

**ANCIENT FUTURE**  
Group Life Conference  
September 27-29, 2007

**COMMUNITY**



**Six Emerging Trends Impacting  
the Future of Community**

**Bill Donahue**

## **Bill Donahue**

Bill's passion for helping churches develop leaders through small groups led him to Willow Creek in 1992. Bill is currently the executive director of group life and adult ministries for the Willow Creek Association. Prior to that, he served on the staff of Willow Creek Community Church for six years, helping launch and develop the church-wide small group ministry. He was also leader of the couples ministry, director of the Willow Creek Institute, and headed the leadership training department. Bill has a Ph.D. in adult education from the University of North Texas, a master's degree in biblical studies from Dallas Seminary, and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Princeton University. Bill and his wife, Gail, have two children, Ryan and Kinsley.

## **Session Description**

There are several issues facing churches that utilize groups for connection, support, service, and spiritual formation. The role and function of groups in the church is linked to these emerging trends and developments. Each will be addressed and critiqued as we explore the implications each has for sustaining group life in the church. In this breakout, we'll explore moving from group format to group process; from training leaders to training groups; from group as study center to group as learning community; from a place to belong to a people to become; from formal gatherings to organic environments; and from coaching structures to coaching conversations.

## Six Trends that will Shape Group Life in the Church

What in the world is God doing?

### 1. From Group Format Toward Group Process

#### Format

Functions like Muscular System, Skeletal System

#### Focus

- Structure
- Boundaries
- Segments
- Order/Schedule

#### Process

Functions like Nervous System, Circulatory System

#### Focus

- Connections
- Pathways
- Themes
- Integration
- Flow — Spirit Movement
- Communication patterns
- Relationships
- Flow

*Implications: Process requires engagement, reflection, observation, involvement, and attention. What does this mean for groups?*



### 3. From Study Center to Learning Community

The Difference between *Transformational* and *Informational* Reading

This requires moving beyond Bible Study to Formation Study (or Bible Practice). Why?

- Because we have a tendency only to “use” the Word
- Our desire is to solve problems and repair relationships
- We have a need to control people and outcomes in our lives

Parker Palmer notes that two primary sources of knowledge we use are curiosity and control. Curiosity is “pure speculative knowledge.” But Palmer notes, “We are also creatures attracted by power; we want knowledge to control our environment, each other, ourselves. Since many of the boxes we have opened contained secrets that have given us more mastery over life, curiosity and control are joined as the passion behind our knowing.”

*To Know as We are Known, p. 7.*

#### Bible Reading and How We Use the Scriptures

	INFORMATION	TRANSFORMATION
<b>Focus</b>	<i>Quantity</i>	<i>Quality</i>
<b>Approach</b>	<i>Linear</i>	<i>Holistic</i>
<b>Attitude</b>	<i>Critical/Analytical</i>	<i>Humble</i>
<b>Objective</b>	<i>Master the Text</i>	<i>Mastered by Text</i>
<b>Result</b>	<i>Study Jesus</i>	<i>Know Jesus</i>
<b>Method</b>	<i>Observe, Interpret, Apply</i>	<i>Listen, Meditate, Respond</i>

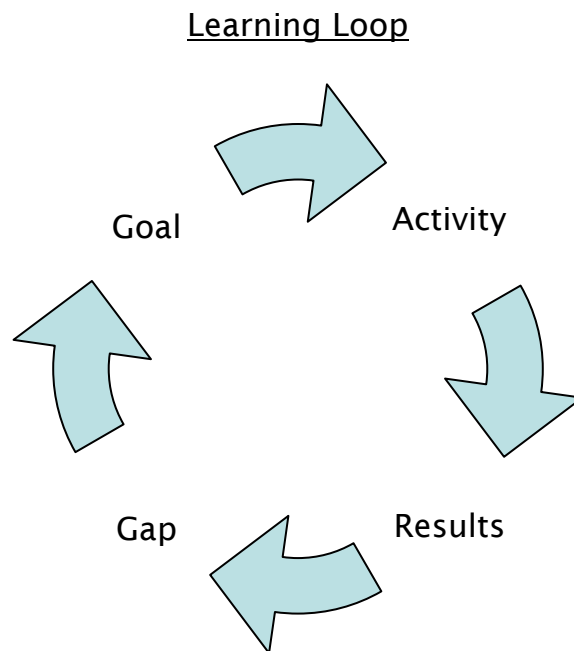
**KNOWLEDGE ABOUT GOD**

- Leads to pride
- Leads to trying to know more
- Leads to indifference
- Leads to arrogance
- Leads to respect
- Leads to control of others
- Defines God
- Corrects us
- Judges others

**KNOWING GOD**

- Leads to humility
- Reveals that we need to know more
- Leads to passion about God
- Leads to sincerity
- Leads to love
- Leads to abandonment
- Reveals God
- Surrenders us
- Convicts us

**Rethinking the Learning Process in Groups**



#### 4. **From a Place to Belong to a People to Become**

*“People don’t want to be invited to a strategy, but they do want to be invited to a relationship.”*

— Joe Myers

From an institutional approach to an incarnational approach.

Move Beyond Connection to Co-mmission

Unpacking the Missional DNA of groups

*Implications: Turning Groups Inside-Out*

## 5. From Formal Gatherings to Organic Environments

### **Exercise:** Building a Spiritual Greenhouse

What are the structural components and essential ingredients that create an environment for growth?

Expectations and Intentions:

What are the implications for groups and for leaders of group ministry?

*("If it's organic, that means we don't have to work at it, right?")*

## 6. **Beyond Coaching Structures toward Coaching Conversations**

Q: What might the Coach-Leader interaction like?

### 1) **The Caring Conversation**

Always

Never

### 2) **The Developmental Conversation**

Always

Never

### 3) **The Difficult Conversation**

Always

Never

### 4) **The Inspirational Conversation**

Always

Never