



Small Group Leader Guide

Christ Church

*A leadership resource to help you
offer predictable and conversational environments that
help people deepen their love for God and others*

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Greetings!

The purpose of a small group at Christ Church is to help people love God and love others by creating a predictable and conversational environment that pursues Christ through authentic community. This Guide is designed to help your group grow and become familiar with Christ Church's approach to small groups.

Small Groups are an essential component in the process of Worship-Connect-Serve. Sometimes life will try to pull you away from nurturing these vital relationships, yet we know that you will be blessed by remaining in close fellowship!

Small Groups are marked by mutual learning, mutual care and mutual accountability. This Guide is designed to help your group grow even further and become familiar with Christ Church's approach to small groups.

I am confident that together you are exploring what it means to be involved in mutual learning, mutual care and mutual accountability. As you have gotten to know each other through sharing your stories, my prayer is that you have developed the kind of authentic community that is essential to group life.

We also know that the time will come to expand your spiritual network and gain a fresh perspective from a new group. If your group has been together for more than 18 months, you may want to consider adjourning at the end of this church "semester." Stay tuned for more information to come about a special group formation event called *iConnect* that will give you the opportunity to share your experience of group life with others as you join a new group!

Peace and grace,

Pam Charbonneau
Connections Discipleship Leader

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Tips on using this Guide

This guide has been designed for use by groups that contain people across the spiritual spectrum. The main goal of this guide is to lay the foundation for the authentic community that drives group life.

Before and/or in conjunction with diving right into your first study, we strongly encourage you to invest in forming and strengthening the relationships among your Small Group body. This guide is broken up into five “conversations” that will help your group become acquainted and aligned on a spiritual as well as personal level. Perhaps your group has already covered the ground contained in these conversations. However, if you have not, they may be useful exercises to use as you begin the next stage of your study together. Many of these can be completed in the course of one meeting, but your group should feel free to let these conversations roll over into the next week.

Connections Team Contacts

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Also included in the Appendices are suggestions for enriching your Small Group experience as well as a Small Group agreement that may be helpful for setting a clear baseline of expectations for each member of your Small Group.

Use your Connections Team

If you or anyone in your group has a question related to group life, don't hesitate to connect with us. See “**Your Small Group Resources**” in the Appendix for more about what to expect.

Leader Resources

Our Leader program is a combination of workshops, web based systems and online training modules designed to support and encourage you in your leadership here at Christ Church. Make sure you refer to this guide as well as the LifeLeader Guide for information and best practices. Also, check the [Life Leader](#) page under the Resources tab on christchurchva.org often to keep up to date.

Conversation One: What's the Story?

Discussion: "Life Maps"

The goal of this week is to refresh or fill in the gaps about what you know about one another. Once everyone has found a seat, transition into a time of storytelling by using this **Life Map exercise** (see Appendix for sample).

Tools

Blank paper and markers, crayons or pens/pencils.

Time

Give 10 minutes for each person to draw a map of significant people, places and events that have shaped who they are.

Process

1. Distribute the materials.
2. Instruct participants to draw a map of their life, noting significant events, people or places that have shaped their story. Encourage personality and creativity in the design of the map. Some may want to draw pictures, others just the facts, some may use lists, bubbles or a timeline - anything goes. This is just an outline for sparking conversation about your life journey.
3. Start the clock; signal a stop at the end of 10 minutes. Go around the room and give each member an opportunity to share from their Life Map. As a group, be ready and willing to question, explore, and celebrate as significant life events are shared. Continue this exercise until everyone that would like to share has had an opportunity.

Think of the major milestones that have shaped your life and brought you to this place and this group. Some of those milestones may have even happened before you were born!

A Word about Time: Try to limit each person to 5 – 8 minutes. Depending on group size, this exercise may take more than one week. As group members are sharing, be mindful of the agreed upon group end time.

Closing

Give a brief overview of the next several weeks listed in the **Table of Contents**. Take a moment to review the **Small Group Agreement** in the Appendix of this booklet. Remind people to bring their Bibles from here on out. Close in prayer.

NOTES:

Conversation Two: Life Together

"God never intended Christianity to be a 'Me, God, and my Bible' lifestyle. The Bible teaches that we also *need* each other for many reasons."

Doug Britton
Benefits of Small Groups

Discussion: "*Life Together*"

We have been created to live in meaningful relationship with other people. Have you ever stopped to think about what that means? Today your group is going to talk about "life together".

1. When you think of the word "community", what comes to mind? How about the word "mutual"?
2. Have someone read aloud Acts 2:42-47. What stands out to you in these verses? Is there anything here you find exciting? Anything that is strange?
3. Who are the people in your life that share in celebrating your milestones (birthday, job promotion, graduation, birth of a child, etc.)? Are they the same people who support you during a crisis? Why is that?
4. Sometimes our biggest obstacle to "life together" is ourselves. What are some things that prevent you from being known by others?

Reflection

The temptation is to categorize our personal life as "off-limits". As a result, our character gets neglected. Are you willing to give some time and attention to your character development? Are you willing to let others be involved in that process?

Closing

Ask if someone would volunteer to close the group in prayer after a few moments spent in silent prayer.

NOTES:

Conversation Three: Mutual Learning, Care & Accountability

"Fellowship is like the 'life' and energy of our connections with people. It's the quality of our relationships. It's something that is added to relationship that adds life, impact, and even sweetness. It means literally sharing in common which is modeled in many of the one another commands of the New Testament, like: love one another, spur one another on, forgive one another, carry one another's burdens, and many more."

Dan Lenz
*Relationship vs.
Fellowship*

Discussion: "The Three M's"

One of the qualities of a healthy small group dynamic is the presence of mutual learning, mutual care, and mutual accountability.

Mutual Learning: Gareth Weldon Icenogle, in his book *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry* writes, "The nature of the body is to learn of Christ together." We learn through our shared discovery of who God is and how He works.

1. Read Hebrews 10:23-25. What is the "hope that we confess?" In light of that common confession of hope, what are we instructed to do?
2. How might your group "spur one another on" as you learn with each other?

Mutual Care: We are followers of Christ. This is something we confess with our mouths, but which we must live out as well. Our obedience to Christ is expressed through what we believe and what we do.

- Read John 13:34-35. What is Jesus' new command? According to these verses, how will people know who followers of Christ are?
- How have you been cared for? What are ways in which you've cared for others?

Mutual Accountability: Often when we think of accountability our ideas revolve around the notion of personal accountability. Scripture teaches of a kind of accountability that goes deeper than that.

1. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-13. What do these verses have to say about accountability?
2. How might that kind of accountability show up in this small group?

Reflection

Often we view small groups in terms of what we can get out of them. What do you have to contribute to your group?

Closing

Ask for a volunteer to pray that God would show your group what shared discovery looks like and how you can be intentional in learning together.

NOTES:

Conversation Four: Prayer

Many times our prayers sound more like grocery lists than conversations with our Creator. The purpose of prayer is not to get answers from God as much as it to have a relationship with God.

Discussion: “Prayer”

One of the amazing things about our Christian faith is that we can speak directly to, and hear directly from, God. We call these conversations prayers. Many times our prayers sound more like grocery lists than conversations, consisting mainly of things we want. Let's spend some time recalibrating our attitudes towards prayer.

1. Is prayer or the idea of prayer difficult for you? Why or why not?
2. Read Matthew 6:5-13. How does it make you feel to know that God values time and place over the words we use?
3. If God knows what we need before we ask, why do we need to pray?

Reflection

In light of Jesus' teaching on prayer in Matthew 6:6-8, how might your prayer time look different than it does now?

Closing

Spend some time in your group praying with and for each other about your prayer habits.

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Conversation Five: Service

"And like our Savior,
who poured out His life
and blood so we have
reason to rejoice, we
were made to lay down
our lives and give until
it hurts. We are most
alive when we are
loving and actively
giving of ourselves
because we were made
to do those things."

Francis Chan
Forgotten God

Discussion: "*Intersect*"

Throughout his ministry, Jesus made a point of restoring people from physical infirmities and social injustices as well as restoring them spiritually. We are invited to join him in that work. Jesus calls us to attend to the needs of those less fortunate than we are. Small groups offer a unique opportunity for the commands of Christ and our actions to intersect in service to others.

1. What are some of the ways you've served those less fortunate than you?
2. Read Matthew 25:31-45. Who are "the least?" What does Jesus expect our relationship with "the least" to be?
3. How might serving as a small group enhance your experience together?

Reflection

Serving others often makes us uncomfortable. If you find the idea of serving in the community a bit daunting, take a moment to ask God why that is. What area of growth might God be leading you to in this area?

Closing

It is our prayer that small groups at Christ Church would actively serve in the community at least twice every year and within the church on a regular basis. To get started, go to christchurchva.org and click Serve in the menu bar to read about some of the ways that your small group can get involved in service, both inside and outside of the church. Pray about what your group's next service opportunity will be.

NOTES:

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Life Map

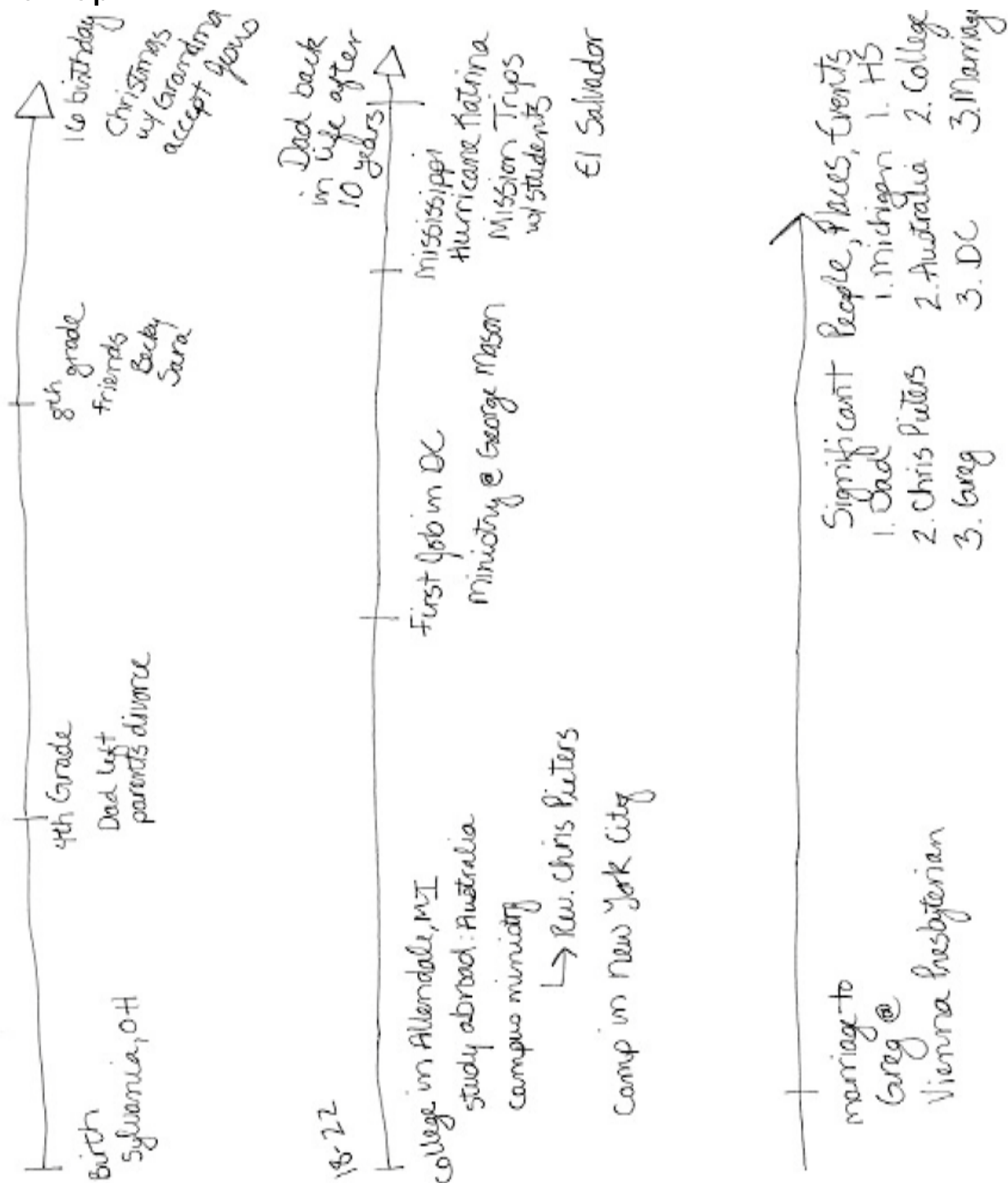
Appendix B – Small Group Suggestions

Appendix C – Small Group Agreement

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Appendix A

Life Map



Appendix B Small Group Suggestions

This section is intended to share some hints and insights about how to create an effective Small Group atmosphere.

Group Size

Small groups are most effective with 6-12 members. This size gives everyone time and space to communicate and makes sure that no one gets “lost in the crowd.”

Attendance

Because your group has been logged into our centralized discipleship system, you will get an automated email reminder after each one of your scheduled meetings to enter attendance. This is very important as we are required to maintain statistics for the United Methodist Conference regarding the number of people engaged in small groups and classes. More importantly, we want to be able to reach out to those who are not plugged in or who are falling away for some reason and attendance information is the principle way that we can do this. You can manage your group roster and keep attendance via the **myChristChurch** tab on our website.

Pray

Every time your group meets, you should spend some time in prayer with each other. But don't let it end there! Encourage one another to be in prayer on a weekly basis for the members of the group and the things going on in their lives. The regular habit of lifting each other up in prayer goes a long way toward building authentic community.

Establish routine

This guide is based on having 90-minute group meetings. Feel free to adjust that time to fit the rhythm of your group. Most sessions are broken into three parts: Discussion, Reflection, and Closing. Following this format helps to build predictability into each meeting.

Communicate

Tools such as email, Facebook, text messages, and phone calls are a great way to keep each other up to date on

your lives, your needs, and opportunities for you to build community.

Enlist Guest Participants

Invite church leaders or other guest participants if your group is wrestling with a specific topic and would benefit from an external perspective or experience.

RightNow Media

Christ Church has invested in a powerful web-based tool called RightNow Media. Think of it as your own “Netflix” library of Bible study media and training resources. As a Small Group leader, you will have received an invitation to join RightNow Media. Make sure you accept the invitation by clicking on the link and creating your own account. You will find thousands of videos and studies by teachers such as Francis Chan, Dave Ramsey, Matt Chandler and more. Your group may desire to use these studies and/or instantly find short video resources to answer a particular question or address a situation. If you would like each member of your group to have a RightNow Media account, just let your Connections team now and we will issue additional invite emails.

Spiritual Journals

Encourage your group members to keep a journal of their spiritual walk as your group moves from study to study.

Allow time for members to periodically share lessons and/or observations that they see God reveal through their journaling.

Memorize Scripture

Some of your group members may not be skilled at memorizing Scripture, however, know that the ability to call on God’s Word during difficult times is often critical to making it through life’s darkest moments. Keep a package of index cards handy during your small group meetings and encourage people to write down scripture that speaks to them in the moment and to reflect on and memorize that specific piece of scripture.

Answering Hard Questions

Small Group members will ask some questions that the group leader cannot answer. Expect them. Welcome them. When you do not have the answer, encourage the group to join you in praying and searching the Scriptures. Write down the question and refer it to your Senior Pastor or other Church leaders. Be open to God sending the answer through any number of ways!

Respond to God's Movement within the Group

Know that God has a plan for your group experience! He cares deeply for your group as a whole and for each member in it. Do not be surprised if God chooses to interrupt your group activities or plans and brings something or someone to the forefront for a specific purpose. Be flexible, watch for Him working in your midst through a group member's tears of joy or conviction, emotional or spiritual brokenness, the thrill of a newfound insight, or a need for prayer.

Study Costs

Small Group members should expect to pay a proportional share of the cost of the group's study materials. This includes a share of the DVD and Leader's Guide, as well as their personal study books. Remember, the RightNow Media videos are free for you to use, although you may wish to purchase the additional study materials.

Mutual Learning Resources

Need some ideas for your group's discussions?

Consider some of the following options:

- Try and make a choice that will carry your group through a 6-8 week period.
- Would your group be interested in studying a book of the Bible or maybe a theme from the Bible?
- Would your group like to engage in a topical series discussion (relationships, money, character development, etc.)? What topic(s) are you all most interested in discussing together?

- Would your group like to go deeper with the current sermon series? Ask to be included in the Dive Deeper training posts via RightNow Media.

Appendix C

Small Group Agreement

The purpose of this Agreement is to set the expectations of your small group in order to help create an authentic and predictable environment.

It is important that your group agrees upon a common set of group values that support Christian community. Your group should discuss these values together, preferably at each first session after returning from a group “break” or when a new Small Group has formed.

Values & Goals

- ☐ **Community** – Life is not meant to be lived in isolation. Small Groups intentionally pursue relationships where one can know and be known by others as they pursue a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.
- ☐ **Priority** – While you are in this course of study, you give the group meetings priority.
- ☐ **Participation** – Everyone is encouraged to participate and no one dominates.
- ☐ **Respect** – Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinion, and all questions are encouraged and respected. Group members never say anything that will embarrass their spouse or members of the group.
- ☐ **Authenticity** – The atmosphere of a Small Group should encourage openness and transparency among members. This is an environment where people should feel free to be themselves.
- ☐ **Confidentiality** – For authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues disclosed within a Small Group will not be shared outside of the group.
- ☐ **Care and Support** – Permission is given to call upon each other at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group will provide care for every member.
- ☐ **Accountability** – We agree to let the members of the group hold us accountable to the commitments we make in whatever loving ways we decide upon.
- ☐ **Service** – The group will encourage one another to volunteer and serve in a ministry and to

support missions by giving financially and/or personally serving.

- **Adjournment** – All Small Groups have a natural life cycle. We expect Small Groups at Christ Church to adjourn proactively after 18-24 months. This allows members to multiply their positive group experience by returning to iConnect and getting into a new group, intentionally connecting with others who have yet to experience group life.

Group Norms

It is important that everyone in your group is on the same page when it comes to basic group expectations. Talk through the following:

Where will the group meet?

At what time will your meetings begin? End?

–

Understanding that groups have a life cycle, when do you anticipate adjourning?

–

Appendix D Small Group Support

Your church staff is committed to supporting you and your small group and wants to help you create predictable and authentic environments, focused on discipleship. The relationship between Small Group leaders and staff develops through one-on-one coaching meetings, leadership training, email, and phone correspondence.

What should I let my Small Groups Champion know about?

Be sure to keep us in the loop on:

- Group dynamics
- Curriculum questions
- Service opportunities
- Care needs
- Participant changes
- Stories of transformation
- Schedule changes
- Roster changes

Anytime you, or someone in your small group, has a question, perceives something is “not quite right,” or feels like the group is disconnected, let a member of the Connections Discipleship staff team know and we will do our best to help.

Credits

Much of this Small Group Guide is based on one created and used by Fairfax Community Church who has graciously offered to share their resources with Christ Church.

Additional ideas and language for the Small Group Agreement come from *Lasting Legacy: Making a Difference with My Life* `Leader Book, Serendipity House Publishers, 2001.

Some of the ideas contained in the section on Small Group Suggestions are inspired by *Experiencing God, Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, Leaders Guide, Claude V. King, Lifeway Press, 1990.

General inspiration for our approach to the Small Group program also comes from materials provided by North Point Community Church.