



Christian Artist Fellowship Groups

HOW TO START ONE WHERE YOU LIVE

Catherine Obreza Fetterman

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* TABLE OF CONTENTS *

Introduction

Starting a Christian Artist Fellowship Group

Four Steps

Suggestions on Topics, Book Discussions & Prayers

Sample Program

Sample Press Releases


Featured Artist Presentations

Scriptural Encouragement

From One Artist to Another

This booklet is offered to you as a gift. It comes from a heart overflowing with gratitude to God for all that he has done for me and many others through the creation of the Christian Artists Circle. You may freely download, print and share this document with others you know. I ask, however, that it not be reproduced in whole or in part in any other form, or in any other publication, without my written consent. I can be reached through my website www.catherinefetterman.com. Thank you and God bless you.

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God has given each of you
some special abilities;
be sure to use them
to help each other,
passing on to others
God's many kinds of blessings.

1 Peter 4:10

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

First of all, *thank you* for recognizing the importance of your gifts! Whether we're a novice or an expert in our field, our talents are a gift from God and have been given to us for a purpose.

Local artist support groups provide a necessary forum in which we can seek, receive and give the guidance, support and encouragement we long for, and need, if we are to fulfill the dreams and purposes God places on our hearts as individuals, and as groups, within our churches, neighborhoods and society.

In this booklet I share with you some of what we have learned in Virginia about how to start creative communities with a Christian purpose over the last three years. I hope that you are inspired, strengthened and encouraged by what you find within these pages. If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me through my website.

May God bless you, and your efforts to further his kingdom through the arts.

In Christ's service with you,

Catherine Obreza Fetterman
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Enlarge My Territory

Written by Catherine Obreza Fetterman, Leesburg, VA

This is my story of how God called me into starting a local Christian artist support group in my area. I share it with you to show you how God can take our "little" and make it "a lot"!

In the spring of 2002, after many years of quietly and discreetly honoring God with my talents, I felt the Lord gently but persistently asking me to joyfully and boldly proclaim the connection between my faith and my art.

This was a pivotal time for me. In 2001, I had read *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson. This little book is about the short but powerful prayer of Jabez recorded in I Chronicles 4:10: "Oh, that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain." Claiming this prayer as my own started an important change deep within me.

This spiritual transformation was happening while I was preparing for my third Featured Artist show at The Potomac Gallery in Leesburg, VA. The many months of preparation were unusually difficult for me. My prayers had resulted in a message to share and beautiful images to convey it through, but after a few weeks, I had begun to experience a deep and long lasting artist block. I could teach someone how to paint what I wanted to paint, but I couldn't do it myself.

At no other time had I asked for so many prayers for my art. While I remained confident that I was doing what the Lord was asking me to do, I couldn't understand why it had to be so difficult. But now I do.

During those months of artist block, I learned that there was a difference between asking God to help me paint, and asking him to paint through me. I needed to fully trust in him, not on what I thought I could do, and, to realize that I can't do what he calls me to do, without giving him *complete* control of the process.

I learned something else very important: he delights in using what we find unworthy and flawed, to include the artist and the art. When we let go of and surrender our personal ambitions and plans, we make it possible for God to fulfill the prayer of Jabez within our own lives. I must have completed over a dozen unfinished paintings in one night when I relinquished my paintbrush to the Master Artist. I'm still amazed at how he transformed a painting of tulips into a landscape-- in watercolor, no less!

Openly sharing with the public that my reason for painting was to communicate God's truth, love and presence in our everyday life, was more difficult than I had expected.

I am grateful that a new artist friend invited me to discover a hidden resource that I then needed--a faith-based arts group called ARS, Artists for a Renewed Society, a Catholic arts organization based in Washington, DC. While I only attended a few of their monthly

gatherings, I experienced a peace, joy and sense of community there that I had not experienced before in any other art group. The problem was that it was too far and complicated for me to get there by myself. “Lord, I need this kind of group”, I remember praying. “If there are others like me out here in Virginia who need this same kind of support, I will start one. You know this is difficult for me, Lord, but I know that I need to walk with other Christian artists to continue to serve you well, so please help me know your will and give me the courage I need to do it.”

And so, in October 2003, after nearly a year of prayer and discernment, and meeting an increasing number of other local artists wishing for the same fellowship and support, several local artists and I started gathering once monthly to pray for one another, and to share our artistic journeys through featured artist presentations and small group discussions.

Within four months, artists from other parts of the state started calling me to find out about this new Christian arts group and how they could get involved. It didn't take God long to show me that his plans went beyond starting a little local group. In fact, we were the newly planted seed that was to become a wide-reaching ministry of encouraging and helping artists be part of creative Christian communities, near and far, working in harmony with one another.

The Christian Artists Circle (CAC), as we later called ourselves, started to provide artists with a model and a method for artists everywhere to cultivate creative communities with a shared Christian purpose.

You can imagine how overwhelmed I felt knowing that God was “enlarging my territory” in such a vast way. The Lord, in his infinite wisdom, had already taken care of the details. I approached my fellow artist friends Bonnie and Tomas Fernandez, co-founders of Archangel Arts Center in Central VA, about adopting this outreach ministry as one of their own since it shared their nonprofit's mission of “promoting artistic excellence for the glory of God.” The Lord impressed upon them that the CAC provided an opportunity for artists far away to be connected to and inspired by Archangel Arts Center, and so they welcomed this new program to be an outreach ministry of their facility in Madison, VA.

Three years later, in 2006, we had three CAC chapters in Northern VA, with other groups wanting to form. In an effort to simplify, clarify and give more autonomy to local groups, we decided it was best to drop the CAC name and give the local artist fellowship groups an opportunity to express their own unique identities and creative ideas while at the same time continue to receive support and inspiration from a larger community through Archangel Arts Center.

May God continue to bless the fruits of our efforts to help others like you plant communities of faith and creativity throughout the world, that we might together raise humanity's eyes towards Heaven through song, image, word and action.

Starting an Artist Fellowship Group

Step 1 --Pray

- ✧ Before you do anything else, talk to God about what is on your heart. Ask him if he is asking you to start a group, or if you are to try and find one that already exists in your area.
- ✧ Ask God if the timing is right, and if it is, that he would lead you to a co-leader to share the journey of planting this new group.
- ✧ Set up a meeting with your pastor to share with him/her what you are praying about and ask for prayer and guidance. Also, find out if your pastor can lead you to others who might have an interest in such a group. Could the group meet at your church?
- ✧ Pray about what kind of group you would like to create. Who will it be for and what will your purposes be for meeting?
- ✧ Answers to step 1 might not come until you continue with step 2. Be bold and trust in God's timing, strength and vision.
- ✧ You may want to keep a journal to record your developing thoughts, prayers, and answers to prayers. It can also have a section in which you record contact information for those who have expressed an interest in your group.

Step 2—Invite Others

- ✧ Start by talking to friends and family members. Perhaps some of them may want to join you in forming this new community. In any case, invite them to help you spread the word and ask if they have any leads on people who might want to join.
- ✧ Get the word out in your church community. Seek permission to put an announcement in your church's bulletin. (If possible, have it run for 3 consecutive weeks.) Maybe you could also put up a small poster with a sign-up sheet to garner interest. Sample church bulletin announcements are included in this packet.
- ✧ Talk to other artists in your community to see if any of them are interested in what you want to start. If so, ask for their contact information and let them know that you will be back in touch with them as you know more.

Step 3—Gather Together

- ✧ Once you feel you have enough people to start a group, send out an email to everyone and set a date for your first organizational meeting. (We recommend that at least 4 people participate in this first meeting.)
- ✧ Gathering together with some kind of food and beverages helps people feel more comfortable and relaxed.
- ✧ The goal of the first meeting really is to start meeting! The focus can be on getting to know each other and then starting to discuss the structure and purposes of the group.
- ✧ Sample meeting formats are included.
- ✧ Some questions you might want to discuss in that meeting would include:
 - When should we meet?
 - How often should we meet?
 - Where do we want to meet?

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- How long do we want our meetings to be?
- What should we name our group?
- Can anyone come to our meetings? (ie: Is this group open to artists of all ability levels, ages and creative disciplines? Do you have to be Christian to come to our meetings?)
- How will we stay in touch with each other?
- Should we have a membership form and what should be on it?
- What do we want our group to be about?
- Do we need to collect some kind of dues?

Step 4 –*Spread the Word*

- ✧ Once you have met a couple of times and have a clear sense of what your group is about and how it will run, we encourage you to get the word out to others in your local community. Here are some suggestions for how to do that:
 - Have each member invite at least one friend to come to the next gathering.
 - Make up a postcard that members can give out to invite others to the group.
 - Write up an invitation to your group and send it by email to your members. Ask them to pass it along to others who might be interested in joining.
 - You may want to send out a press release to the local community newspapers, churches and arts councils to announce the formation of your group. Keep in mind that your announcement will generally need to arrive 2 weeks (or more) before the desired publication. Sample press releases for this are included.
 - Create a poster and ask to put it up in local libraries, arts venues, art stores and churches.

Artist Gatherings: A Model and a Method

Why have a local artist fellowship group? It's all about being a part of a like-minded creative community centered in Christ. Having one provides local artists with an opportunity to gather together, build new friendships, share difficulties and triumphs, ask questions, pray together, offer advice and provide encouragement. It may also provide opportunities for collaboration and service projects for the community.

What does it look like? While we're sure that there are many models that work, we offer to you a model that we have found successful in helping artists start groups in Virginia. Artists usually meet once or twice monthly for 2-3 hours. Locations have included churches, art centers, public libraries, coffee shops, and members' homes, among other places.

Format

There are many models to choose from depending on the needs and interests of the artists in the group, and the limitations of the location chosen. Generally, however, our gatherings begin with a combination of a welcome, group introductions, opening prayer and a time of worship through song (if the location permits).

Some groups routinely include sharing a meal as part of their time together, while others don't. If you decide to eat, you can start with a meal and then move into the formal sharing time, or you can do the reverse.

There are many choices for the next 45-60 minutes, including, among others:

- **"10-10-20"** –Everyone in the group is given a short question or statement to journal quietly about for 10 minutes. The next 10 minutes are spent sharing your thoughts with one other person in the group. The sharing opens up to the whole group for the final 20 minutes.
- **Chat n'Chew** --Place a bowl or basket in the center of the table and have small slips of paper in it that have statements or questions that you can take turns pulling out and answering. This is a good way to facilitate conversation with a meal.
- **Featured Artist Presentation & Group Response** –An artist from the group shares samples of his/her work and shares experiences in seeking to glorify God with their talents. The featured artist presentation lasts 30-45 minutes and is followed by 15 minutes during which the group responds to what they have heard & seen. Enclosed as an appendix are some suggestions on how to prepare and give this kind of presentation.
- **Art Share** --Everyone brings in a sample of their creativity (finished or unfinished) and shares it with the group.
- **Book Sharing** –There are many wonderful books out about creativity and Christianity that you could read and discuss in your group. See the next page for some suggestions.

The gathering may continue with praise reports, announcements, sign-ups for the next gathering and thank you's to those who participated in that gathering. Close with prayer.

Artist Gatherings: SUGGESTIONS

Sharing Topics:

- ✧ What is most meaningful to you about your creativity?
- ✧ How does God work in your life through your art form?
- ✧ How do you juggle the demands of a family and job and your need to create?
- ✧ What are your creative goals and how are you working to achieve them?
- ✧ Complete this sentence: “If I could I would...”
- ✧ How has God used your artistic talents to reveal himself to you or to others?
- ✧ Every journey has highs and lows. Where are you in your artistic journey right now?
- ✧ What do you enjoy about being an artist?
- ✧ What is hard for you as an artist?
- ✧ Have you read something that you have found encouraging? Share it with us.
- ✧ Why did you join this group?
- ✧ How does being an artist bring you closer to God?
- ✧ How do you get through the dry times?
- ✧ What are some issues/topics that would be good to discuss/think about for a future gathering?

Worthwhile Book Discussions:

- ✧ *The Creative Call*, Janice Elsheimer, Shaw Books, 2001.
- ✧ *The Heart of the Artist*, Rory Noland, Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.
- ✧ *Imagine. A Vision for Christians in the Arts*, Steve Turner, InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- ✧ *Scribbling in the Sand: Christ and Creativity*, Michael Card, InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Lifting Up Prayer Requests

It is important that *all* who attend have the opportunity to seek the prayers of the group at *every* gathering. Here are some ideas that we have used:

- ✧ At the end of the meeting all gather together. (You may want to stand in a circle and hold hands, or you may want to stay at your chairs or stand and not hold hands.) The facilitator starts the group off in prayer and then all others add in their prayer requests. The facilitator then closes the prayer time by leading the group in saying the “Our Father” prayer. Note: If there are many in your group this can take a LONG time.
- ✧ At the beginning of the meeting, have a sheet of paper titled “Prayer Requests” that people can indicate their requests on. At the end of the gathering, the facilitator reads the requests individually (person needing prayer can give simple elaboration of need) and then ask if any other prayers need to be added. The facilitator then begins a prayer and lifts up those requests for the group, adding that the Lord also hear the quiet prayers of our hearts that have not been written down. Finish with all joining in to pray the “Our Father”. (There are many benefits to using this system. Those who are new to the group, or are shy about voicing prayers, feel more comfortable with this system. Also, it makes it possible to stay within a certain time allotment for closing prayers.)

Artist Gatherings: SAMPLE PROGRAM

The following agenda includes a **Featured Artist Presentation & Dinner 6-9pm**

Preparation

- Have name tags to help people learn names.
- Have sign-in sheets and prayer request sheets out with pens.
- Have music playing in the background.

Facilitator's Notes

6:00 pm Gather & Mingle

Greet newcomers and be sure to introduce to them to others. You may want to have people sign in when they arrive. This gives you a way to contact people afterwards.

6:30 pm Welcome (Facilitator)

Once people get situated, start off with a little welcome and let people know that you're happy they could come today, what you'll be doing/discussing and for how long, what time the gathering will end, where the bathroom is, etc. I would remind everyone of what your purpose is in gathering together.

Introductions (if new members are present)

Opening Prayer (Facilitator, or it could also be a volunteer)

It should only be a couple of minutes long, at most. Mainly we are thanking God for the opportunity to gather with one another, and asking for his presence and guidance that our time spent together would be a blessing to all present.

6:45pm Start Dinner

By 7:45pm Featured Artist Presentation

The presentation should last no longer than 45 minutes to allow for an additional 15 minutes of response from the audience. Let the presenter know you will use a hand signal to indicate when they need to start wrapping up their presentation.

- Introduce presenter
- Have someone lead a prayer over the presenter
- Presentation
- Give hand signal when there are 5 minutes remaining
- Community Response – Ask artists for feedback about what they've seen and heard. What spoke to their hearts? Do they have any questions? What words of encouragement and thanksgiving do they have to share with the presenter?

By 8:45pm Closing

Looking Ahead

- Sharing what's going on in the area that others might want to check-out/attend
- Invitation to next gathering (Date/Time/Place)
- Sign-ups for next gathering (song leader, facilitator, featured artist?, other?)
- Invite others to join us 😊

Prayer Requests, Closing Prayer, and Thank You's

Sample Press Releases: FOR CHURCHES

- Send by email, when possible. In the subject line of your email write: Please share with your congregation
- Send early. 3-4 weeks in advance of when you want it to appear in print.
- Simply choose the sample you want, insert your information in the red areas, and type it into the body of your email. Do not send as an attachment.
- When writing to churches I like to begin with a paragraph telling them who I am and what I am asking of them. Here's a sample that you can adapt to fit your needs:

Dear (Pastor's name):

Hello. My name is _____ and I am a Christian artist from _____. Along with some other local artists dedicated to serving the Lord with their talents, I am starting a local artist fellowship group so that **artists of all skill levels and creative disciplines** have an opportunity to gather **monthly** for support, encouragement and fellowship as we seek God's vision in using and developing our talents, that all we do might lead others to raise their eyes towards God.

Included below is information about our next monthly gathering. We would be truly grateful if you would help us reach the artists in your faith community who may feel alone in serving the Lord.

Thank you for helping us minister God's truths, love and goodness through the arts.

In Christ,

Your name and contact information

See next page for sample press releases for churches.

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #1 FOR CHURCHES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: (insert your name)
TELEPHONE: (insert your phone number)
EMAIL: (insert your email address)

Do you have an artistic talent that you want to use to reflect in some way the glory of God and raise people's minds to him?

The (name of your group), an artist support and networking group, invites local artists of all artistic disciplines and levels of skill -- poet, sculptor, architect, musician, actor, designer, painter and craftsman -- to join together monthly to encourage, strengthen and inspire one another through featured artist presentations, guest speakers, and small group discussions. Membership is free and all levels of skills are welcome.

We meet the (day and time) of each month. (**if you meet at the same place each time indicate that here too.) Our next gathering will take place (date) at (place) in (town). For further information about (name of group), please visit us on the web at (www.archangelarts.com or other website) or contact (your name), at (phone number) or (your email).

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SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE #2 FOR CHURCHES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: (insert your name)
TELEPHONE: (insert your phone number)
EMAIL: (insert your email address)

If you are trying to pursue a career in the arts, or are someone who dabbles in them as a hobby, and you are looking for the support of other Christian artists to fulfill the vision the Lord has for your talents, we invite you to learn about a Christ-centered artist support and networking group now forming in our area. Featured artist presentations, guest speakers and small group discussions are planned for artists of all ability levels and creative disciplines. Membership is free and all levels of skill are welcome. For further information contact (your name), at (phone) or (email).

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Sample Press Release

This sample press release **announces a featured artist presentation**. If possible include a picture of the artist with your press release. I've included what we wrote about one of our artists. Obviously you would write about who your artist is and why people should come.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: (insert your name)
TELEPHONE: (insert your phone number)
EMAIL: (insert your email address)

Trip to Israel Inspires Local Artist

Award-winning local artist Tina Mell will be the featured artist at the next monthly gathering of the Christian Artists Circle-Northern VA Chapter, to be held Sunday, May 16th from 2-5pm at Saint Matthew's Episcopal Church in Sterling, VA.

Ms. Mell, who has been painting professionally in oils for over 20 years and owns a studio/gallery in Old Town Manassas, has just returned from a trip to Israel and will be sharing what she experienced, what took her there and how artists are making a difference in a hurt and troubled world.

The Christian Artists Circle (CAC) is a national artist-to-artist outreach ministry of Archangel Arts Center, a non-profit organization whose mission is to promote artistic excellence for the glory of God. Begun in 2003, the CAC exists to support, encourage, strengthen and empower artists (visual, music, performing, and literary) in their desire to glorify God with their gifts. Monthly gatherings of prayer, featured artist presentations, guest speakers, small group discussions, and opportunities for fellowship and collaboration. There is no cost to participate and all are welcome. Learn more by visiting [www.....](#)

For further information, please call (your name) at (your phone number).

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Featured Artist Presentations ----Notes for the Presenting Artist

Thank you for volunteering to share your artistic journey with us as a Featured Artist. Presentations such as these help us to learn more about each other's art forms, what motivates and inspires us, and how we can be a source of blessing for one another.

Listed below are some guidelines and suggestions. Please remember that this is not a test, nor a term paper! You do not need to write everything out to prepare. We want this to be a blessing to you, not a burden. As long as you prepare with prayer, speak from the heart, and have a brief outline of the order that you will speak about things, you'll have an awesome presentation!

Format A Featured Artist Presentation is composed of the following parts:

- prayer over the artist
- presentation by the artist
- response of the community gathered
- questions and answers
- thanking the artist for sharing

Length of Time Assuming that the gathering will last 3 hours, the Featured Artist Presentation shouldn't take up more than 90 minutes of that time, to include all of the components listed above. 20-45 minutes is appropriate for the actual presentation. This can vary depending upon what the artist has to say and how many samples are shared with the group.

What to Share Essentially, Featured Artist Presentations give individuals an opportunity to authentically share with a group of like-minded artists who they are and how their gifts of creativity and faith relate to one another.

Please remember to speak to the convictions of your faith in a way that does not condemn other doctrines or denominations.

Pray Before you do anything else, spend time in prayer first. Ask God what he would want you to share with the group. Having a prayer journal by your side and ready to write in will help you record your thoughts, questions and answers as they come to you. Remember, you aren't writing for anyone but yourself.

Reflect Sometimes we are so busy creating and performing, that we forget why we're doing it, the lessons we've learned along the way, and the joys and gifts that have helped us to grow through the tough times. To help you reflect on those things, you may want to consider the following questions. These are *not* meant as an outline for your presentation, but rather as a way to help you better understand and communicate the artist God calls you to be. Remember, **you do not need to answer all of these questions in your presentation. Pick and choose the ones that you'd like to share with us.**

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- Who are you?
- What do you do and why do you do it?
- Why are you a member of the Christian Artists Circle?
- What is your motivation for creating or performing?
- How does being an artist bring you closer to God?
- What kind of art moves you the most?
- Educational background/training
- Medium you work with or have worked with and why you chose it.
- How do you get through the dry times?
- What is most meaningful to you about the art you create?
- How does God work in your life through your art?
- Who and/or what inspires you?
- Do you have any special accomplishments that you would like to share with us?
- What challenges do you face and how do you overcome them?
- Are you looking for any advice/suggestions/recommended resources from the group?
- What are some of your short term and long term goals?
- Do you have a personal ministry verse (a biblical or inspirational verse that reflects your passion and/or giftedness)?
- Is your art a ministry? If so, how?

What to bring:

- Business cards, if you have some
- Samples of your work --in the order you will be talking about them.
- Verify if the venue will have any electronic equipment you might need (ie. TV, VCR/DVD player, boombox, slide projector,extension cords)
- A brief outline of what you would like to share.

Wrapping it Up

Ask the facilitator to have someone in the group keep track of time for you. If necessary, that person will let you know (with a hand signal) when there is 10 minutes left, then 2 minutes left so you can wrap things up.

At the end of your presentation, the facilitator will invite the group to respond to what they have just heard and seen. This feedback is very important for you, but it also helps the others think about the encouragement/inspiration they have received from your presentation, and how they, in turn, can be a blessing to you.

Scriptural Encouragement

Every person has some special creative abilities. While we are not all necessarily called to the artistic vocation--as writer, designer, dancer, architect, painter, musician, decorator, actor, photographer and so on --our unique talents are nonetheless intended to be used and developed to bless the lives of others.

- “God has given each of you some special abilities; be sure to use them to help each other, passing on to others God’s many kinds of blessings.” 1 Peter 4:10
- “All of you together are Christ’s body and each one of you is a separate and necessary part of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NLT)
- “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.” Jeremiah 1:5 (NCV)
- “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:1-4

God, the Master Artist, is the source of our inspiration, the giver and developer of our talent, and the provider of opportunities for us to use our talents.

- “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)
- “Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above.” James 1:17 (NASB)
- “Before I made you in your mother’s womb, I chose you. Before you were born, I set you apart for a special work.” Jeremiah 1:5
- “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6b

May we be committed to using and developing our talents to their fullest, and to living our life, as best we can, in a way consistent with God’s character and his Holy Word, that we may reflect the true, the good and the beautiful and thus point others towards him.

- “Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.” Ephesians 5:8b-9
- “As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more.” 2 Cor.3:18b (NLT)
- “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” Galatians 5:6 (NIV)
- “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.” Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

Yes, we are all imperfect! Thankfully, God loves to use imperfect ordinary people to do extraordinary things in spite of their weaknesses (or lack of perceived abilities!) We know and trust that he equips us with all we need for doing what he calls us to do.

- “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Ephesians 6:10
- “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6b
- “My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9a (NIV)

From One Artist to Another

The following letter of encouragement is written by my friend Sue Schalestock, who started a Christian artist fellowship group in Manassas, Virginia, and who served as its coordinator for a year and a half.

Dear Fellow Artist,

It is my wish to encourage you in your walk with your Christian artist group, whether you are just starting one or find yourself at low tide in your experience trying to keep it going.

I could probably have taken first place for the title “least likely to start a group”. For me, it was being in the right place in God’s time and being willing to say “yes” that put me in the position of leadership in our group. Our numbers have been small, but growing over the past year and a half. What I have seen is that the Lord always meets us there -- whether there are two of us or eight. Don’t consider the number of attendees the measure of success. Sometimes a small group allows for more intimate sharing. Sometimes it’s just what someone in the group needs. The number of people is not nearly as important as the fact that you are meeting, asking the Lord to be with you and sharing your journey. Continue to seek Him and be consistent in holding your meetings.

There are two important things I’ve learned over the past year and a half that may help you. The first is that two are better than one in sharing the responsibility of leadership. It helps prevent burnout and gives you someone else to bounce ideas off of. You can lift one another up as you walk. The second is the importance of spending time praying, asking the Lord to guide your meetings and taking the time to pray for each other’s specific needs. This simple act of sharing our needs and praying for each other enables people to be more real. It often forges a bond that goes much deeper than you could form any other way. The Lord will often remind you of another’s prayer request between meetings which allows you to continue to lift the need up before the Lord. It is a wonderful way to connect with your brothers and sisters, and to encourage them by seeing God meet their needs.

Sharing one another’s art is stimulating and inspiring, even across the mediums. Seeing what the Lord is doing in and through others can lead you down new paths you may not have considered or just give you a fresh perspective and enthusiasm for your own work. In our group, we have not only shared art in progress, but we have taken turns leading discussions pertaining to topics that affect us all as Christians in the arts. It helps us to see we are not on this journey alone and that God is moving in the arts.

I am excited and encouraged that the Lord is speaking to so many artists in this day and is showing us our need to relate to one another. May He bless you and those who will share your journey as you seek Him and what He has for you and the talent He has given you. May it all be to the glory of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Many blessings,

Sue Schalestock