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Welcome Letter

from Pastor Kory



Waite Park
WESLEYAN CHURCH

Hey Small Group Leader,

I'm so glad you have decided to lead a small group this year. Your role as small group leader is critical to the effectiveness of our ministry. Small groups change lives by providing a space for people to develop spiritual friendships, be shaped by Scripture and serve the people around us. This year, these are the challenges I have for you and your group.

Spiritual Friendships

In a society that seems designed to separate people, small groups can be a place of belonging. For long-time members and attenders, it can be the family within a family where they share their questions, hopes, struggles and moments to celebrate. But they are also the way to draw in people on the margins. Over the last year, through our study of Luke and Acts, we've seen how important this is to God. So, continue to encourage your people to actively support and celebrate each other, but also build a culture of inviting people in. Make it a habit to notice new people and actively invite them into community.

Shaped by Scripture

We are people of the Word. I don't know many Christians who do not like to study the Bible. However, few are really *shaped* by the Bible. Most simply live how they want to live, but add a Christian veneer to it. For some, it goes deeper, but how many really live differently than the world because of their love of and obedience to Scripture. This year, we want to study the Word, but we also want to develop regular practices that will train us to live more like Jesus. When you lead a study, do not allow it simply to be an interesting discussion. Drill down into how what you learn will change how we live as believers.

Serve those Around Us

Another thing we've learned through our study of Luke is God's emphasis on ministries of mercy. How is your group being intentional about serving people in need? It's natural for us to notice people within our group or to help family, but I encourage you to keep ministries of mercy as a live conversation in your group time. Who do you see in need? How could you support them? Is there a particular ministry organization you could support with your time or money? Make this an active and practical part of your group discussions.

What I've found in my years of ministry is that when a leader is passive or just "wings it," the group struggles and people find little value. But when the leader is intentional and engaged, the group thrives. Of course, you don't have to do it alone. Delegate tasks, ask for help, train up other leaders. But ultimately, how much you put into that leadership will determine the effectiveness of your group.

Thanks, once again! I know life is busy. But the investment you are making in your group is of eternal value. What could be more important and rewarding than that!

Have a great year!

Pastor Kory

Vision of Waite Park Church Small Groups

Strive to be a community to love and grow together where we learn to live out love for God and others.

Mission of Small Groups

Our Small Group ministry exists to build up lay leaders who create small communities where participants live out the gospel through regular meetings centered on loving one another and growing for the sake of the world.

Core Values of Small Groups

L O V E

The greatest commandment is to love God and others. When our identity is grounded in these loving relationships, our lives can exhibit the life and love received in these relationships. Our ministry strives to be a place where all are loved well.

G R O W T H

Our desire to grow flows from our desire to love well. As leaders, we want to encourage and guide our groups to seek God with all our hearts and walk out our faith. The only way to truly accomplish this is through love. This core value cannot be separated from love without getting off track. Believers should be growing in our personal spiritual walk as well as our relationships with others. We also want to grow by inviting others into our group in addition to helping future leaders develop their gifts.

Why Small Groups

Oftentimes people will question the necessity of small groups. While the argument can be made that even Jesus had a small group, we all recognize that how Jesus and the disciples shared life was a lot different than what most small groups experience. If I have strong spiritual friendships and have people in my life who care about me and will support me when I need it, do I need a small group?

While the quickest answer to that question is “no” the fact remains that small group ministry is the best framework for growing in and living out the Bible’s expectations for Christian Community. Here’s Why:

Need to Know, Need to Grow Moments

Discipleship classes and most curriculums tend to be linear in design. “Ordo Salutis” is a fancy phrase that theologians use for discussing the Order of Salvation (how things ought to happen for a sinner to come to Christ). “Via Salutis” is a fancy phrase used to discuss the Way of Salvation... the way things happen. The way things happen tends to be a lot messier and more complicated than we’d like it to be. One is a textbook experience and the other is real life. One looks more like a line graph and the other can look more like a plate of spaghetti.

Small groups do discipleship more in line with the Way of Salvation. Every believer has “Need to Know” And “Need to Grow” moments. Something that Larry Osbourne talks about in his book, "Sticky Church." When a believer needs to know something (a Jehovah's Witness comes knocking at the door, they're considering baptism, a friend is asking theological questions) they're needing to know the moment. When a believer needs to grow (they realize they're struggling with sin, a boss is being overbearing, a neighbor is gossiping, their marriage is headed for crisis) they're having a need to grow moment. During either of these moments a believer doesn't open up their Discipleship 101 binder and go to the table of contents to see if the question was already answered in some class they took 5 years ago. What do they do? They reach out to a friend. They go to the community. They call their spiritual mentors.

Small group lets someone know: We're here for your “need to know” and “need to grow moments.”

Love

Love is a central theme in Scripture. God is described as love. The greatest commandments are loving God and our neighbor [Mark 12:28-31]. In 1 Corinthians 13 starts by reminding us to keep love as our central motivation in how we live. When we look to build and sustain our small group communities, let's keep these pillars of the community from *The Other Half of Church* as our guide:

1. Love

Lamentations 3:22 says, "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases." This verse reminds of his constant nature of love in 1 John 4:7. In Romans 8:37-39, the power of God's love cannot be separated from His people. As a community of believers, living out this love invites people to grow and deepen in their faith journey and identity. Jim Wilder says, "Our brains draw life from our strongest relational attachments to grow our character and develop our identity. Who we love shapes who we are." As we invest in our groups, how can we demonstrate and guide our groups towards this picture of steadfast love for God and others?

2. Joy

The fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:23-24 begins with love and joy. These traits are foundational in forming our identity and relationships. Wilder says, "Our identity is built and formed by joy-bonded relationships. The identity center in our brain grows in response to joy, which helps us act like ourselves in all situations." One key practice to build joy is gratitude. As we serve and invest in our groups, what are ways that we can demonstrate gratitude? When we show appreciation, we affirm the relationship and demonstrate the importance of having their friendship.

3. Group Identity

As Christians, we choose to be part of his body to reflect Jesus in the world around us. Colossians 3:12-13 speaks to this identity provides how these people live. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Let's use these verses to guide our lives and how we identify ourselves as Small Group Leaders this year.

4. Correction

Once we have built a healthy comradery within our group, we can find ways to lovingly encourage others and remind them to live out our identity. Wilder points to the heart of healthy correction. "Healthy correction is always an invitation to return to our true identity and start acting like ourselves again," he says. As we walk through our leader meetings, we will discuss more how to correct. As we walk through our groups, let's focus on building the foundation of love and joy through the Colossians 3:12-13 passage.

Growth

Life can become going through the motions. Creating and tackling a to-do list or responding to the next urgent item. As Christians, Scripture reminds us of a rich and rewarding life invested in the priorities that matter most. One Scripture passage uses the imagery of a tree to explain the abundant life Jesus came to provide.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 says, ⁷ "But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

How do we move beyond the grind into this life? Through growth and relationships. We are not meant to walk through life alone.

When the famous evangelist George Whitfield was coming to the end of his life, he considered the work he had done, his labor, and the fruit it produced. It didn't take him long to say that his "people" were "a rope of sand" compared to those who came to Christ through the ministry of John Wesley. What did he attribute the lifelong faith of Wesley's converts to? Small Groups!

Pastor Joel Comiskey once observed that "John Wesley wasn't persuaded that someone had made a decision for Christ until that person became involved in a small group."

The two main ingredients of Wesley's small groups are something we'll hear often. These groups were committed to acknowledging their brokenness and lovingly examining one another. They recognized and confessed their sin and they asked pointed questions and wanted to be held accountable.

Everyone Brings Something to The Table

1 Corinthians 14:26 is probably the most compelling small group ministry passage:

²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

Paul's picture of the Church is that when they gather, everyone brings something to the table. Everyone contributes. Some bring a hymn, some bring instruction, some bring insight or a revelation, some bring a tongue, some bring an interpretation. Paul says that each of them has something. Paul's not picturing a Sunday morning worship service and he's not picturing a group of tightly knit friends hanging out. What he's picturing looks more like a small group where each member has taken it upon themselves to be an integral part of the group. Try to do this on Sunday morning and there just wouldn't be enough time for 100 people to each share something. This can only be done in small groups.

Given to Give

Scripture is clear that nearly all spiritual gifts are for others, not for ourselves but 1 Peter 4:10 provides the most persuasive wording on the matter:

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Peter says that we are faithful stewards of God's grace and that the gifts we've received ought to be used to serve others. Another way to understand that is this: God has given you grace for the express purpose that you might share it with others. In other words, by not participating fully in Christian Community, other Christians miss out on the grace that you would've brought. You are so empowered and dignified that you can withhold God's grace from people.

How New Small Groups Start, Grow, Maintain, & Succeed

Small Group On Ramps

Small group on-ramps are simply – how people join small groups and get connected to small groups. The following is a list of how our church plans to intentionally build on-ramps to small groups.

- **Personal Invitations**
Small group members and leaders are encouraged to bring their friends to small groups.
- **Small Group Fair/Station**
There will be a station in the lobby of the church in which those interested can sign up to be on a small group. This will be followed up by email, phone call, or an in-person meeting with the small group pastor to see which group would be a good fit for them.
- **Online Inquiry**
Potential participants may find out more about small groups from our website and connect via email.
- **Baptism or Membership**
Small groups are a big part of what we do at Waite Park Church and sharing that during our Baptism or Membership class can help encourage new people to find a community where they can grow in their faith.
- **Highlighting from the pulpit**
Because Sunday morning preaching is an opportunity for a community to hear from God and because most of our community is involved in small groups, it makes sense for us to address, encourage, and promote group life from the pulpit from time to time.

Community Group Off-Ramps

Before every summer break, individuals will be given a small group survey. They'll give feedback about their experience and will also have the opportunity to decide their future involvement.

They'll have three choices:

- a) I want to continue with my small group
- b) I'd like to try another small group
- c) I'd like to take a break from small groups.

This creates a simple design for members to exit without hurting feelings, awkwardness or feeling like they're pressured to stay. It also helps for people to not make excuses week after week for months at a time (trust me, no one likes that guy and now you don't have to be that guy). To avoid the awkwardness of having to hunt people down for responses we'll assume that a non-response means participants are planning to continue.

Who Leads Small Groups

Small groups will be led by anyone:

- 1) with a desire to lead small groups
- 2) who professes faith in Jesus Christ
- 3) who has approval from the Church based on that individual's personality & giftings
- 4) has good standing in the community.
- 5) exhibits a transformed life free from willful persistent sin
- 6) upholds and submits to the teachings of our faith community

Growing as Shepherds

Our small groups have become communities that support and encourage one another. We walk through life together. As we pursue groups where people are growing, the leaders' role shifts to become more like a shepherd. The values we embrace as shepherds that arose from our study of Scripture are:

- **Gathering**

Good shepherds gather their sheep. How we incorporate people to gather is by building community and inviting people into a community. Our focus on building community will be in practicing joy and love as foundations to create an atmosphere of belonging. Belonging provides a place for vulnerability and growth within these relationships. The other aspect is desiring the benefits gained in the community for others within our church family.

Our purpose in being together is to encourage one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

- **Guiding**

Dr. Henry Cloud wanted to become a professional golfer. He played through an injury until one day he realized that he would not be able to reach his dream. This season of discovering a new plan and purpose in his life started in depression. A couple let him come live with them where

they helped him grow in his faith. Cloud realized that God's primary plan for growth was in relationships with other believers.

Our role as leaders is to love our people and guide and encourage them in growing deeper in their faith. John 10:2-4 eloquently paints the loving picture of being guided by a shepherd. It says, "The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice."

- **Granting Grace**

Being a Small Group leader is not for the faint of heart. Loving and helping people grow is messy. How we lead and serve our groups is close to God's heart for people. Finding ways to show grace as people share weakness and failure. Being models of failure and combating the idea of having it all together.

In Romans 2:1-4, God walks in kindness as He waits for us to change. It says, "If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do. ² God judges those who do wrong things, and we know that his judging is right. ³ You judge those who do wrong, but you do wrong yourselves. Do you think you will be able to escape the judgment of God? ⁴ He has been very kind and patient, waiting for you to change, but you think nothing of his kindness. Perhaps you do not understand that God is kind to you so you will change your hearts and lives."

Leader Gatherings

We don't just want to empower our small group leaders. We also want to equip our leaders and not just for the sake of your small group but also for your personal relationship with God which comes before all else. Here's our plan:

- Training, Retreat, Celebration

We'll train at the beginning of the year, have a day retreat in the winter, and have a celebration right before Summer.

Training: Thursday, August 18th

Retreat: Saturday, January 14th

Celebration: Sunday, June 4th

- Huddles (three times during the school year)

Leaders will break into two groups and meet every other month (typically on the second Sunday of the month at 7 pm in the Office). The purpose of this meeting is to share, encourage, and pray together. This meeting will have three components:

(1) Celebrating WINS

Share areas where your group has seen wholeheartedness, increase, next steps, and serving. Taking time to remember the ways that God has showed up in our groups.

(2) Collaborate

Share ideas or challenging situations to seek feedback and insights from the other leaders on how to take the next steps and encourage one another.

(3) Prayer

Spend time in prayer together. Shepherding people well cannot be done in our strength. We want to seek God to move in our people helping us grow as we follow Him.

- Coaching (four times during the school year)
Each group is unique. The groups have different needs and are in different places spiritually and in building into the group. The coaching will be time to encourage and support you equipping your group to take steps of faith.
- Resources
The Small Group Leaders page has been re-designed to equip leaders with resources covering all the values laid out in the Health Check. Please use these as you shepherd your group to grow.

Measuring What Matters

Rick Howerton once said that “Great small groups celebrate success, suffer with one another, and expect God to do more than they can do themselves.” That sounds like a good group of friends doesn’t it?

Sometimes we'll hear feedback from someone that their small group seems somewhat directionless. They'll say something like, "We just get together and talk but there doesn't seem to be any real point to it." This is sometimes a legitimate critique BUT it also could be an issue of not knowing how to properly identify when your small group is winning and when it isn't.

Knowing your wins is incredibly important as a small group leader because it helps you know whether or not you're being effective with your time.

The Small Group Health Check empowers and encourages our leaders to guide the groups in growth that is best suited for the group's needs and faith journey together. The group can take ownership of its development. As the year progresses, they will be able to see their growth progress. The values that we want to invest in and cultivate within our groups are:

Cultivating Community: Reflecting on the group connection and comfort level in being vulnerable with one another.

Engaging in Scripture: Reflecting on the group's engagement in Scripture together and personally. We believe growing in our understanding of Scripture is crucial to fulfilling our purpose as God's people.

Practicing Prayer: Reflecting on how the groups are practicing prayer. Encouraging groups to see and celebrate how God is answering their prayers.

Serving: Our faith needs to be put into action to fully mature. Each group strives to serve each other in the rollercoaster seasons of life. Each group seeks to make an impact outside our church to contribute to the flourishing of others.

Leadership Development: Developing leaders provides opportunities to empower those around us to be an important part of the ministry God is accomplishing in our church family, and beyond.

Group Growth: Personal invitations have always been the best way to engage people in groups. Measuring through numbers is one indicator of the group's health and our ministry.

The reason we do so is so that we can pursue a purposefully effective small group ministry. We want to make sure that we're using our time wisely. Imagine if we're able to say at the end of the year share how each group grew. More importantly, the group would see how God has moved powerfully through their group and their own lives. Now we're able to see (as a church and as individuals) the difference that small group ministry makes in our life. Through this, we also encourage accountability and loving examination.

Guide to Gathering

As we walk out being shepherds in our groups, consider ways to invite people to take ownership in your group. One model of small group ministry encouraged everyone to have a role. Let's invite and challenge people to contribute by planning rec nights, organizing service projects, bringing snacks, or leading the discussions are a few ways that others can invest in one another.

We don't cap the number of small group participants that each small group can have but we do want to suggest a healthy number to aim for – 10. In our previous years of experience we've

found that groups over 10 often have group members who feel on the fringe start to come occasionally, aren't pursued by other members, and don't care to let people know when they will or won't be coming. These fringe members also tend to not invest in the group when they do show up.

The model for groups to eliminate members moving to the fringe and avoid a potentially unhealthy split is through subgrouping. With this model, groups can start together and have time to connect by sharing about the previous week. The group breaks into smaller groups for different sections of the meeting. A valuable benefit to this model, it allows for smaller opportunities for people to lead various aspects of the meeting. These potential leaders can learn through experience and gain confidence in navigating the challenges that can arise in discussions.

Here are three ways to practice subgrouping:

1. Sentence – In your discussion, identify a question or sentence that the group would benefit from digging deeper that week. Ask a potential leader to lead the other subgroup in discussing the question. The question could be how to apply a Scripture passage.
2. Section – Another way to subgroup is to break up for a section of the meeting. What are the different sections where there are natural transitions in your meeting? Prayer is a section where the group separates to spend time praying for one another. Prayer is a powerful way to support and care for each other. Another idea when a section could break apart would be to have accountability once a month. The groups would separate by gender to share victories in walking out faith and obstacles or temptations in life.
3. Study – The study time of our small groups is the opportunity where every person can contribute to the group through sharing. Utilizing subgroups for this part of the meeting makes it easier for the quieter members of the group to feel comfortable to share.

Take time to pray and consider who to invite and how to lead parts of your meeting. The benefits of incorporating one of these methods include developing leaders, creating opportunities for ownership in your group, changing the group meeting structure occasionally keeps people engaged, and our leaders get a break to be part of the group.

Rhythms of Small Group Ministry

WPC Small Groups will go through 3 primary seasons of varying intensity: Focus, Study, & Rest.

1. Focus

Twice a year all small groups at Waite Park Church will be studying the same topic together which will be dictated by our sermon series. This will usually take place in September or October and in January. We generally print a booklet for every individual in our church to guide us in engaging in the focus at a deeper level. This is more than just sharing a common theme – it's the pursuit of God's will for our church together. In Revelation Jesus writes a letter to each of the 7 churches and in his letters, He identifies what that Church does well, what it does poorly, and what it needs to do to change. We believe Focus seasons help us to ask Jesus how we're doing as a church and to identify the things we need to do to change.

2. Study

If the Focus season is the church's chance to grow how God would have us grow, then the Study season is the small group's chance to do the same. The small group can choose to read a passage of scripture and discuss it, they can choose to do a book study (from a list of suggested resources or their research), or they can choose to do a video study. During this time small groups will be doing separate studies from one another. Small Groups should be encouraged during this time to consider what areas of their spiritual life need more attention. For example, if your entire group is lousy at evangelism or doesn't have a heart for the lost, you might strongly consider finding a study to address that rather than doing things that interest or appeal to the small group. Groups don't need to meet weekly during a Study season.

3. Rest

We rest during December (For Christmas and New Year's) and the summer months. There's two primary reasons that we "Rest."

- **To appreciate variety and rest.**

Have you ever played a game or sung a song or went somewhere you loved and you ended up doing it a bit too long and it became... tiresome? Or perhaps you've played a game, sung a song, or went somewhere you loved and it ended a little too short and left you wanting more? We'd love to leave people wanting more rather than leave them

feeling exhausted and never wanting to come back. Rest is a godly discipline. Some of us are too good at it but the majority of us probably struggle with the idea of taking a break. You have our permission. Rest.

Days of Service and Rec

As we pursue growth for our groups, there are a couple of aspects of building a community where the leaders can incorporate them into meetings at their discretion based on the needs of the group.

Rec

Rec is not new to the rhythm of our groups. Plan nights where your group does fun activities together maybe a game night or BBQ. Let others in your group plan these activities, so you are not leading all the time. Laughing, having fun, and enjoying food are wonderful ways to build community within your groups.

Service

Our groups have built a solid foundation of community and in many cases solid understanding of our faith. The harder task is living out the principles seen in Scripture, like in Mark 10:43b-45, "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many." Leaders will work within the groups interests and schedules to identify an organization to serve. Coordinating these service opportunities would be a good place to have others in your group contribute in serving each other.

We believe leaders and their small groups are the best people for knowing when the group needs to do something recreational and when it needs to rest.

In an article in the summer 2014 issue of *Facts & Trends*, senior writer Bob Smietana wrote the following about LifeWay Research's findings on the spiritual effect of small groups.

Sixty-three percent of regular group attendees say they intentionally spend time with other believers to help them grow in their faith. Only 22 percent of those not in a group say the same. And 73 percent of group attendees say they are intentionally putting their spiritual gifts to use serving God and others, compared to 42 percent of non-attenders.

Churchgoers who belong to a group are more likely to go to church at least four times a month (79 percent), and to read the Bible daily (28 percent).

Being in a group also impacts people's daily lives. Group members feel closer to God (69 percent), understand the Bible better (74 percent), trust God more (66 percent), and become more loving in their relationships (48 percent).

"God has supernaturally ordained community to sanctify His people," writes Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger in their book Transformational Groups. "In other words, groups provide environments for people to grow in Christ. A call to discipleship and spiritual maturity is a call to biblical community."

No matter how you define groups—life groups, Sunday school, discipleship classes, or Bible study fellowships—the importance is the same, the authors say. You cannot make disciples apart from the community. Although groups are not the only place transformation happens, the authors are convinced it is the primary place.

How to Kickoff Your First Meeting

Your first small group meeting is important. It sets the tone for the year and teaches your people what to expect and what to hope for. We're going to do our best to make sure that you have everything you need for your first small group meeting is the best it can be.

From Now Until Your First Meeting:

Pray & Recruit

Pray for your small group. Pray for the individuals who are planning on coming. Pray for those who are on the fence about coming. Pray for those who haven't responded. Pray for those who aren't planning on coming. Pray for yourself. Pray that the Holy Spirit would empower all that you do and that ultimately lives would be changed through His grace and His power.

The Week Before You Meet:

Reminders

During the days leading up to your meeting, you'll want to remind your people that you're meeting. Give them the time and date. Make it super easy for them to find your house. Take out as much anxiety as possible. Some people put a sign on their lawn that says "small group" with balloons attached to it for visibility. Others take a picture of their home and send it to their people so that no one has to worry about knocking on the wrong door or not being able to find the house.

Answer Questions

Consider sending out a group email the day before you meet. Work towards alleviating common fears and points of anxiety and make it easy for people to find and enter your house. Here are some questions to help you get started.

- Will there be pets?
- Do I ring the doorbell or just walk in?
- Will I have to pray out loud?
- Do I need to bring a Bible? A journal?
- What door should I go through?
- Do I have to take my shoes off at the door?

The Day You Meet:

Clean, Set Up, Plan

Don't wait to prepare and set up right before small group. You don't want to be frantic or stressed while also trying to welcome people and be hospitable. Your small group meeting is a time to be people-oriented, not task-oriented. If you don't have time after work to prepare, then set up as much as you can in the morning before work or even the night before you meet.

- Make sure there is enough seating for everyone
- Clean the house if you need to but it doesn't have to look like a museum. You are sharing life together, after all.
- Clean the bathroom if it needs it.
- Turn on plenty of lights, especially outside, in the entryway, and in the meeting room.
- Run through the night in your head. What supplies will you need? Where can you put things so that they'll be easily accessible?
- What do you plan on doing with your pets?
- Consider having music in the background while people are arriving.

A note about cleaning: People feel more at home and more at ease when your home doesn't look like something out of a catalog. You're not hosting Royalty – you're getting together with friends. Don't let the "prep work" of getting your house ready burn you out – your ministry is far too important.

As Group Members Arrive:

Greeter

Whether it's you, the host, or a particularly warm and inviting person, consider having someone at the door who will focus on greeting people, introducing themselves, and welcoming guests into your home. Stationing someone at the door allows everyone to chat and mingle without having to constantly go to the door when someone knocks or rings the doorbell.

During Your Meeting:

The first meeting you have probably won't look like the deeply spiritual small group of your dreams. That's something that will take time, patience, and grace. For now, just focus on getting off to a great start and don't take anything for granted. Enjoy every moment. This could be the beginning of a Spirit-filled community sharing life and love.

Start and End On Time

Let groups know that you value their time by starting when you're supposed to and ending when you're supposed to. After the discussion is over, close in prayer, and let your people know that small group is officially over. Optionally, you can invite them to stay longer if they want to.

Agenda

The agenda for your first meeting will be different from the rest.

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 20
minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Spend time hanging out, waiting for everyone to get there.▪ As people come in, tell them to help themselves with snacks or beverages.▪ Once everyone has arrived officially welcome everyone to your very first small group meeting. |
| 10
minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Go over the Small Group Guidelines Agreement (5 min)▪ Ask people how they feel about the guidelines and whether they'd like to change or add anything. You have our permission to make it your own. (5 min) |
| 20
minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Go over the Small Group Health Check (5 min)▪ Ask people how they would like to grow over the year. Ask people how they would they like the group to grow this year. Ask for ideas on how the group could approach growing together. (15 min) |
| 20
minutes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Spend time in prayer together. It is easy to spend all this time sharing prayer requests. Limit the sharing to make room for being in prayer together.▪ Let people know that group is officially over, let them know you're looking forward to seeing them next week, and invite them to stay later if they want to continue to hang out and don't have anywhere, they need to be. |

In the future, discussion time will be longer and most group meetings will probably be 1.5 to 2 hours long. Knowing that, do your best to read the room and don't rush the agenda. Because this first meeting is focused more on getting to know each other and less on getting to know the Bible, make sure your snack and beverage game is on point.

Right After Your Meeting:

Follow Up

If you committed to follow-up with someone or get back to them about how they were interpreting a particular verse, be sure to make a note of it because once work starts the next day, you may forget all about it.

Debrief

One of my favorite things to do with my leaders after an event is to debrief with them. What went well, what didn't go well, what should we do differently in the future? If a few people stay behind to help clean up, if you and your spouse are leading together, or if you've got some co-leaders, take the time to debrief with one another.

The Next Few Days:

Contact

After the meeting is over, keep the ball rolling. You've got good momentum, don't lose it. Contact your people, thank them for coming, or let them know you missed them if they weren't able to make it.

One way to do all of this quickly and effectively in the future is to send out an email with people's prayer requests that were made in your previous meeting. You won't take prayer requests during your first meeting so you won't be able to do that, but keep it in mind for the future.

Pursue

Friend request your new members on social media, send them texts, emails, or phone calls. Most importantly, seriously, continue to pray for your group and your own spiritual health and development as you lead God's small group.

How to Facilitate Well

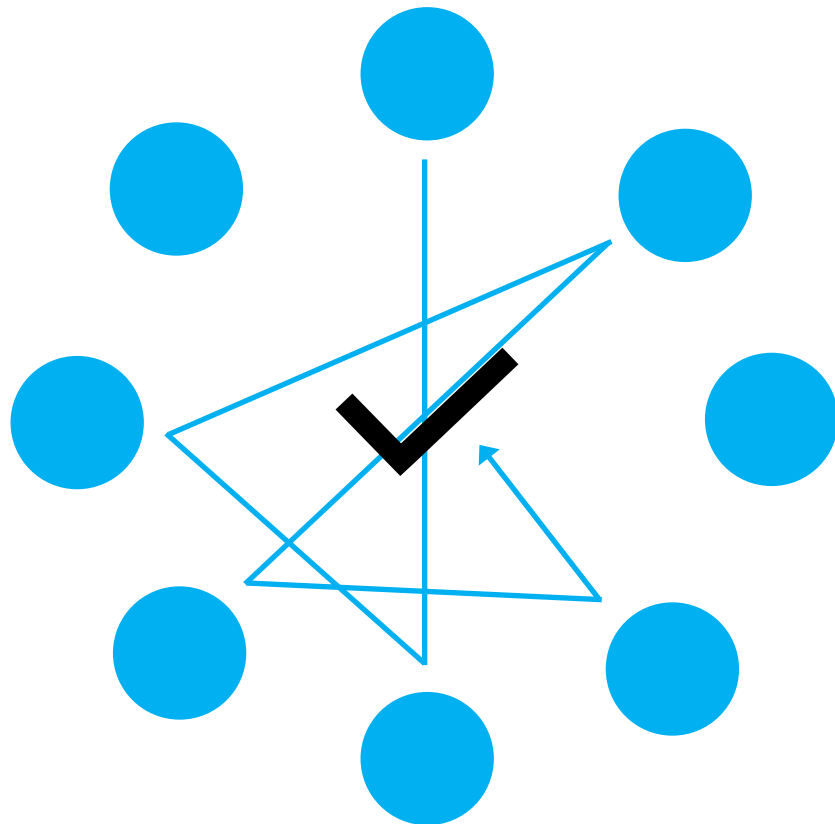
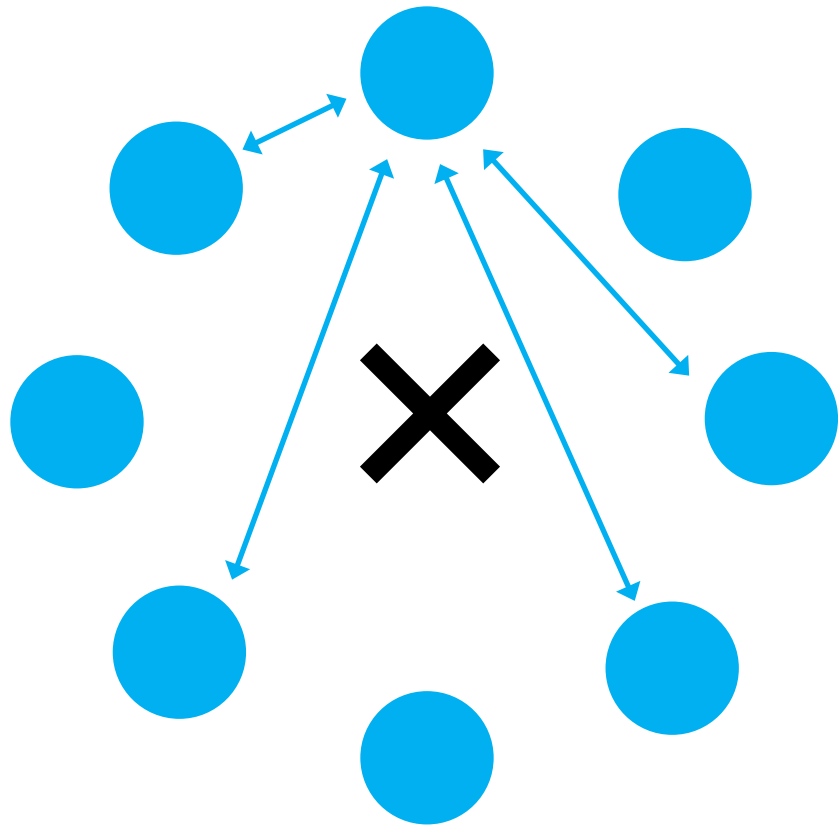
Be Okay With Not Knowing All the Answers

Our small groups aren't classes. Great teachers usually resort to teaching during small groups. We don't want our leaders to teach, we want them to facilitate. So if you do know all of the answers, try to keep your mouth shut.

Sometimes it's best not to have all the answers. For one thing, I trust that God knows our small groups and cares about our members - if He wanted a question answered during small group time then He could prepare us for that question ahead of time. It does happen. There are plenty of times when someone will say, "I was just reading about that!" Or there may come a time when an answer comes to your mind even though you'd never really considered it before. However, I believe there will also be plenty of times when an answer can do more harm than good. Sometimes I think God wants people to wrestle with Him on certain issues. It's part of our growth journey. When we have stock answers for people's questions (and we don't let them wrestle with God) it can often be like sewing up a festering wound. On the outside, things seem fine but on the inside, the infection is spreading.

What to do when you don't have the answer:

- 1) Encourage other group members to chime in. In a small group, people shouldn't be responding to your discussion questions by looking at you and talking to you, they should be looking at each other and talking to each other. So if someone asks you a question, redirect it.
- 2) Write the question down and agree to find out the answer together after the group. You can research home after the group or you could also email the Small Group Director at Waite Park Church.
- 3) Don't pretend to know the answer and don't pretend that the answer can't be known. "Oh, I know I know it, but I just can't recall." Or, "That's just one of those questions that are unanswerable. That's when we need faith." Often we are tempted to hit the "mystery" button too soon. The depths of Christian doctrine and tradition are rich. Chances are, you're not the first person asking and chances are, there are plenty of answers out there.



Be Okay With Silence

Some people love silence and some people can't stand it. Maybe you're one of those people who can't fall asleep without some sort of white noise in the background. Regardless of personality or preferences, every small group leader needs to learn to embrace silence.

Allow for Silence:

Guess what: silence is your friend. If you're okay with silence then your group will be okay with silence too. They'll know it's nothing to worry about. It's natural and it's good at times. If you're uncomfortable with silence then it will make others uncomfortable with it too and they'll think they're doing something wrong. They're not.

Give People Time to Process

When you ask a question and no one responds, it's because people are thinking. It's because people aren't firing from the hip or giving you scripted responses. They're considering what you said and formulating an answer. It takes time for people to process your question and it takes time for them to consider their answer and it takes time for them to consider how they want to best articulate their answer. It can take between 1-10 seconds for someone to do this.

Ask the Question Again in a Different Way

After you ask a question and give plenty of time to respond if they still haven't responded then ask the question in a different way to help your people formulate their thoughts and to give them even more time to think.

Another thing that you could do is ask your small group why it is that they're struggling to answer the question. Something like, "We're not as responsive as usual to this question, why do you think that is?" That will get them talking about the question without actually feeling like they need to have an answer for the question itself.

Resist the Urge to Answer the Question

Whatever you do, don't feel like you need to answer the question. It's not what you're here for. If you feel like every question needs an answer then you're ultimately saying two things: 1) This is a class with right and wrong answers and 2) I'm the teacher with the right answers.

Move On

It's totally fine to move on from a question that isn't working for your group. Allow for silence. Give people time to process questions and formulate responses. Ask the question differently. If all else fails, move on.

Be Okay With Giving Direction

Know When to Go First

Hey, you're the leader and as leaders, there are times when we go first. Did a question ask the group to get vulnerable and go a little deeper? This might be a great time for you to go first. Was a question kind of cumbersome and difficult to answer? Admit that and then give your best shot at answering. You have to be willing to take risks, put yourself out there, and say things that might be wrong. You're not the teacher, you're the facilitator and it has to be okay for you and others to get it wrong sometimes.

Know When to Ask Someone To Hold Their Answers

If you have 10 people in your group and every person takes 5 minutes to answer one question, that's almost an hour's worth of discussion. Woah. At the same time, if you ask 10 questions and one person responds for 5 minutes to each question, he or she has just monopolized an hour's worth of your group's time together. That's not okay. It's your job as a facilitator to know when to say, "I love that you are participating so much, but I was hoping we might hear from some others in the group." After the group, pull this person to the side and let them know that you meant what you said – their participation is great, and you wish everyone were as open as they were.

Know When to Ask Others to Speak

On the flip side, there are going to be times when you'll want to hear from everyone or one person in particular. You could say, "I wonder if each of us could respond to this question in one or two sentences." If someone looks like they have something to say, you might say, "Hey Frank, you look like there's something on your mind... would you share it with us?" Or if you know someone well enough and are friends with them, you might say, "Hey Lindsey, we haven't heard from you in a while, care to share?" Some people have no idea when they're answering questions or not.

Know When to Reign in it

If Lindsey brings up "infant baptism" and it ignites into a debate, you might allow it to go on for a minute because it's good for group members to run with a topic and respond back and forth to one another but chances are your group hasn't met to figure out the doctrine of infant baptism. So kindly remind those who are carrying the conversation too far off course that you love that they're passionate but there's more to talk about tonight and maybe that conversation can happen after small group. BAM!

Know When to Correct

If Frank says to Lindsey, "Hey, that was the dumbest thing I've heard in a while." It might be a great opportunity to get out the Guidelines Agreement paper and have Frank sit in the corner and think about what he's said. In reality, when someone says something hurtful or unloving you might say something along the lines of, "Hey Frank, that was inappropriate and uncalled for, it's not helpful to our discussion and it's certainly not why we're here." Allow Frank to apologize and then move on. You might need to talk to Frank afterward and see where he's at.

Know When to Call for Back-Up

If someone's behavior is continually disruptive or unhealthy for your small group and you've tried addressing it, contact Pastor Keith or your coach and arrange a meeting. It's good to nip this sort of thing in the bud. Be sure to read through the "Extra Grace Required" portion of this handbook too.

Recap Don't Reframe

It's awesome when a facilitator says, "Hey, here's what I hear us saying." Or "So Frank says this, and Lindsey thought this..." Recapping is valuable. It says, "What we've discussed is important and I was paying attention." Don't reframe. When a facilitator says, "Frank said this and I think we can say it better by saying...." When you begin to end every discussion by reframing it, people will believe that there are "right" answers and when there are "right" answers then discussion stops. We aren't looking for yes or no or fill-in-the-blank responses. This isn't a test or a quiz but it's a discussion. Let's trust the Holy Spirit to be at work speaking in us, to us, and through us.

"Interestingly, individuals... often come to a small group for some time before they choose to follow Christ. Community precedes conversion. Belonging usually comes before belief." – Jim Egli

Conversation Dominators

One out of every two groups will draw someone that either dominates the conversation or dominates the energy, care, and needs of the group. Most conversation dominators simply need others to help them manage time and (unfortunately for Minnesotans) this means learning the art of interruption. Here are 10 tips. Feel free to use the ones that make the most sense for your context.

Pretalk action steps:

- Set Up Some Ground Rules Before Every Meeting. Even something as simple as “Let’s try to hear from everyone at least once today during our discussion.”
- Sit next to the conversation dominator. Many times people look for eye contact to get and receive permission to speak. When we sit next to someone we decrease the number of times that we’ll end up making eye contact with them.
- Write down the answers on a dry erase board. When you’re recording answers, people will often be more concise. This can’t work for every question but if there’s a moment for brainstorming it can certainly help keep answers shorter.

Non-verbal interrupters:

- Open your mouth. This simple and small gesture is often what we use when speaking face to face – when we make eye contact with someone and suddenly open our mouths we’re saying, “I’ve got something I’m about to say.”
- Raise your hand – indicating that you’d like to speak. This is my favorite. Raising your hand recognizes that you’re asking for permission to speak. Also, a raised hand is subconsciously the sign for “STOP.” It’s a gentle but effective way of taking back control.

Verbal Interrupter:

- **Permission** “Can I stop you for a moment – I think we need to hear from some others.”
- **Apologize** - “I’m sorry to interrupt but...”
- **Acknowledge** - “I know you have more to say but I think we need to make sure we have time for others to have a chance to respond.”
- **Compliment and steal** - I love that – great point and I wonder if we can hear from some other people
- **Summarize and proceed** – So, what I hear you saying is... does anyone else have anything to add to that?

Not a Support Group

When a group has a member that dominates the energy, care, needs, and time of the group – it can quickly kill a small group. How do we address this? We have several options. Sometimes some people aren't yet healthy enough to be a part of a small group and the best way to love them is to find the appropriate care for them until they can become healthy enough to be a part of a small group.

A word of caution: Your small group is here to care for one another. Don't be too quick to identify someone as "not healthy enough for a small group." We will all go through a crisis at some point in our life and sometimes a small group will have to rally around their wounded member for a season. That's life. That's love. Thank God for the men who rallied around me and poured into me during my time of need when I had very little to offer them.

That being said, some people have chronic crises in their lives or who are suffering from trauma or a disorder or illness that most small groups simply can't compensate for and offer effective care and community. Many megachurches will have specific care groups or support groups to refer such people too.

We're praying for support groups to happen at Waite Park Church but until that time – small group leaders will need to meet with coaches and pastoral staff to develop a game plan for each case. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is help people find a place where they can receive the help they need rather than keeping them at a place where they cause harm.

Don't make this decision on your own – meet with a coach and develop a competent, effective, and gracious plan together.

Additional Resources

Service Projects Ideas

When the disciples are working to solidify their authority, Jesus' response is a challenge to humble ourselves to become a servant. Serving the least of these is part of our calling as disciples of Jesus.

[Mark 10:43b-45 NLT] "Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant,⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first among you must be the slave of everyone else.⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Small Groups serving together provide accountability and comradery. We can accomplish more together. We know that we can have good intentions, but life gets busy. Serving as a group can help each other to be intentional to invest in the least of these in our communities where we can experience God's presence and fruit through our lives.

Groups will work within their interests and schedules to identify an organization to serve.

Coordinating these service opportunities would be a good place to have others in the group contribute to serve each other.

As a group take time to discuss how you can serve together.

1) How often can you serve?

- What about once a month?
- Would you be able to use your group meeting time to serve?
- If you are serving individually, how can you help encourage one another to serve consistently?

2) Who would be willing to coordinate and communicate with group on serving together?

3) Below is a list of opportunities to give you some options to consider.

⇒ **Together for Good**: creates pathways for the local church to come alongside vulnerable children and families in Christ-centered ministry.

- **Crisis Hosting**: Temporary hosting of vulnerable children to give parents a safe option during crisis.
- **Respite Care**: Respite care of children for moms in distress; a few hours weekly or one weekend per month.
- **Relational Support**: become a Mom's Advocate to walk with a mom and share your faith and hope with her.
- **Wrap-Around Care**: Provide rides for moms that need help getting to appointments, etc. support WPC host families with meals and prayer when they are hosting, other needs as requested by TFG.

⇒ **Arrive Ministries**:

- being English tutors through *Somali Adult Literacy Training* program

- supporting refugee family through *Refugee Life Ministries* program
- ⇒ **Freedom Works**: Christian community that transforms lives through personal accountability, service and fellowship through reconciliation to God, family, and the community.
- ⇒ **Building relationships with neighbors**
 - Here are a couple resources for guide and practical steps to engage in these relationships:
 - [*The Art of Neighboring*](#)
 - [*The Hopeful Neighborhood*](#)
 - [*I Once Was Lost*](#)
- ⇒ **Eastside Meals on Wheels**: They need volunteers to deliver meals Mon-Fri. The meals are ready for pick up at 11:15am at our Lincoln St entrance.
- ⇒ **Second Harvest** provides food to many of the food pantries in the city. They need volunteers to help pack the food being distributed. They have several shifts a day at multiple locations.
 - [Maplewood](#): morning and afternoon shifts
 - [Brooklyn Park](#): morning, afternoon, and evening shifts
- ⇒ **Salvation Army**: There are several ways to get involved with SA through food shelf, working with kids, or administrative opportunities.
- ⇒ **Feed My Starving Children**: pack meals shipped to different parts of the world. Most days has multiple shifts available throughout the day.

Soul Training Goals

We know that small groups are effective – statistics show that discipleship often happens BEST in small group communities. We want to be intentional about our time by identifying ways that each of us would like to grow. Over the course of the week consider prayerfully how you'd like to grow this small group year. Then write down your choices on the back. As a small group, we want to offer one another accountability and care as we move forward this year together. So be prepared to share your responses with the group or with your group leader. Feel free to make your own goals that may not be on the list below – use this list for inspiration.

*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, and with all your **soul**, and with all your **mind**, and with all your **strength**: this is the first commandment. ~Mark 12:30*

- **Heart (Holiness & Love for God)**
 - Overcome a habitual sin
 - Get an Accountability Partner
 - Address a character flaw
 - Forgive a past offense
 - Find healing for a past hurt
 - Selfcare & Sabbath Rest
 - To grow in zeal and desire for God

- **Soul (Worship)**
 - Develop a habit of regular prayer
 - Develop a habit of regular scripture reading
 - Implement regular family devotions
 - Develop a rule of life
 - Plan & Follow through with a spiritual fast
 - Attend Church regularly
 - Get Baptized

- **Mind (Knowledge of God)**
 - Memorize Scripture
 - Read through the Bible
 - Read more Christian books
 - Learn Theology

- **Strength (Evangelism/Outreach/Service)**
 - Share the gospel
 - Share your testimony
 - Bring someone to Christ

Small Group Flight Plan

First three months – TAKE OFF

September, October, November

1. Know members
2. Know Soul Training Goals & Strategy
3. Encourage Vulnerability
4. Identify gifts in members
5. Cast vision for multiplication & Identify potential leaders

Middle three months – FLIGHT

December, January, February

1. Care for Members
2. Implement and Assess Strategy for Soul Training Goals
3. Encourage loving examination
4. Equip and empower members
5. Talk about multiplication & Equip/empower leaders

Last three months – LANDING

March, April, May

1. Care for members
2. Highlight and celebrate wins and next steps (Soul Training Goals)
3. Encourage loving examination
4. Plan for Summer & Multiplication

A church must grow larger and smaller at the same time. Larger through worship and smaller through small groups. –Rick Warren

The first thing you must learn in order to avoid burnout as a small group leader is that God is the real leader and center of every Christian small group. –Michael C. Mack

After 25 years of leading small groups and coaching small group leaders, I have come to one clear conviction: prayer is the most important activity of the small group leader. – Dave Earley

Small Group Maturity Pathway

	Level 1 Group	Level 2 Group	Level 3 Group	Level 4 Group
Group Composition	Mostly new and nonbelievers or less available believers.	Mostly New believers (Beginning)	Mostly mature believers (Growing)	Whole and Holy Community (Loving)
Shared Leadership	Group is hosted by the leader who functions as an event planner.	Group is hosted by the leader and a few members contribute.	Group is hosted by the leader & most members contribute.	The majority of the members contribute as equals.
Focus of Group	Connection & Content	Connection, Content, Community.	Community, Sanctification & Evangelism	Community, Sanctification, Evangelism, & Sending
Accountability	No Accountability	Group accountability begins (How's your faith?)	Group Accountability and some have accountability partners	Group accountability and most have accountability partners
Vulnerability	Members aren't expected to acknowledge their brokenness	Members are encouraged to acknowledge their brokenness	Members are expected to acknowledge their brokenness	Members are used to acknowledging their brokenness
Living out the Values	Word and Friendship take place in group only	Word, Worship and Friendship take place in group only	Word, Worship, and Friendship take place outside of small group	Word, Worship, and friendship take place outside of small group
Commitment to Community	Small Group is Weekly Event Based and people come when they have time.	Small Group is Weekly Event Based and people make time for the group meeting.	Some of the small group members spend time together outside of the weekly group meeting.	"Small group" happens throughout the week and gathers once a week for the event.
Multiplication Vision	Launching a new group is not on the radar	Launching a new group is something to consider for the future	Launching a new group is a desire of members and leaders	We plan to launch a new group within a year.


Most Connect Groups

The 58 'one anothers' of the Bible- love one another, care for one another, help one another, encourage one another, serve one another, share with one another (etc.)- can only be done in a small group setting. –Rick Warren

The best tool I've ever seen for connecting people to one another and engaging them with the Bible for the long haul is a sermon-based small group. –Larry Osbourne

Group Stages

Forming

Group members are positive and polite, though some may feel anxious. In this stage, people make an effort to get to know each other.

Storming

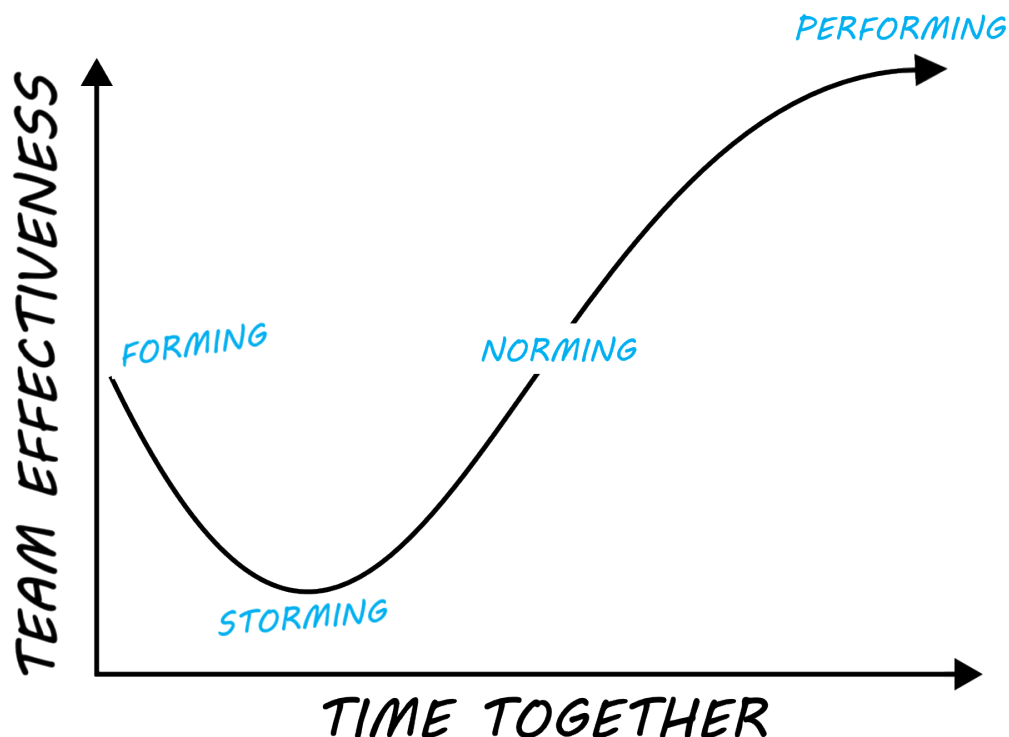
When the “honeymoon” phase is over, group members begin to show more of their true color. They grow comfortable enough that they may begin to push boundaries or identify weaknesses in the group. Members may begin to experience frustrations and conflict with one another's personality differences, approaches to faith, and vision for the community.

Norming

Towards the end of the storming stage, the group begins to resolve differences, build on one another's strengths, learn how to better operate with each other, and begin to see more clearly what their role may be in the small group.

Performing

The group, after overcoming their internal obstacles, are now able to divert more energy into pursuing their goals as a team.



Secret Ingredient to Group Health

“What does God want to do with this group?”

Deitrich Bonhoeffer in his book “Life Together” observed: “The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.”

In small group ministry we need to pay attention to two things simultaneously:

- 1) What are God’s expectations for Christian Community?
- 2) Who makes up my current community and what are healthy expectations for this particular group of people?

You could imagine the first as deeply theological and the second as deeply pastoral.

Focusing on the first question without the second creates a guilt-driven community which often leads to burnout and frustration as well as a lack of love and care.

Focusing on the second question without the first creates a consumer-driven program which often leads to boredom and apathy as well as a lack of commitment and direction.

In tandem, both questions help us to discern: What does God want to do with this group?

Moving our groups from point A (where they are) to point B (where God wants us) will never be as linear as we hope. The reason is that all of our groups are filled with people who will each go through their own individual unique sets of challenges, experiences, crises, and life changes. As group leaders then, our job is usually not about learning and applying the right techniques but rather something more akin to the philosophy of “adaptive leadership.” In adaptive leadership, we as a group and as individuals take on gradual change together by adapting ourselves according to our circumstances.

Scott Boren uses the analogy of tacking. Tacking is a sailing term that involves maneuvering a sailing vessel to progress in the desired direction regardless of which way the wind is blowing. This means embracing the idea that the path God takes us on will not always be straight and will not always feel like progress. Good leaders don't just know where they're going but they help their group to get there and know that deviations from the course are part of the journey.

Small Group Health Check

Our Small Groups provide a crucial opportunity to love, support, and encourage our church family towards flourishing. Please help us gauge how well our groups are growing by rating all the fields based on the scale listed below.

Scale Guide:

Non-Existent: not present pursuit of our group

Enduring: present in conversation, no progress seen or resistance encountered

Exploring: present in conversation, seen energy building around area or small steps of progress

Growing: tangible steps of progress seen, the area has been embraced or impacted the group

Flourishing: the area is regular practice within the group, become part of who we are

Cultivating Community

How well does your group connect with each other? When you are together, does the group feel comfortable sharing what is happening in their life?

Group Connection (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Engaging in Scripture

How receptive has your group been to studying Scripture together? Have you seen your group grow through Bible study? Have you seen indications that people spend time in the Word throughout the week?

Group Bible Study (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Personal Study (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Practicing Prayer

Prayer is a crucial practice in living as disciples. How well has your group engaged in prayer? How often have you seen God work through your group or personal prayers?

Group Time Prayer (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Overall Personal Prayer of the Group (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Serving

How well has your group served or cared for each other? How well has your group served others outside your group?

Serving One Another (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Serving Others (Outside the group) (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Leadership Development

How well have you been at identifying and developing the leaders in your group? How well have you been at asking people to take ownership in different aspects of leading the group?

Identification of Potential Leaders (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Providing Opportunities for Potential Leaders to Grow (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Group Growth

How has your group grown over the last year? Have you invited anyone to join your group?

Personal Invitations to Join Group (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

People Joined Group (Score on scale from Non-existent to Flourishing)

Small Group Planning

What values would you like to see your group grow? Why?

What goal empowers your group to grow in this value?

What does your group need to accomplish the goal or a next step? Here are some possible examples: training, modeling, inspiration, or accountability.

What do you desire or need to accomplish this growth goal or next step?

What are ways that people could help share the load in your group?

Below are possible roles. Brainstorm 1-2 people who could fill any of these roles.
Leading discussions – Having others lead the discussions provides growth opportunities and training to new potential leaders.

Prayer - Invite a person faithful in prayer to lead this portion of the meeting.

Service Project Coordinator - Serving is an essential part of living out and growing in our faith. The best way to keep this a focus is to identify a person to lead coordinating these projects.

Rec nights - A good rule of thumb would have 2-3 rec nights over the small group year.

Snack Rotation - Enjoying refreshments together builds relationships.
