



Seventh-day Adventist
Theological Seminary
Andrews University

PATH 656
EVANGELISTIC SMALL GROUPS
March 9-12, 2026

Gerardo Oudri Varela

This course provides a robust ecclesiological foundation for a balanced Small Group Ministry. Secondly, it presents an examination of various small group approaches (Affinity Groups, Free Market Groups, etc.), showing their purposes and effectiveness in the broader context of church ministry. Thirdly, it explores the key principles of Holistic Small Groups, a major factor of the Natural Church Development framework, as well as the importance of developing an effective equipping system to grow disciples into disciple-makers.

CLASS & CONTACT INFORMATION

Class location: Columbia Union (NAD headquarters) – 9705 Patuxen Woods Dr.,
Columbia, MD 21046

Class meeting dates: March 9-12, 2026

Class meeting times: Monday-Thursday 8am to 5pm

Course Website:

Instructor Tel.: (240) 962-0344

Instructor Email: oudris@gmail.com

Office hours:

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Prerequisites:

1. Reading report— (30 hours minimum) from the books listed below. Submit a three-page evaluation of the material read, indicating the number of hours and pages read from the required reading. The report should be submitted electronically on the LearningHub and to the professor's email in a MSWord document by the *first day of class*.
2. *Late submission penalties*. Pre-intensive assignments are due the first day of class (**March 9, 2026**). Late submissions of these assignments are penalized with a 5-point deduction, each.

During the intensive:

Class attendance. Students will need to spend 45 hours during the intensive, in person with the professor. Participants who miss four class periods without a written consent from the seminary Dean (Dr. Jiri Moskala), will have to repeat the course. Not only class attendance, but especially class engagement is critical. The professor may ask students not to use electronic devices for certain segments of the class.

Short essays. Every day, as indicated by the professor, students will be asked to submit a short essay on specific topics related to the class. Students will provide feedback to at least two other students' essays. The feedback will comprise of at least two evaluative points as explained by the professor on the first day of class. The topics are the following:

DAY	TOPIC	SECTIONS
Monday	<i>The Church</i>	• Definition (What is the church?) • Biblical foundation (3-5 biblical passages and how they inform your view of the church) • Relation to Small Groups (How does small group ministry fits into this view of the church?)
Tuesday	<i>Discipleship</i>	• Definition (What is discipleship?) • Biblical foundation (3-5 biblical passages and how they inform your view of the church) • Current experience (what discipleship practices are being implemented in my context?) • Relation to Small Groups (How does small group ministry relates to your discipleship practices?)
Wednesday	<i>Mission</i>	• Definition (What is mission?) • Biblical foundation (3-5 biblical passages and how they inform your view of the church) • Relation to Small Groups (How does small group ministry relates to mission?)
Thursday	<i>Community</i>	• Definition (What is community/fellowship?) • Biblical foundation (3-5 biblical passages and how they inform your view of the church) • Challenges/Solution (what are the main 2-3 challenges around community/fellowship in your context? What are some possible solutions?) • Relation to Small Groups (How does small group ministry relates to community/fellowship in your context?)

Collective learning. During the intensive, students will have time to work with peers in small groups to discuss topics related to the course and then share with the rest of the class.

Post-Intensive Requirements

1. **Final paper/project.** 50 hours of study, with the following options: **1)** Write a **thirty-page paper** on a text or a topic agreed upon in class; **2)** A different **project** in consultation with the instructor. The projects or reports are due 60 days after the first day of class—**May 12, 2026.**

2. The paper/project will be graded based on the Paper/Project Rubric at the end of this document and should have the following parts: **1) title page; 2) table of contents; and 3) appropriate content subheadings.** The final paper/project must be submitted electronically in a MSWord document following the *Andrews University Standards for Written Work*. Available at the following site: <https://www.andrews.edu/grad/documents/standards-for-written-work-2015.pdf>
3. This final assignment is due on **May 12, 2026**, before midnight.
4. Late submission of this assignment is penalized with a 10-point deduction.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required Reading: (Read 30 hours total, completing at least one of these books and learning the main argument of the other three)

- Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book On Small Groups* (Revised Edition). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Comiskey, Joel, Egli, Jim. *Groups that Thrive: 8 Surprising Discoveries About Life Giving Small Groups*. Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2018
- Hartwig, Ryan T., Davis, Cortney W., Sniff, Jason A. *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Small Group to the Next Level*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.
- Icenogle, Gareth. *Biblical Foundations For Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Schwarz, Christian. *The Three Colors or Community*. St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2012.

Recommended Reading:

- Bankson, Marjory. *The Call to the Soul: Six Stages of Spiritual Development*. Philadelphia: Innisfree Press, 1999.
- Bilezikian, Gilbert. *Community 101*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. New York: SCM Press, 1959.
- _____. *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954.
- Bruinsma, Reinder. *The Body of Christ*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009.
- Comiskey, Joel. *The Relational Disciple: How God Uses Community to Shape Followers of Jesus*. Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2009.
- Dale, Tony and Felicity. *The Rabbit and the Elephant: Why Small Is the New Big for Today's Church*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009.

- Demarest, Bruce. *Seasons of the Soul: Stages of Spiritual Development*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- Frazee, Randy. *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.
- Fowler, James. *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Development and the Christian Faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1984.
- _____. *Stages of Faith*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.
- Gorman, Julie A. *Community That is Christian*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Guder, Darrell, Ed. *Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998.
- Hagberg, Janet, and Robert Guelich. *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*. Salem, WI: Sheffield Pub. Co., 2005.
- Hammett, Edward. *Reframing Spiritual Formation: Discipleship in an Unchurched Culture*. Macon, GA: Smith and Helwys, 2002.
- Hellerman, Joseph. *When the Church Was a Family*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009.
- Henderson, D. Michael. *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. Napanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997.
- Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Meyers, Joseph R. *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community and Small Groups*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Newbigin, Leslie. *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009.
- _____. *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1995.
- Ogden, Greg. *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Rainer, Thom S. and Eric Geiger. *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples*. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2006.
- Scazzero, Peter. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: Unleash the Power of Life in Christ*. Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2006.

- Scazzero, Peter. *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003.
- Schwartz, Christian. *Color Your World with Natural Church Development*. St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2005.
- Sine, Tom. *The New Conspirators: Creating the Future One Mustard Seed at a Time*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008.
- Stanley, Andy and Willits, Bill. *Creating Community*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2004.
- Viola, Frank. *Finding Organic Church: A Comprehensive Guide to Starting and Sustaining Authentic Christian Communities*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook. 2008.
- Waggoner, Brad. *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship*. Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008.
- Wilhoit, James C. *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Wilkins, Michael. *Following the Master, A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
- Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.

REVISION STATEMENT

The instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus for the benefit of the learning process with appropriate notification to the students.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Course topics and assignments have been selected to contribute to learning and evaluating these Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) as follows:

Program Learning Outcomes (PO):

1. Has an overall understanding of Holistic Small Groups and its place within NCD.
2. Understands the biblical/theological foundations for small groups.
3. Knows the central ecclesiological role of Holistic Small Groups
4. Is able to develop a small group strategy in his/her context.
5. Is ready to start and lead a small group.
6. Can provide basic lay training on Holistic Small Groups

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) The student:

1. Understand the theory and practice of Holistic Small Groups
2. Teach church members on Holistic Small Groups
3. Be ready to start and lead a small group
4. Ideally, the student will implement/strengthen a small group strategy in his/her context

Date	Topic	Assignment Due	CLOs Addressed
Monday, March 9	General Class Introduction • Review course requirements • Devotional and group presentation schedule • Course introduction • My experience with Holistic Small Groups (HSG) Introduction to Holistic Small Groups • NCD and Holistic Small Groups • Biblical foundations for HSG • The Spirit of Prophecy and HSG • HSG within Adventism (NCD minimum factor)	Reading report. Assignments for group study Daily small group discussion and collaborative learning sessions on the subject Essay on “The Church” Daily small group discussion and collaborative learning sessions on the subject	
Tuesday, March 10	Holistic Small Groups: Discipleship • HSG and discipleship • Discipleship in Scripture • Discipleship in Adventism • Practical discipleship	Essay on “Discipleship” Daily small group discussion and collaborative learning sessions on the subject	
Wednesday, March 11	Holistic Small Groups: Mission • HSG and mission • Missional concepts • Mission in the 21st century • Mission through small groups	Essay on “Mission” Daily small group discussion and collaborative learning sessions on the subject	
Thursday, March 12	Holistic Small Groups: Community • HSG and community • Christian Community in Scripture • Community and discipleship • Barriers for Christian Community • Community and church growth	Essay on “Community” Daily small group discussion and collaborative learning. Small group presentations based on collaborative learning during the week.	
Friday, May 12		Final project is due today: May 12, 2026. The project must be posted on LearningHub and Email an electronic MSW	

Date	Topic	Assignment Due	CLOs Addressed
		document before midnight to: oudris@gmail.com . Students who have not completed all intensive requirements by May 12, 2026, will receive an “F” and will need to repeat the class.	

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance is required at all classes and other academic appointments. When the total number of absences exceeds 10% of the total course appointments, the teacher may assign a failing grade. Merely being absent from campus does not exempt the student from this policy. Absences recorded because of late registration, suspension, and early/late vacation leaves are not excused. The class work missed may be made up only if the teacher allows. Three tardies are equal to one absence.

TIME EXPECTATIONS FOR THE COURSE

US Credit-Hour Regulations

For every semester credit, the Andrews University credit hour definition requires that:

- **Courses for professional masters’ degrees (e.g. MDiv)** include 15 instructor contact hours and 30 hours of independent learning activities.
- **Courses for academic masters’ (e.g. MA [Religion]) and all doctoral degrees** include 15 instructor contact hours, and 45 hours of independent learning activities.

The calculation of hours is based on the study skills of the average well-prepared graduate student. Students weak in these skills: 1) may require more time and should consider taking fewer classes each semester; and 2) can find skill development assistance through the Seminary Study and Research Skills Colloquia, the AU Writing Center, and AU Student Success office.

In order to achieve the outcomes of this course, learning time will be distributed as follows:

		Professional Masters’ Programs	
		2 Credits	3 Credits
Instructor Contact Hours	Face to Face Instructional Time		45 hours
	Name of Assignment #1		30 hours

Independent Learning Activities	Pre-Intensive Reading		
	Name of Assignment #2 30-page project/paper		90 hours
Total Hours:			135 hours

Note. In order to make grading fair for everyone, grades will be assigned on the basis of the above requirements alone. No individual arrangements will be made for those requesting last minute grade adjustment or extra credit.

Submission of Assignments

Assignments are to be turned in on Learning Hub before the dates indicated in the Course Overview-- Above.

Late Submissions

Because student assignments are an essential part of class activities, assignments turned in after the time they are due will be worth a maximum of 50 of possible points%--for this course, see penalties posted on the **Course Overview Table**. Any requests for extra time on an assignment must be made in advance with the professor. Such requests should be a rarity and should be accompanied by a valid reason why the work could not be done by the date due.

ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Gerardo Oudri Varela (DMin/PhD Candidate) grew up in Uruguay, South America, and went to school in Argentina and the U.S. In 2015 he obtained a DMin from Fuller Seminary; his final project consisted of a small group strategy for a local church in postmodern context which resulted in unprecedented quantitative and qualitative growth. He is currently pursuing a PhD in Religion with emphasis on Systematic Theology.

Dr. Oudri has lived and worked in various contexts: his ministry began in Northern Argentina in 2000 and then continued in Canada in 2002. Gerardo has pastored and led multiple congregations of different cultures and sizes. Until 2016, he served as Youth Director for the Ontario Conference. He currently serves as Associate Director of the Ministerial Association of the North American Division, in charge of ministerial resources and pastoral education.

Gerardo is married to Paola Franco-Oudri, who also serves at the NAD, as Associate Director for the Adventist Learning Community (ALC). Together they have two young adult daughters, Sofia and Fiorella.

OTHER COURSE-RELATED POLICIES

Academic Integrity

The Seminary expects its students to exhibit rigorous moral integrity appropriate to ministry leaders representing Jesus Christ. Complete honesty in academic matters is a vital component of such integrity. Any breach of academic integrity in this class is subject to discipline. Consequences may include receipt of a reduced or failing grade, suspension or dismissal from the course, suspension or dismissal from the program, expulsion from the university, or degree cancellation. Disciplinary action may be retroactive if academic dishonesty becomes apparent after the student leaves the course, program or university. A record

of academic integrity violations is maintained by the University Student Academic Integrity Council. Repeated and/or flagrant offenses will be referred to an Academic Integrity Panel for recommendations on further penalties.

Academic Dishonesty includes:

- Plagiarism in which one fails to give credit every time use is made of another person's ideas or exact words, whether in a formal paper or in submitted notes or assignments. Credit is to be given by use of:
 - Correctly designed and inserted footnotes each time one makes use of another individual's research and/or ideas; and
 - Quotation marks placed around any exact phrases or sentences (3 or more words) taken from the text or speech of another individual.
- Presenting another's work as one's own (e.g., placement exams, homework assignments);
- Using materials during a quiz or examination other than those explicitly allowed by the teacher or program;
- Stealing, accepting, or studying from stolen quizzes or examination materials;
- Copying from another student during a regular or take-home test or quiz;
- Assisting another in acts of academic dishonesty
- Submitting the same work or major portions thereof, without permission from the instructors, to satisfy the requirements of more than one course.

For additional details see: https://www.andrews.edu/academics/academic_integrity.html

Academic Accommodations

If you qualify for accommodation under the American Disabilities Act, please see contact Student Success in Nethery Hall 100 (disabilities@andrews.edu or 269-471-6096) as soon as possible so that accommodations can be arranged.

Use of Electronics

No recording or streaming is permitted in seminary courses.

Courtesy, respect, and professionalism dictate that laptops and cell phones are to be used only for class-related activities during class time.

Communications and Updates

Email is the official form of communication at Andrews University. Students are responsible for checking their Andrews University e-mail, Moodle, and iVue alerts regularly.

LearningHub Access

Andrews University Learning Hub hosts this course online. Your Learning Hub username and password are the same as your Andrews username and password. Use the following contact information if you need technical assistance at any time during the course, or to report a problem with Learning Hub.

Username and password assistance	helpdesk@andrews.edu	(269) 471-6016
Technical assistance with Learning Hub	dlit@andrews.edu	(269) 471-3960
Technical assistance with your Andrews account	http://andrews.edu/hdchat/chat.php	

Emergency Protocol

Andrews University takes the safety of its student seriously. Signs identifying emergency protocol are posted throughout buildings. Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting that specific location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during any evacuation or sheltering emergency.

Please Note: The instructor reserves the right to revise the syllabus, with the consensus of the class, at any time during the semester for the benefit of the learning process. The up-to-date Course Description for this course may be found at www.learninghub.andrews.edu.

APPENDIX 1: INTERPRETING LETTER GRADES

Letter Grades and Percentages

95-100%	A	80-84%	B	65-69%	C
90-94%	A-	75-79%	B-	60-64%	C-
85-89%	B+	70-74%	C+	55-59%	D
				58-Below	F

THE A GRADE

An A grade is given only when a student not only fulfills the criteria for a B grade, but in doing so demonstrates an advanced academic aptitude for content knowledge, critique, synthesis and independent insight, while exhibiting highly developed communication skills and professional publication standards that would allow them to pursue a highly competitive academic career.

THE B GRADE

The B grade is a sign that you have competently fulfilled all of the requirements stipulated for an assessment or competency evaluation. It is a very good grade and demonstrates a high level of the knowledge, insight, critical competence and professional presentation standards essential for an individual wishing to pursue a career as a professional leader in ministry.

THE C GRADE

The C grade differs only from a B grade in that the traits outlined in the B grade above are not consistently applied. However, with diligence and by applying feedback from your lecturer, the academic process can provide opportunity for a student to improve their consistency, and hence, their grade.

THE D GRADE

The D grade points to a limited level of knowledge, insight, and critique, as well as to inadequate quality of written work. This may be because of a lack of time management on the part of the student, difficulty grasping the concepts being taught, use of English as a second language, or a personal issue that is affecting one's concentration and motivation levels. Again, with diligence, applying feedback from your lecturer, and seeking services offered by the University like the writing lab or the counseling center, the academic process can provide an opportunity for a student to significantly improve their performance.

THE F GRADE

A failing grade is given when very limited or no demonstrable competency has been observed or when the final assignment is not submitted within the dates indicated in the Course Overview Table.

ASSIGNMENT RUBRIC

Rubric for Assessing Project Plans

Student _____

Criteria	(5) Exceptional	(4) Proficient	(3) Satisfactory	(2) Emerging	(1) Unsatisfactory	Score
Title Page	Includes: 1) institution's name, 2) title, 3) name of the course, 4) course period, 5) name of the student, 6) date submitted, 7) follows AU Standards for Written work (AUSWW). Has no errors	Misses 1 of the 7 components	Misses 2 of the 7 components	Misses 3 components	Misses more than 3 components	
Introduction	The introduction is engaging, states the main topic and purpose of the paper, and previews the structure of the paper	Introduction states the main topic and purpose of the paper and previews its structure	States the main topic and purpose of the paper, but does not adequately preview its structure	The introduction states the main topic but lacks a purpose and a preview of its structure	There is no clear introduction or main topic and the structure of the paper is missing	
Project Description	Project is described in detail. Protocols to be followed are presented. Specific aspects of the organization, implementation, and evaluation are offered. Meets paper length requirements	Project is well described. Some details regarding protocols, organization, implementation, and evaluation of the project are missing. Meets length	Project is satisfactorily described and meets paper length	Project is poorly described and does not meet number of pages.	The report misses entire sections of the project description. Does not meet paper length.	
Organization	Report provides a table of contents, and is organized using different subhead levels, following AUSWW. Subheadings are exceptionally well-worded and reflect upon the main subject. Exceeds all organizational specifications stated in the syllabus	Table of contents and subheading levels follow AUSWW Standards. Subtitles reflects upon the subject, but wording can be improved.	Paper provides a table of contents and is organized using different subheading level. However, does not follow AU standards of written work	Paper provides first level headings, but headings do not clearly reflect upon the subject. No table of contents. Does not follow all specifications stated in the syllabus and AUSWW	Does not provide a table of contents and is not divided under headings and subheadings. Does not follow organizational specifications stated in the syllabus and AUSWW	
Format/Style	All texts and references follow specifications from AUSWW. Syntax and semantics are outstanding. Models language and	Consistently follows AUSWW with minor flaws. Syntax and semantics are very good. No major errors in style	Consistently follows all AUSWW format. Syntax and semantics are good. Few errors in style	Inconsistently follows some AUSWW. Syntax and semantics are poor	Does not follow AUSWW. Syntax and semantics are deficient	

	style. No errors in punctuation, spelling, and sentence formation					
Conclusion	Conclusion is engaging and provides an outstanding overview of the project and personal reflections on projected implementation. Exceeds expectations	Conclusion restates the purpose, gives a good summary, and provides personal opinions about the outcome	Conclusion restates the purpose and satisfactorily summarizes results Lacks personal reflection on projected implementation	Conclusion attempts to summarize the thrust of the project, but is ambiguous. Lacks personal reflection	Conclusion fails to summarize and to express personal reflection on the project	

