

Small Groups and Home Groups at Christ Church

The purpose of small groups and home groups at Christ Church is to foster a space and community where individuals and families can develop attitudes of worship, fellowship, and service in the context of doing life together beyond the weekly worship setting. God pursues us through relationships we enter into by inviting honest conversation and providing spaces where we can wrestle openly and authentically with Scripture and a life of faith.

These communities are intentional and designed to live out our Worship-Connect-Serve strategy of making disciples who make disciples. Our prayer, as you begin this journey of leading a home community or small group, is that you take advantage of the resources you have here at Christ Church, so that you can be in ministry, both here and in the world.

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General Overview

This overview is designed for you to use as you minister to the various groups you lead. Keep in mind the diversity of the folks you may encounter, all of whom may be at different places in their faith walk.

- Use your Discipleship Team—We are here for *YOU!* Do not hesitate to reach out to one of us when you might need input pertaining to vision, community care, or even resource direction.

- Use your coach—Your coach is your primary point of contact when it comes to helping you grow as a leader, a facilitator, and a minister within your community. Always start with this valuable resource when it comes to helping your group bear fruit. It might be helpful to establish some regular communication with this individual.
- Be sure to keep track of your attendance—This allows us to report well when it comes to church-wide updates and evaluations.
- Leader Resources—Our team will organize various table talks, panel discussions, and workshops designed to give you additional resources that will support you in your growth as a small group/home group leader. See *Christ Church Discipleship Coach Guide* for more in-depth information.

Getting Started

Imagining Your Community

(Loosely adapted from Jay Firebaugh's "Creating a Community of Care"—2012—)

Jim Egli says, "People want to join groups where there is a strong level of care. That is, when group members really care about each other, when they pray for one another, eat together, and have fun together, taking time with one another in between their meetings, new people want to be part of the group . . ."

While many of us tend to find ourselves stuck when it comes to what resource or study to choose for a group, we simultaneously forget that much of our role as leaders in home group or small group settings is in the realm of care. At Christ Church, we uphold a vision that sees each of us as ministers. Therefore, we are equipped to do the work of the gospel by reaching those in our midst who desire and seek to know God more. Here are five vital foundations that should be the starting point for beginning or renewing your existing group:

1. **Care and Invest**—Be present in your group's lives beyond the regular meeting time and encourage them to follow suit with one another. Let them know they matter and reach out to them when they are struggling or if you notice they have been absent. Have part of your meeting include some form of update/check-in so that each person has an opportunity to share.
2. **Pray**—Pray daily for your group members and form habits of prayer within the group. Pray before and after each gathering, inviting members to take turns leading. Additionally, consider exploring different avenues of prayer suitable to your group.
3. **Foster transparency**—A great turnoff to those seeking a small group community is the feeling that they cannot be "real." People long for a group that will embrace them no matter where it is they happen to be. A small group or home group is falling short of its purpose when it appears ignorant or averse to deeper conversations.

4. **Impromptu Fellowship**—Don't limit community time to your regularly scheduled gathering. Find other ways to tap into the interests of your group, whether it involves dinner on the town, a family day at the park, a cookout, a trip into D.C., etc. Not only does this help build relationships among the group in an informal context, but it also encourages the group to see itself more as a community rather than a one-off group. Additionally, adopt a service or outreach project as a community that your group can get behind. Plan out times when your group will be in service to the community.

5. **Identify the group's direction**—Once you have a feel for the group, consider the various social, emotional, and spiritual needs you are faced with. Let these be important factors in determining what the group will spend time studying together. **Don't feel like the topic/study has to be determined before the first gathering. Let the group figure out its identity.**

Covenant Agreement

- When your group starts to form, begin thinking through the following questions:
 1. What makes our group tick?
 2. What conversations are we yearning to have?
 3. How will we facilitate collectively?
 4. What are the needs of this group?
 5. What are the expectations of the group?

- Draw up a covenant agreement with one another that reflects your communal desires. Ensure that this contains input from everyone and honors important facets of the group dynamic, such as transparency, participation, spiritual disciplines, boundaries, and confidentiality, to name a few.

- Have this covenant available at each group gathering as a reminder of what you have decided to be accountable to with each other.

Logistical Suggestions

- **Group Size**—A healthy and fruitful home group or small group is around 6–15 members. If the group begins to exceed that range, it may be time to prayerfully consider planting a group out of the existing one.

- **Attendance**—While it may sound tedious, let attendance be your friend! Not only does logging attendance through “My Christ Church” on the website let us know for statistical reporting how our classes are growing, it also allows you as leader(s) to send emails out to your group and to follow up with folks who may have missed a meeting or two.

- **PRAY!**
- **Communicate**—Find a medium of communication that best fits your group when it comes to getting the word out about meetings, events, etc. Use texting, a group chat, Facebook, email, etc.
- **Format**—This will also best be determined upon conversations with your group. How will you divide your sessions? Will you have discussion, reflection, fellowship time? Will a meal be part of your gathering? Will you have some worship components?
- **Journals**—If appropriate, invite members to keep a journal or notebook where they can write down questions or reflections. This is a good resource to have if you have members who may not speak out loud but who are internal processors.
- **Difficult topics or hard conversations**—Before attempting to engage in something you know is way out of your comfort zone or don't have a good answer to, seek out your coach or the associate pastor.
- **Materials**—Christ Church does not purchase materials for the growing number of small groups we have affiliated with the church. However, we do have a limited number of resources here for your use. Additionally, the collective library of our pastors and ministry staff can also be a helpful option.