

TRANSITION TIMES

A QUARTERLY OF THE INTERIM MINISTRY CONFERENCE

interimministrylcms.org
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Volume 3, Issue 2—April, 2019

LEARNING: COTTAGE MEETINGS IN THE INTERIM By Timm L. Griffin

The use of a cottage meeting format is a dynamic tool in the ongoing refreshment and/or restoration within a congregation. Jesus said: *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet"* (Matthew 5:13). The oft-quoted adage is: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." The exception to this is when you first feed the horse some salt. When you have a thirsty horse, he will practically drag you to the water! We must be the salt. The nature of the messages we share, individually and corporately within the pastoral ministry, must be done with a desire to make others thirsty for Christ, and for the carrying out of His purposes for His church.

What cottage meetings provide in their form and function are invaluable resources that can aid us in our desire to design positive outcomes for the congregation. The results of the cottage meeting format can echo in the congregation's ministry long after our service as their IIP is completed. Cottage meetings function best towards refreshment or restoration when they are designed to:

1. Provide an outline of what Christ's design for His people as a church can be.
2. Work toward replacing the negative spirit (which is normally resident in a congregation in need of an Intentional Interim) with a more positive vision and hope at the grass roots level of the membership.
3. Swing the focus of purpose and hope toward Christ, and not ourselves and/or others.
4. Help identify positives in the congregation's history and in what is still going right in the congregation.
5. Give voice to the negative perceptions, history and issues presently at work in the congregation in a setting conducive to reducing angst. Replace negative

perceptions with hope for the future of the congregation.

6. Create an environment which helps focus the congregation on the Lord's specific purpose for their congregation to serve in their specific locality.
7. Open the door for raising up new voices and leaders within the congregation, as well as for better incorporating those already in leadership, to be utilized in solving problems and becoming a more synchronously functioning body of Christ.
8. Identify possibilities where each member may (and should) serve in their God-given calling within the ministry of the local congregation.

Some desired outcomes for the IIP from a well-orchestrated cottage meeting process are:

1. Making connections with as many individual congregational members as possible.
2. Creating a resource base of people willing to be used by Christ, and His Church, in possibly serving on the Interim Task Force.

Rev. Dr. Timm L. Griffin is has served as an IIM practitioner for 7 years in the Nebraska, Minnesota South, Kansas, Northern Illinois and North Wisconsin Districts. He presently serves as the chair of the Education Committee for NALIP.





PRACTITIONERS TOOLBOX

ESTABLISHING A COTTAGE MEETING

By Timm L. Griffin

How does one organize and schedule the cottage meeting process in the congregation? I like to hold a series of cottage meetings within the first three months of an IIM experience.

I find it is best if cottage meetings are organized and experienced by as many people as possible. So, once we have assembled the contents of our cottage meeting presentation, it is a good practice to give away samples of the contents at council or board meetings in the congregation. Samples need to be shared with as many people as possible: as a portion of our interaction with the staff of the church, as part of our participation in the lay elder meetings we attend, and with any other groups of people who are influential within the congregation.

Next, we need to set up a process for scheduling the cottage meetings. In order to determine the initial number of cottage meetings to schedule, one can use a simple formula of taking the total number of attendees in worship on an average weekend and then dividing that number by 20. Round up your resulting answer to the next whole number. Thus, if your congregation averages 107 people in worship, the number of cottage meetings you would initially schedule would be 6 ($107 / 20 = 5.35$ rounded up to 6).

I try to schedule the cottage meetings over a three-week period. Three weeks should give enough variations in scheduling to allow for some flexibility in choice by those who wish to attend. In those three weeks, the schedule of meetings should vary as to daytime and evening, week day or weekend. Some variability in this scheduling must be adjusted for, such as the time of year, the type and average age of the parishioners, the availability of space, etc. The church staff and lay leadership should be helpful in understanding the factors affecting such a schedule.

An attempt should be made to schedule some of the cottage meetings on the church campus, but it is also efficacious to seek some members in the congregation who would be willing to host a meeting in their own home.

Recruitment for attendance at cottage meetings is usually a challenge. What appears to work best is essentially the same organization by which a church sets up taking pictures for a photo directory. Most congregations have experience with such organization.

There are often some members who assisted with the last directory who are willing to help organize and sign members up for the cottage meetings. All of the communication arms of the church should be used for getting the word out. Then easily accessible sign-up materials must be made available. Photo directory providers wish to have everyone in the congregation sign up for pictures, but they also know that one rarely gets over 75% participation. In fact, recent changes in society have brought the average participation down into the 50-60% range. For cottage meetings one desires full participation as well, but reality also lowers the number to at best 50-60% in smaller congregations. The larger the congregation, the smaller the average attendance percentage compared to attendance.

In practice, there is no real minimum attendance required. Perceiving the cottage meetings as an information poll, then getting a 3-10% response is often more than sufficient for accuracy in the responses that are generated. Certainly we wish for the attendance numbers to affect every individual we can from the congregation, but if the cottage meetings serve as mere informational samplings, then even a small turn out more than worthwhile to do. Holding the cottage meetings facilitates dialogue towards positive outcomes for the church.

NEWS

2019 NALIP Workshop Options: June 18-20

- Peter Alexander Contracting, Covenants and Pre-entry Practices
- Peter Alexander The Big Transition: Discovering a Missional Mindset for a Post-Christian Church
- Beth Marie Halvorsen Using "Centered Flexibility" in Crisis or Major Transitions
- Martin Lee Organizational Learning and the IIP (Theory)
- Martin Lee Cultivating Learning During the IIM Assignment (Practicum)
- Timm Griffin FOC-US: small group focus on why God created the local church and on the specific purpose of the congregation in context of nature, resources and location.