

## **A Vision and Model for Community Group Ministry at Riverview Baptist Church**

### **VISION**

In light of Riverview's mission, and given the Christian Life & Growth Department's purpose of enabling individuals to hear, understand, respond to, and apply the Word of God in accordance with a Biblical Worldview, the vision of a Community Group ministry at Riverview is to provide the people of Riverview with opportunities for spiritual growth and sanctification through fellowship.

### **CLARIFYING THE VISION**

#### *What is a Community Group?*

A Community Group is a group of believers who live life together for the purpose of entering into the process of sanctification with one another while giving glory to God. It is a group of Christians who find their identity in Christ, who worship Jesus together, who care for one another and spur each other toward godliness. These groups afford believers the opportunity to gather together with friends and neighbors to live life together and experience the gospel in ways they can't on their own.

#### *Sanctification*

Sanctification refers to the progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives. Or in other words, sanctification is the process whereby a person gains increasing freedom from sin, and increasing resemblance to Jesus. Sanctification is the end goal of the Community Group ministry.

#### *Fellowship*

Fellowship is biblically defined as the participation of believers together in the life and truth made possible by the Holy Spirit through our union with Christ. It is sharing something in common on the deepest possible level of human relationship – our experience of God himself (Acts 2.42, Phil. 2.1, Phi. 1.6). Fellowship is a means by which the process of sanctification can take place.

#### *The Means of Fellowship*

There are several ways in which fellowship can and should take place amongst believers:

**1. Worshiping God together.** Community Groups exist to provide avenues of experiencing God together through studying and declaring truth about him and giving thanks to him. Since the Bible is our infallible standard for faith, doctrine, and practice, it stands alone as the foundation of our worship and instruction. People become free of sin and more like Christ (sanctified) when they study the word, and particularly when they study it together, so they can encourage one another in what they are studying.

**2. Praying for one another.** Through prayer we can become an active participant in what God is doing in the lives of other people. We pray for our cares, concerns, and burdens, and for how God is molding and shaping us as

individual believers. Through prayer, we can live spiritual life together. Praying together helps to deepen relationships as well, as we become aware of the specific details of the lives of those we live with. Each group is to create time for prayer at each meeting.

**3. Utilizing our spiritual gifts.** God has given us gifts that we can use for the edification of the people in our group and for the benefit of the church at large. God gives spiritual gifts to all believers for ministry in the church and society. The Holy Spirit is the means by which these gifts exist and is the empowerment for their use in the world. The Community Group environment is an ideal one in which believers can practice, hone, and grow in their spiritual gifting.

**4. Carrying one another's burdens.** Believers engage in life together by helping one another in times of external trials, such as illness, job loss, death, financial difficulty, etc., and in times of internal trials, such as fear, doubt, questions, etc. By carrying one another's burdens, believers spur one another on to deeper levels of faith.

**5. Sharing our spiritual experiences.** In Community Groups we can share our spiritual triumphs and failures for the purpose of encouraging one another in the process of sanctification. We celebrate with each other – giving all glory to God – in times of spiritual victory, and we can encourage one another by sharing our struggles with sin and doubt.

**6. Confessing our sins to one another.** Biblical fellowship includes the confessing of our sins to one another. This confession promotes spiritual healing in those areas in which we need forgiveness and the grace of repentance, and helps us to conquer the sin in our lives through the accountability of those within the group.

**7. Correcting one another.** We correct one another in order to encourage each other toward godliness, the restoration of the erring brother or sister, and to promote openness and honesty among the group – both the Community Group and the church in general. Riverview currently has a template for resolving differences and a conflict resolution policy that should be adhered to.

**8. Serving one another in practical ways.** Group members can and should serve one another in practical ways by meeting each other's physical and spiritual needs. This service is made possible by the depth of relationships that exist within a group setting. That is, we become aware of needs as we come to know each other more intimately – we become aware of needs that we would not have otherwise known outside of community relationships.

Each of these means of fellowship is in place for the purpose of the sanctification of believers. That is, we have fellowship with one another in order to increase our freedom from sin and increase our likeness to Christ. Each of these means of fellowship is to be

practiced and made evident in each Community Group at Riverview. This is not to say, however, that each group must hold a time of correction or confession at each meeting. It is to say that elements of fellowship such as confession and correction are able to take place because of the depth of relationships formed between group members. The only requirement for group meetings is the necessity of group Bible study and prayer. It is assumed that, over time, the other six elements of fellowship will emerge as relationships are formed and deepened, trust is established, and spiritual growth is taking place amongst group members.