the tension in the air with a knife, you can rest assured that no one prayed like this before you arrived. I've forgotten to pray through my home before a meeting, and I saw a dynamic drop in the level of sharing and ministry the group experienced that night.

During the Meeting

As the host for the evening, I make sure everyone is comfortable in my home. I'm not entertaining on these nights, but I do feel a need to offer hospitality. If everyone is feeling fine with the temperature, but I see one woman shivering, I ask if she'd like a shawl or blanket from our TV room. If everyone is warm, I quietly slip out and turn down the air conditioning a degree or two.

After the Meeting

When the concluding prayer is offered, Etna is always zipping off to the kitchen to ensure the snacks are ready and that the ice bucket is full so folks can congregate in that area of the house to fellowship. We always encourage people to hang around for a while and visit, because that's what good friends do! Good friends are also helpful, so I have no problem asking a couple of guys to help me move the couch back in place and chairs back to the dining room.

When everyone is gone, Etna and I lock the doors and turn off the lights. As we're doing it, we pray through the house again, asking God to fill it with his presence and leave no room for anything that doesn't belong. Why? We encourage our small-group members to share hurts with the group. We urge them to

confess sins to another person in the group, or at the very least, silently to God during our time of worship.

Please take note of our motivation for praying through the rooms of our home after meetings. We don't do this out of fear, because we have nothing to fear. We just want God to be ever-present in our home.

I know that praying through your home before and after a small-group meeting may sound weird or fanatical to you, but it's hard to argue with Scripture. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Etna and I can always feel the difference in our home when we pray through it, for the "powers of this dark world" just can't stand to be in a "Son room" like our home!

It's Eleven o'clock! What Now?

On occasion, I'm told by one of my small-group members that someone from our group, or a lonely visitor, stuck around the host home far too long after everyone else had left. When this happens to me, I simply tell the person that Etna and I have to be up early and it's past our bedtime already. Often, I share this with them as I am walking them to the door!

On rare occasions, someone will not get this overt hint and still keep talking. So, I put my hand on their shoulder and say, "Can I pray a prayer of blessing over you as you leave?" I guess some people just need a benediction to know when its time to head out the door, and this always works.

It's important to recognize this as a sign that this person is lonely or has something heavy to share and can't get around to it easily. Follow up with them in the days to come and ask them if they were the last person out the door because they needed to talk about something specific that you just didn't grasp that

night. If the person did stay late to discuss a heavy issue with you, it's not wrong to tell them that you need to set a time to talk with them more and pray with them about it versus trying to get it all out late at night. Just remember that your small-group leader is available, and if you don't know what to do, give him or her a call.

Excerpt from chapter six of Community Life 101.