



# Small Groups = Big Needs

## ACS Technologies Offers Integrated Solutions to Manage Small Groups and More

by Lauren Hunter

Churches are continually looking for new ways to engage their attenders, communicate their mission and vision, and care for the needs of their church body. More than ever, churches are turning to small groups to provide this effective environment for spiritual transformation and growth. But how does a church go about increasing ministry efforts in this and other areas when perhaps their church has grown in size and there are more members with which to communicate? The trend is for churches to increase the numbers of small groups that are offered as their organizations grow in size and number.

Meeting in groups at churches, in one another's homes, in coffee houses, and even people's places of business makes it possible for people to stay connected on a more personal level and for churches to increase ministry impact. Whether a church serves 300 or 3,000, small groups can be extremely effective at drawing people in and caring for their needs. But as the number of small groups increases, so does the need to manage their activity.

In order to provide congregations with tools to effectively increase these ministry efforts and maximize small group activities within their churches, ACS Technologies ([www.acstechnologies.com](http://www.acstechnologies.com)) has recently released a new package of solutions that combine Access ACS™ ([www.acstechnologies.com/products/accessacs](http://www.acstechnologies.com/products/accessacs)) online tools and real life ministry implementation. The result is Small Groups Complete™, ([www.acstechnologies.com/totalsolutions/smallgroups](http://www.acstechnologies.com/totalsolutions/smallgroups)) a valuable choice for churches that wish to manage and organize small group ministries more efficiently and effectively.

For example, when Calvary Community Church (CCC) in Westlake Village, California ([www.calvarycc.org/](http://www.calvarycc.org/)) grew rapidly

over a period of a few years, the church realized that they were quickly losing contact with its members, both new and old, and were searching for ways to increase communication, encourage small groups participation, and get people involved in outreach at all levels. With nearly 5,000 people in its congregation, and a desire to expand the numbers of its small groups from 115 to 750, CCC came to a point where they realized that its way of organizing small groups information wasn't working. Spreadsheets just weren't cutting it any longer; information was nearly out of date by the time updated lists were sent to leaders.

Since CCC uses ACS for their church software management, the staff decided to add the company to the list of technology providers to review in order to find the best solutions for managing small groups. After forming a technol-



neer in the CRM field as a former PeopleSoft executive. "These tools give us leverage to equip the people with what they need to minister to the internal and external aspects of the church."

ACS Technologies' Small Groups Complete package provides not only valuable but practical church staff and congregation tools to give churches the ability to monitor attendance and communicate with members, as well as plan activities and create group directories

In addition, small group prospects can view potential groups to join by searching online and finding the right leaders to discuss group involvement; staff members can enter new prospects online and assign them to be contacted by the group leaders; attenders can contact other members of their group, update their own records and keep up with meeting times and more. Through these technology solutions, each role in the group can be given the authority and freedom to perform the functions they need in order to build community.

Through its core product Access ACS, Small Groups Complete gives church staff the ability to create groups and communicate with group leaders and members to ensure the best match for ministry. It also provides tools to keep tabs on size and location of groups and assist in matching up the right people to the best group. Available services also include online event registration, online contributions and e-mail campaigns for added impact.

Another way that churches are going the extra mile to connect people within small groups is to give each small group its own Web page that only their group can see. Groups can post messages, see activities, share prayer requests, find resources, and more all through a secure Web page intended only for the people in that small group. The ACS Extend Platform™

([www.extendplatform.com/](http://www.extendplatform.com/)) is a valuable solution to build church Web sites from the ground up, or to use sim-

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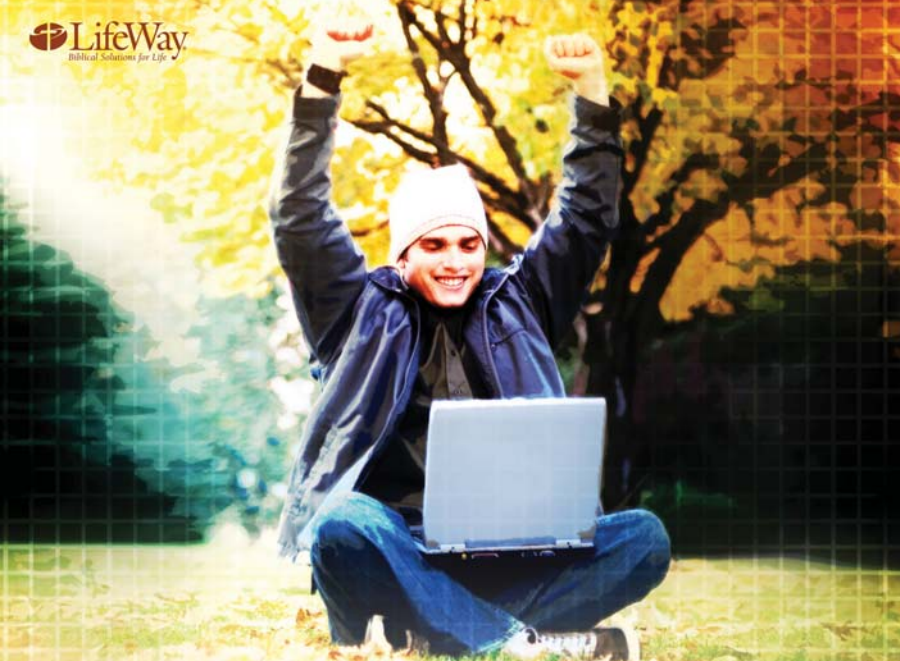
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ply for their small groups Web pages if they don't wish to use Extend for their church Web site.

In October, ACS Technologies launched ACS Google Gadgets, (visit [www.acstechnologies.com/company/news/article14416.htm](http://www.acstechnologies.com/company/news/article14416.htm) for an article by ACS on this feature) created to help church staff, small group leaders, and attenders to stay better connected to their churches. The ACS Google Gadget gives attenders and staff the ability to view outreach assignments; small group leaders can view connections with attenders that need to be made; and everyone can view their events. ACS Google Gadgets are bits of information that can be placed on one's "Google Personalized Home Page" ([www.google.com/ig](http://www.google.com/ig)) to get information delivered where access is most convenient. Gadgets are the first in a series of small bite-sized delivery methods to enhance communications and deliver content where church attenders and staff spend their time.

"The Web allows us to expand the boundaries of church communication and makes it possible for increased involvement, better communication and enhanced outreach," adds Hal Campbell, President and CEO of ACS Technologies.

Overall, people want to stay connected with those they care about. By combining powerful technology tools together with good small groups leadership, attenders can feel like they belong, which is a critical component to having a successful and lasting ministry within your community.

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Lauren Hunter is a trade writer and public relations consultant specializing in the faith-based and nonprofit technology markets. For additional information, please visit [www.laurenhunter.net](http://www.laurenhunter.net) or email Ms. Hunter at [lauren@laurenhunter.net](mailto:lauren@laurenhunter.net). To access more small group resources including a white paper and full success story on CCC, visit [www.ideastoimpact.com/smallgroups](http://www.ideastoimpact.com/smallgroups).

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\*According to mathstudio.com, based on research by Dunn & Dunn.

## Six Keys for Setting Up Small Groups Structure

*From the ACS Technologies Implementation Team*

- 1. Put it on paper.** Write out or draw a structure tree that shows how your groups are organized. If this isn't possible, consider reorganizing your groups.
- 2. Keep it simple.** The structure should be organized enough to function, but simple enough for people to understand. It should make sense, even to people who are not involved.
- 3. Plan for growth.** Consider where your small groups ministry will likely be in two years. Make sure that the structure you put in place now will accommodate the needs you will have.
- 4. Structure for success.** Make sure that the structure you put in place works in conjunction with the expectations you have for your groups and leaders. For example, if you want coaches to mentor and train leaders, make sure that the ratio of leaders to coaches is appropriate (usually no more than 7:1).
- 5. Define the roles.** In writing, clearly communicate the guidelines, expectations, and responsibilities of the people involved in the small groups ministry. Coaches, leaders, assistants, and participants should all know what role they are filling.
- 6. Allow for change.** Ministry needs change. Congregations change. Your small groups ministry will need to change to maintain its effectiveness. New groups will need to be formed. Existing groups will need to split, adapt, or fade away. There should be processes in place for handling these changes.