



## Small Groups as a Key to Church Unity

By Blake Coffee

For some decades now, church leaders have been recognizing the importance of small groups as a critical tool for Spiritual formation (or for Spiritual "transformation", depending on whose vernacular you favor). We have all begun to see that, only in the intimacy and accountability of a small

group of friends gathered together around the Word of God can we live the life God has called us to live and become the Christian God has called us to become. It was true in the lives of the apostles (the first small group ever) and it is still true today. Whether you call them Sunday School, Bible Study, home groups, cell groups, prayer groups, support groups or recovery groups doesn't matter. The concept is the same: creating a safe environment with equal parts grace and truth and where we "lean into" one another's lives is where real Spiritual transformation occurs.

But I will take this one step further. Because small groups are such a powerful tool for Spiritual formation, they are also a key ingredient to unity in a local body of believers. Why? Because Spiritual formation is a key ingredient to unity. If the Spirit himself is the central figure in all questions about unity, then our own Spiritual growth (i.e., learning to allow the Spirit to live through me and to see Him living through others) is likewise a critical part of experiencing unity in the church.

I know some pastors feel a little scared when it comes to small groups, because they definitely have less control over matters of doctrinal purity when scripture is being taught and/or discussed in hundreds of little groups both within and outside the walls of the church. It is also true that small groups can become "gossip groups" where unity is not supported but rather destroyed. So, small groups—especially those meeting outside the church—have not always enjoyed the support of pastors and church leaders. But that does not change the reality that **small** groups, when done correctly, are where Spiritual growth happens best. In the words of my pastor, "they are where the New Testament church really becomes the church." (cont.)

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### Christian Unity Ministries:

...exists to assist and equip Christian organizations to experience Biblical unity.

...accomplishes its mission through training events, conflict intervention, and publications to churches and Christian organizations across all evangelical denominational lines, with the objective of moving brothers and sisters in Christ toward Biblical interpersonal relationships with one another.

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### Christian Unity Ministries

P.O. Box 701685

San Antonio, Texas 78232

(210)386-7895

[www.christianunityministries.org](http://www.christianunityministries.org)

## Small Group Ministries Critical to Unity (cont.)

If small groups are where we grow Spiritually, then they are likewise where Christ-centered relationships grow. In this way, they are where unity is both preserved and strengthened.

It seems a little ironic, doesn't it, that a critical element to unity in the church is our dividing ourselves up into small groups meeting separately from one another? But in this day of the mega-church, where such a large percentage of evangelical Christians around the world belong to a church of many hundreds of people or even thousands of people, small group ministries become the only realistic means of living in true Christian intimacy with other believers. It is the only way I can live in Biblically nurturing relationships of ac-

countability and grace. I can attend gathered worship services every week for the rest of my life and experience wonderful praise and amazing teaching, but if I am not in relationships with other believers who know what is going on in my life and who will pray specifically for me and ask me the hard questions about those things, what chance do I really have of significant Spiritual growth?

So, if you are looking for a way to create a culture of unity in your own church (or, frankly, any other culture which would require Spiritual growth in your people), start by considering your small group ministries. Are the people in your church somehow involved in small groups? Again, whether they be Sunday School classes or home cell groups or even support/recovery groups, are you offering plenty of opportunities for them to get "plugged in" in this way? It is more than just a good idea—it is critical.



*Blake with faculty and students at the Southern Baptist Seminary in Bucharest, where he taught Five Principles of Unity*



*Blake and Oti teach in the First Baptist Church of Sibiu, Romania*

## Romania / Muldova 2008



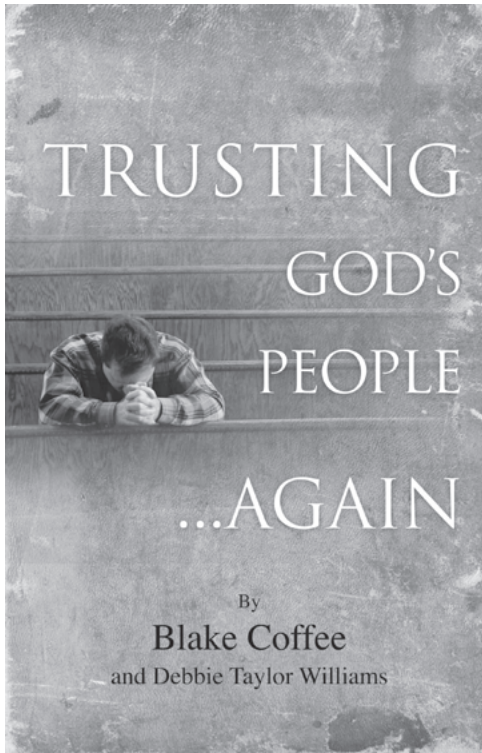
*Singing hymns in Chisinau, Muldova*



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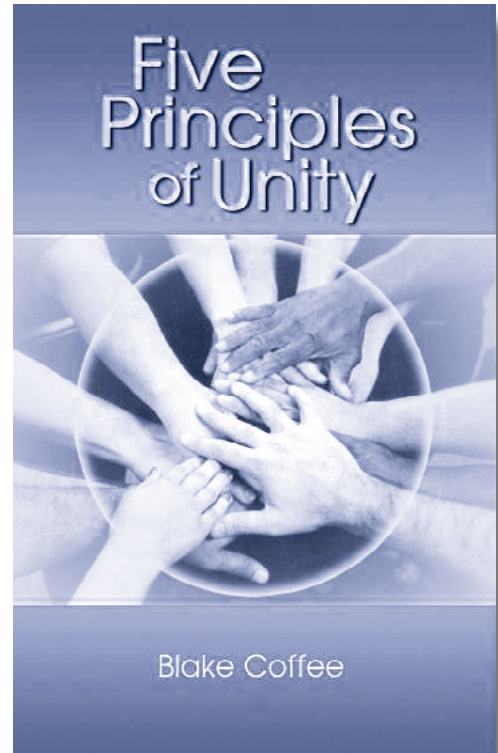


*“Our longing for community is a hot topic. Programs, ideas, and resources have flooded the Christian marketplace. One thing is glaringly missing: an honest discussion of how Christians hurt each other and what to do about it. Blake Coffee’s book fills that gap. Its Biblical wisdom and painful realism point the way to knowing God better and reflecting Him more clearly in the way we relate when we’ve been wounded. Vital reading!”*

Dr. Larry Crabb, author of *Shattered Dreams*

*Trusting God’s People Again* is a healing journey through the true stories and lessons of scripture and the fictional story of Mavis, an average church member who innocently agrees to take on an assignment in her church and ends up being the subject of a slander campaign and a volatile church split.

***Every pastor, Christian counselor, and church or denominational leader will want copies of this book on hand.***



### **What readers have said:**

*“It has changed my life. It will change the life of the Body of Believers where you worship!”*

*“When I first read Five Principles of Unity, all I could think was ‘This is NOT what I’ve been taught growing up in the church my whole life!’ That is why I think this ministry is so important. If those of us who grew up in the church don’t understand these Biblical principles, what about the seekers who have never darkened the doors of the church?”*

*“This study has been an important blessing to my life. I have had many occasions to use the Principles of Unity in talking to individuals-in both their personal situations and in their church difficulties.”*



Christian Unity Ministries  
P.O. Box 701685  
San Antonio, Texas 78232

## *How Your Church Can Partner With Christian Unity Ministries*

God is at work, restoring health and unity to His church. Christian Unity Ministries has joined that work, bringing His message of Biblical interpersonal relationships and Christian community to local congregations. We do this through a multi-piece training program aimed at various aspects of church life.

God has begun to call churches to partner with us in this effort—churches who not only are intentional about their own health, but who also feel a responsibility for contributing to the health of other local congregations.

Would you pray, and seek to know whether YOUR church is called to be a partnering church with Christian Unity Ministries?

For more information, contact us at:

**Christian Unity Ministries**  
P.O. Box 701685  
San Antonio, Texas 78232  
Phone: (210)386-7895  
E-mail: [info@christianunityministries.org](mailto:info@christianunityministries.org)

## **BECOMING A PARTNERING CHURCH WITH CHRISTIAN UNITY MINISTRIES**

*Our **Partnering churches** are intentional about preserving the unity of the Spirit in their own congregation and receive all of our training at significantly reduced costs. They partner with us in each of the following ways:*

- *Regular monthly financial support in any amount;*
- *Being proactive about sharing testimony with other churches' leadership about this ministry;*
- *Sending their pastor or other designated representative to the Unity Ministries Annual Conference in San Antonio.*

*Join us in equipping God's people for unity. **Be a part of what God is doing!***