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*Newsletter of the North American Network of
Charismatic Covenant Communities (NAN)*



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Letter from the Editor

**By Mary Ann West, Editor
New Creation Community**

This issue is a delicious Witman's Chocolate Sampler! Thank you for sharing such a myriad of thoughtful, insightful, personal, and varied articles on care/share, growth, home fellowship groups. This topic continues to come up often in community as we endeavor to grow in relationships with each other, meet each other's needs, and keep our swords sharpened for action! We are all certainly communities willing to think out of the box regarding our care groups. As communities are living organisms, our demographics change, the needs of our members evolve, societal challenges emerge. We are blessed to be able to alter the framework of home fellowship groups to meet these challenges. We do not fit our brothers and sisters into growth group boxes but form our groups to serve them. Thank you for the personal testimonies of the value of your share group and of intimate relationships fostered in your small group. These are inspiring for us all. Thank you to those who willingly step out of the familiarity and safety of a group that you have been a part of for years to try something new. You are willing to increase the possibility of a call to community life in others who may come to this call differently than we did many years ago!

Five articles plus David Peterman, Jr.'s "Letter from Moderator" are devoted to this topic of home fellowship groups. They all take different approaches to the topic. As some communities may want to discuss this topic more specifically for your community situation, I am including the possible questions that were posed for input for this issue. They are:



Why?

- 1) What do you call your small groups.
- 2) Do you have separate men and women's groups or joint groups? Why?
- 3) What value or emphasis do you put on your Home Fellowship/ Share Groups?
- 4) How often do you meet? Why?
- 5) Do you change your group members or keep for the long term?
- 6) What do you do during your home fellowships?
- 7) How do you integrate new members into your groups?
- 8) Do you have/have had people who are not community members in your small groups? Does that change the flow of your meetings? How?
- 9) What have you discerned over the years is important in the structure of your groups?
- 10) What is important for you to share with all of us so that we can learn from your group experiences?

Finally, there is an update on IPECC, The International Partnership of Ecumenical Covenant Communities. Sharon Poppleton interviewed Peter Poppleton. Peter is a NAN representative on IPECC and its Moderator.

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (Psalm 133:1)



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From the Desk of the NAN Moderator

By David Peterman Jr., NAN Moderator,
Community of God's Delight



Greetings Sisters and Brothers! We have so much to be joyful about! Jesus is Risen! I pray your Easter celebrations were a blessing and that we continue to live in this Easter Joy.

Our 2025 conference was well received. The feedback from the conference surveys was positive as well, and the surveys contained excellent suggestions regarding how we can further improve. God is so good, we have only to pause and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal how He is truly at work in our day to day lives.

The Fall newsletter focused on **relationships** because our relationships with one another are at the very core of why most of us were called into a Charismatic Community. We need one another; we need to experience the unconditional love of like-minded sisters and brothers in the Lord. This newsletter builds on this theme and calls attention to the foundation of our relationship development...namely **Small Groups**.

When one joins a covenant community, participation in a small group is such a high priority that most leaders would likely characterize it as an absolute requirement. There are many different 'flavors' of small groups (men's, women's, couples, bible studies, etc.). I think most would agree that there is no one right answer for how small groups should be organized (meeting frequency, who can join, ...). Small groups are essential for spiritual

growth, building authentic relationships, pastoral care, and fostering mutual loving relationships. . For any small group to be successful, members need to be humble enough to be vulnerable and to know conversations will remain private. It is also important that meetings are regular, and participation is balanced across the group.

Some older communities may suffer from small group disengagement (long time members not willing to commit), while some geographically diverse communities may experience travel hardships. What is important is - that we all recommit to this vital, foundational aspect of living in a covenant community. The stories and testimonies in this issue are intended to prompt our network-wide reengagement in building relationships through small groups.

Personally, the blessings of relationships flowing from my small groups have been boundless. My weekly men's group has fostered relationships that are on par with tight sibling relationships. Laurie and I have participated in multiple bi-weekly bible studies that have enriched our understanding of scripture, served as outreach (we invited a few non-community couples to join), and spawned deep personal relationships with the other couples. The relationships forged in these small groups have led to praying together, vacationing together, serving together, and sharing the blessings of covenant community through our small group interactions!

Enjoy and share this issue.

God Bless, David





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Small Groups at Joy of the Holy Spirit

**By Maria Baltazar,
Joy of the Holy Spirit**

At Joy of the Holy Spirit, we have a myriad of small groups that are mixed gender, but we do have small groups for men and women only. Our men's group has several members, single and married, and are known as "Hombres Unidos" or "United Men". The group meets once a week and is an essential part of our ministry as they are also tasked with the beautification, cleanliness, and event set-up/take-down. The "United Men" direct traffic during events, such as Life in the Spirit seminars, when there is increased traffic. This small group recently started their own discipleship group which creates a safe environment where men can be vulnerable with each other. They discuss specific topics related to men and use the group's support during times of hardships.

The women's group, which also meets weekly, is called "Mujeres Unidas" or "United Women". The United Women are tasked with creating beautiful and inspiring "danza" dances which are used during special events where praise and worship is used to engage the public. These "danzas" usually precede our peregrinations around the church at our events like Pentecost and Jericho.

This group is essential for creating a safe and secure space for women to grow their faith, to discuss topics specific to women, and through each other's testimony, to

inspire other women
going through hardships.

These groups have been extremely beneficial to our marriages and family units, as couples will each attend their group respectively and grow individually, while paralleling and supporting their growth as a couple. Group members are welcome to attend as they can/please.

For our discipleship groups, the goal is to start and finish - complete the covenant - with the original cohort. These are our only closed groups. While we try to hold ourselves to that, members can drop/be dropped due to attendance, personal situations, or leader discernment. New members have been added in the past, after the small group has started, if the circumstances allow and through leader discernment. This decision was made since our covenant happens in cohorts and starting/finishing together promotes camaraderie and fraternity. We've seen an increase in covenant member participation when there is a strong sense of unity in the cohort. Having tight-knit cohorts has increased their overall accountability and has strengthened the fraternity in the covenant.

Over the years, we've come to several conclusions about the structure of our small groups. First and foremost, praise and worship are vital for any of our gatherings. Praise and worship truly are indispensable and 99% of all our events have praise and worship at its root. Secondly, we allow the Holy Spirit to flow and, as well, have learned to be mindful with time. Yet we do not let time dictate when to shift or end things. Thirdly, we rely heavily on prayer, trying to be alert to what the Holy Spirit is guiding us to do. Lastly, prophetic words are encouraged and our seasoned prophets are attuned and ready to speak if God is giving us a message. Overall, we've learned that structure helps us have a blueprint, but God has the best plan for each small group gathering. We try to meet Him where He wants to take us.





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Growing and Living Together Through Growth Groups

By Mark Gargulinski,
Mother of God

If we desire to grow in maturity in Body of Christ and share Christ with one another then meeting regularly in small groups to share Community life and discuss Scripture is one of the most powerful ways to do this. The members of Mother of God thrive in community and family life by regularly meeting in Growth Groups. In Acts 4:32 we learn that the early Church members “were one in heart” through Spirit filled Community gatherings of believers who devoted themselves to prayer, teaching, and breaking of bread.

Here are five clear keys, that we have discovered at Mother of God Community over past 50 years in belonging to small Growth Groups, that are based on mutual values, beliefs, and relationships.

Deepened Understanding of Scripture - “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship...” – Acts 2:42

In a small group, Scripture becomes more than words on a page, it becomes a lived experience! As each person shares how the Word speaks to them, new insights emerge. I’m always surprised how much more I understand Scripture as I hear how others apply it in their



lives. Growth Group study deepens not only knowledge but also love for God’s Word.

Spiritual Growth and Accountability - “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” – Proverbs 27:17

Each week as we meet in small groups, we are strengthened in faith! When we’re surrounded by others pursuing Christ, our faith is strengthened as we care for others. Fellowship Growth Groups help us stay spiritually grounded. We become accountable to one another—not through pressure, but through love and encouragement. I can’t think of a single time I have walked away not feeling edified by my small

group and others’ good reports. Growth happens naturally when we’re walking the Christian pathways caring for each other.

Genuine Community and Support - “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” – Galatians 6:2

Life is too hard to do alone. In small Growth Groups, people share openly about work, marriage struggles and joys. We build trust, pray for each other, and support one another. These relationships often become spiritual family—some of our Growth Groups have been meeting 30 years supporting each other as brothers and sisters. Growth Groups can also be a time when we test the spirits and discern God’s will as a member believes God has spoken something to him.

Discovery of Spiritual Gifts - “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” – 1 Corinthians 12:7

The small Growth Groups are great places to discover and use spiritual gifts. Charisms are given to the body of Christ. It is in small groups that we can get the support to discover and grow in supernatural gifting. Whether it’s teaching, prophecy, healing, wisdom, encouragement, or hospitality, we notice and develop our unique contribution to the Body of Christ. It has always been in my Growth Group that I have felt most affirmed in what I see God doing in myself and others.

Formation for Mission - “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” – Hebrews 10:24

One of the primary values of Mother of God Community is mission to evangelize. Small groups are not just inward-focused—they are launchpads for mission. As people grow together, they are empowered to serve their community, invite others, and share the Gospel in everyday life.

In summary, it is in small Growth Groups that Scripture comes to life, spiritual growth happens, life is shared, and fellowship fuels the mission of Christ. Don’t wait—find one or start one. God desires to multiply not just add to our numbers as we grow in caring for our brothers and sisters He brings to our lives





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Family Support Groups

**By Mike Bergez,
City of the Lord**

Small group arrangements in City of the Lord are varied, reflecting our circumstance as one community in multiple locations in California and Arizona. Across the community one will find all-male and all-female groups alongside co-ed cohorts, intergenerational and age-peer groups, groups that meet weekly and others less often, in-person groups (the vast majority) and inter-branch groups that meet on Zoom, all-member groups and groups that include guests and friends of the community. One common denominator is, participation in small groups as an essential element in our community life and the primary place in which we learn and practice our covenant love for God and one another.

Some lessons have been learned over the decades of meeting in small groups, and some questions remain to be explored. For example, leaders have learned to make changes in the makeup of groups only when necessary and then, with great pastoral sensitivity, as members of groups become deeply invested in their relationships and struggle with disruptions in their group's membership. Also, community members—including, even especially, younger families—find great value in intergenerational groupings and the mentoring opportunities they afford, as well as a concrete experience of our “family of families.” Finally, members who live outside of community neighborhoods or clusters experience meeting regularly with those in closest



proximity as the lifeblood of our covenant life.

There are questions to be discerned. Should small groups be used on occasion as contexts for all members of City of the Lord to engage in common formation in community life and culture? Would forming voluntary “Lord’s Day groups” that would gather occasionally to inaugurate the Lord’s Day—or otherwise celebrate the day of rest—with each other and guests provide more opportunity to celebrate and extend to others our way of life? How do we best engage our members who are limited in their mobility or live far from the rest of the community? And, taking our cue from Fr. Dave Pivonka’s exhortation at our recent Convocation: are we intentionally creating ways in our groups to ‘waste time’ and have fun with each other?





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A Band of Brothers (sans Parachutes and M1's)

A Reflection on the Gift of Men's Groups

By Geoff Shell,

City of the Lord, Phoenix

I've had the great benefit of being in men's groups for over 40 years. The men with whom I've shared regularly are some of the pillars that surround my life - encouraging me (both explicitly and implicitly), inspiring me, and occasionally correcting me. There is an undefinable dynamic that is created when men come together as men. In fact, one of the distinctive features of covenant community life for men is the recovery and promotion of a genuinely authentic spirituality that can help a man at any stage of his walk with Christ.

For young Christians, the mere presence of older men that have run the race for years bears witness to the value of living a Christ-centered life over the long haul. Men, who have gained the wisdom and maturity that come with longevity, speak volumes to those starting out on the path to a more intentional Christianity.

For those who have been living as a mature disciple for some years, a men's group that meets regularly can be a great help in overcoming the "noonday devil" that almost every Christian faces. At times, we all start to feel the constant pull of the world, seeking, as one brother once put it, "the Shire life." Many times, I've been saved from taking the easy

road by thinking, "What would Peter (or Mark or Randy or ...) do in this situation?" Also, there is a "protection in numbers" from Satan's attacks on the stray sheep.

A men's group becomes a place where we can receive support and enjoy the camaraderie of brothers in Christ. This isn't to say that everyone in every men's group I've been in is necessarily a bosom friend. Friendship, as C. S. Lewis points out in *The Four Loves*, is something that goes beyond mere brotherhood, though it certainly encompasses that. Most of us are familiar with the "sandpaper ministry" that some men experience. Nevertheless, it's simply a fact of life that regularity and consistency build relationships, almost regardless of what the focal point is - whether it's bowling, woodworking, poker, or - in our case here - seeking to grow in our love for and knowledge of and service to our Lord.

Through our prayer, sharing of life, and spiritual discussion I have been strengthened beyond what I can do on my own. I am with men with whom I can be accountable and transparent, men whom I consider to be for me - a company of heroes - indeed, A Band of Brothers.





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Small Group Experience in Community of God's Love

By Joe Loizzo,
Community of God's Love

In Community of God's Love, we have tried every possible type of small group over these forty-seven years! From the beginning, we put a strong emphasis on the need for small groups for support in life, building relationships, growth in the spiritual life, and having fun together. Currently we have men's groups, women's groups, couples' groups, and one is a mixed group of couples and singles. In the past we had

separate groups for single men and women. In the last 3 years we have allowed nonmembers to join our groups too.

This has resulted in some of those nonmembers becoming covenant members over time.

From my experience, small group participation is fundamental both in building community and sustaining community life. As I tell new people who are undergoing formation in the community, attending praise and worship meetings with everyone is essential, but so are the small groups. One can genuinely share one's life, get personal support, advice and accountability in the small group that cannot be found anywhere else.

In earlier years I had been in a small group that changed membership frequently. This was not as helpful as the long-sustained relationships formed when the group does not change. In another men's group of like-aged brothers, we supported one another through all the challenges of life, such as our spouses'

or our own sicknesses, raising our kids, job situations, and spiritual journeys. I cannot imagine how different my life would have been without these brothers!

Now several of them have passed into Glory and that is challenging. But I believe that they are still supporting me, and I pray for them all the time too.

We have experimented with a couple of changes in the makeup of our small groups. I started a new group two years ago with an intergenerational focus. I have a great group of men in the 70s, 60s, 50s, 40s, 30s in this new group. We needed a way to bring younger men into small groups and this is one that we are trying. The challenge is for everyone to commit to the same things- time and frequency of the meetings for example. The cause, I think, is the difference in the outlook on life itself among the various generations. It is a work in progress. The other experiment that we did is to allow men and women, not covenanted yet, join some groups. This has not been a hinderance to anyone in these groups, and several of these people have become covenanted after experiencing life in the community at this level. I think this is something that we will continue in the future.

My advice on small groups is to always be open to the Spirit, open to change, and see what He does with you!





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IPECC News - Interview with IPECC Moderator Peter Poppleton

By Sharon Poppleton
City of the Lord, Phoenix

What does IPECC stand for?

International Partnership of Ecumenical Charismatic Communities.

How did it begin?

The main thrust of its inception was confirmed by a prophetic word given at St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome on May 20th, 2017: "This is a new day for the communities. Because of your repentance and My love for you, I have bound the demons of disunity. And you will experience a new springtime of working together."

Who are the founding members?

In July, 2023, in London, leaders from Sword of the Spirit, European Network, Servants of Jesus, and the North American Network (NAN) agreed to form a partnership. For several years, relationships among leaders in the communities had been strengthening and where needed, reconciliation had occurred. Groups had begun helping each other.



IPECC meeting attendees from: USA, Italy, Poland, Austria, Australia, UK, and Lebanon.

Could you give us some examples of this?

A current example of this: Johannes

Fichtenbauer of the European Network of Communities and Jean Barbara of Sword of the Spirit have been assisting each other in their outreaches to communities in Africa. Also, last year, Steve Lillis and I, both members of City of the Lord, North American Network, were invited to Sword of the Spirit's international meeting held in Costa Rica. There, we gave a training session based on our community's method of inner healing.

Could you tell us about the recent meeting of IPECC leaders (Feb. 27 – March 1) this year?

We were hosted by the Servants of Jesus in Sydney, Australia. It was great for the service team of IPECC to meet again. And a wonderful surprise, through the relationships with Johannes Fichtenbauer, 9 key leaders of the International Bruderhof attended and formally joined IPECC. There was a sense of celebration and unity expressed through the Lord's Day service together. Matteo Calisi also attended the meeting. He is the current leader of the Forum of Italian Charismatic Communities. Next year, the IPECC Meeting will be hosted by the Italian Forum.



Peter Poppleton, IPECC Moderator
and
Bruderhof Senior Pastor Heinrich Arnold
Signing of International Bruderhof joining IPECC

For more information on the Bruderhof see: bruderhof.com/history

