

Small-Group Ministry



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Leader's Guide

How to use "Small-Group Ministry" by SMALLGROUPS.COM

Welcome to SMALLGROUPS.COM. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you assemble concise and complete documents dealing with small-group ministry policies and procedures. These documents include descriptions of small-group ministries (especially appropriate for a church web site), as well as application forms to lead such groups. In addition, there are small-group leadership criteria that help to spell out what qualities are important. Documents also address the signs of a healthy small group, as well as the signs that a small group may need to be dissolved or re-formed. Selected by the editors of LEADERSHIP Resources at Christianity Today International, these documents address formation and sustenance of small-group ministry in its many forms; they come from a variety of churches and denominations.

We have assembled 15 documents that include information on personal and spiritual readiness for small-group leadership, leadership styles for small-group sessions, and an expense reimbursement list for small-group meetings. You may use these sample forms—adapting them as necessary—as part of your policy and procedures handbook, especially in view of the great variety of small groups that reach people within and outside of the church. These documents also help congregations to develop a standard for excellence in small-group ministry in its many forms.

These 15 descriptions and forms will provide pastors, small-group leaders and others in congregational ministry with programming and materials that clarify the expectations at the church regarding the small-group process. With these documents in place, your church will be able to promote the spiritual development of church members and to attract potential members who can come to know Christ through close and caring fellowship opportunities.

We hope these forms will assist your church in deepening and strengthening your congregation's understanding of healthy small groups, and engage people of every age in the very pattern of spiritual growth that built the early church.

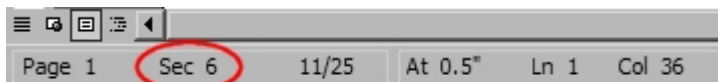
Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at SmallGroups.com.

To contact the editors:

E-mail SmallGroups@christianitytoday.com

Mail SMALLGROUPS.COM, Christianity Today International
465 Gundersen Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188

Printing Note: To print out the forms you would like to use, put your cursor on the page to print and notice the section number located on the left side of the status bar at the bottom of the page.



Click "File" + "Print," select "Pages," and type "s" and the section number in the corresponding box. For example, if you would like to print the third form, "Small-Group Leader Qualifications and Application," type "s6."

* We've worked hard to make sure this information is accurate and legally sound. However, we remind you that this is not a substitute for legal counsel. If your church has a legal question, be sure to talk with an attorney.



An Old Ministry for a New Century

We live in a generation that is rediscovering the benefits and challenges of small-group ministry.

by John R. Throop

Since the 1980s, churches have developed many forms of small-group ministry. In an increasingly secular age, leaders have found great value in bringing people together for intentional work in spiritual development, fellowship, and service. Through groups of 6–16 individuals who meet regularly for prayer, study, and connection with one another, people can develop their faith and break through the anonymity of modern life to share life with others. In this way, the 21st-century church can pattern itself after the 1st-century church to grow in faith, hope, and love.

Different Types of Small Groups

Churches have many names and uses for small groups. They meet specific needs to help people to connect outside of the Sunday services. Some are generically termed as “fellowship groups” to gather people for activities and meals. Others focus on education, both formal and informal, such as Bible study programs like Bible Study Fellowship or Theological Education by Extension. Still others organize on the basis of age, from high school youth groups to groups organized by gender to Moms’ Groups to groups of working people.

Other types of groups are more intentional in design. Some have a spiritual focus, such as prayer; others emphasize pastoral issues, such as grief support, divorce recovery, or job loss. Still other intentional groups include those who join together for Christian service in the local community or global mission projects. Other groups organize around the arts or creative writing, which helps develop talents and abilities. Spiritual-giftedness groups help people to discover, develop, and release their specific spiritual gifts for ministry.

Small-group ministries focus on more intentional activities to help members become stronger Christians for service in ministry. In addition, they become more intimate (in appropriate ways) with fellow believers, so that stronger individual and corporate faith can be developed. This approach sometimes is known as cell group ministry, designed after early church methods for gathering together in people’s homes. In fact, in some churches, cell-group ministries are the primary method for study, fellowship, and prayer, while the larger worship gatherings bring all groups together for praise, worship, and teaching.

Formats for Small Groups

Generally, small groups meet outside of Sunday or weekday education and fellowship times in the local church. A member’s home is the typical location of a small-group meeting, and the member is known as the **host**. In that home, learning and fellowship activities take place. In some cases, it is more convenient for a person—especially a single person—to host a gathering at a restaurant or office building.



A **group leader** (either an individual or a couple) facilitates the meeting. This responsibility periodically shifts to other group members so that all can learn to lead at some point. Small groups also feature a **correspondent** who keeps in touch with group members between meetings and reminds them of the gathering. If the group has an ordained staff member, that person functions just like any group member. He or she is not necessarily selected for leadership responsibility.

These individual groups are linked by a **small-group ministry coordinator** (lay or ordained) who monitors the consistency and quality of group meetings and the ministry that happens in them. The coordinator will orient and, often, will train new group leaders in the responsibilities of group facilitation—and particularly when a group or individual situation becomes unmanageable and requires further help.

A spiritually-oriented group generally establishes a set period of time for the meeting, and a consistent day of the week to meet. Usually, the meeting length is one and a half hours. It begins with an icebreaker to help open people to God's presence and to each other. Then the meeting focuses on a study lesson that is less intellectual and more experiential in nature. A period of sharing follows, where group members can describe what has been happening in their lives since the last meeting. Finally, the meeting closes with prayer and dismissal. Refreshments often are available at the start of the meeting.

Two other meeting practices are important to build confidence in the spiritual nature of the time. First, all that happens in the meeting is confidential to the extent that participants agree. Sharing with the group, and a deeper intimacy in prayer, relies on keeping information within the group. Further, there must be an established duration of the meeting. People want the certainty and clarity of a time frame so that they can get ready for the next day and handle family matters. The group facilitator needs to be firm about the starting and ending time.

Small-group ministry leaders also must be careful to ensure that groups do well in their meetings and assignments. Leaders are trained to help the group to stay focused, and to ensure everyone's participation. They also are trained to re-direct dominant or counter-productive behavior in group interaction. It is important to monitor the openness and comfort level of all participants and quietly to confront any poor behavior or reluctant participation.

Small-Group Learning

There are three specific activities within the small- group learning objectives. First, there is an icebreaker or opening exercise. This specific element helps people move from their busy days and life challenges, and moves them into the themes of the session's study and reflection. Most often, the group meets for a specific number of weeks, depending on the learning material and objectives. So the icebreakers or opening exercises help people to "re-wire" themselves for the material ahead of them, both on this day and through the study and reflection objectives over the several weeks of the group.

Spiritual lessons are the next activity for the small group. They can be presented intellectually, with reflection on specific bible verses. More often, the learning is experiential. A biblical text is presented, but group members are asked to reflect on their own lives or to share their own perspectives. The group leader functions as a facilitator, ready to keep the



discussion on track and to answer questions that may arise in the discussion. He or she also intervenes if the discussion becomes inappropriate or when a person requires pastoral care beyond what the group can offer.

Finally, the group leader should be prepared to begin the prayer period toward the end of the meeting, with a focus on the key lessons learned in the discussion, and the insights and understandings that members contributed to build group fellowship. Certainly, there is a place in the prayer period for personal and community petition. But members can be trained to relate their prayer needs to their learning, which helps them grow spiritually as they can connect biblical passages with personal prayer.

Methods of Small-Group Development

Small groups form and develop in many ways. There is no one method that works better than another, and there need be no single pattern of small-group life within a congregation.

- **Geography.** Hosts and group leaders may build groups based upon where people live. This pattern is especially important in metropolitan areas. People get to know fellow church members near where they live and work.
- **Spiritual maturity.** Groups can be formed on the basis of length of faith commitment, church membership, or completion of earlier and more basic steps in a specific educational process. It is important, however, to place two more mature couples (leaders and one other couple) to help the group stay on track and to encourage spiritual growth.
- **Random assignment.** If spiritual maturity is not an issue, then group members can be chosen somewhat randomly.
- **Recruitment.** For specific kinds of spiritual interests and ministry development, people can be recruited for groups based on giftedness, ability, or focused interests. Musicians, college and university faculty, moms or dads, athletes, or businesspeople are some examples of focused recruitment and shared experiences.
- **Multiplication.** Each group needs to help members to prepare to be group leaders for another small-group ministry once the current small group goals have been reached. There should not be a “leadership crew” of people who lead in every period of small group ministry. Part of small group ministry involves leadership development.

Leadership Development

A key goal of any small-group ministry is to develop people to lead. That way, the small-group ministry can expand as participants continue to mature spiritually. No one group of people is responsible for leadership, which can cause burnout or a form of spiritual domination. Further, the small-group ministry can expand potentially to include nearly every member of the church, every visitor, every seeker, and any person who lives in the community from which the church will draw.

Two traits of small-group leadership are like any other leadership in ministry: organization and facilitation. Any leader must be trained to develop a group and to carry it through to the small-group objectives as defined by the church and a specific small-group program. A good group leader facilitates effectively to make sure that the entire group stays focused on the questions or approaches of a lesson, that everyone participates, and that learning is focused into prayer.



No leader is permanent. After a specified period of time, the group breaks up and reforms into another group. The previous leader now can be a full participant as another person or couple leads a new group. The small-group coordinator makes sure that, ultimately, every participant of every group has the opportunity to become a leader.

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Small-Group Ministries at Community Church

John Smith, Leader Small-Group Ministry Team

Mary Jones, Small-Groups Coordinator

The **Small-Groups Ministry Team** wants to help everyone at Community Church find and be a part of an active small group. We believe small groups are the key to connecting in a biblical way with other members at Community Church. A small group provides healthy fellowship in a community marked by Christian love and oneness. Small groups can help you to "grow up" as a Christian and discover your spiritual gifts.



Do you desire to become more like Christ?



Are you looking for a way to connect more with others at Community Church?



Are you seeking to grow in prayer, Bible study, service, support and accountability?



Are you in a small group that is looking to grow in focus and influence?

If so, then Community Church's Small-Group Ministry is for you!

It's easy to get lost in a crowd, to feel lonely even though you may be surrounded by worshippers on a given Sunday. That's why Community Church has a Small-Groups Ministry. We want everyone to have the opportunity to be known and cared for and to find their niche in ministry. People grow faster spiritually in a caring, interactive group where they can feel free to ask their real questions and sense the support of the group.

The small group is as much "church" as the larger convening of believers. Jesus' ministry was in small groups as well as large. All of the "one another" commands in Scripture (love one another; pray for one another; be kind to one another) can only be truly obeyed and experienced in a small group.

There are about 40 small groups at Community Church that meet throughout the week in various places and at various times. Their leaders/coordinators are all volunteers, people who love to help others grow as disciples of Christ.

Community Church's small groups are as different as they are many. There are men's groups, women's groups, groups for couples with young children, for mothers of young children, college and career groups, and still others getting ready to start up.

There are many different kinds of small groups...

➤ Task-Oriented

➤ Caring Support

➤ Study

➤ Relational

➤ Prayer

➤ Covenant/Accountability

➤ Mixed Agenda

Community Church's Small Group Ministry Team seeks to...

- **Launch** new small groups at Community Church for those who would like to participate, especially for new and recent members
- **Link** those who are looking for a certain type of small group with one that is open for new members
- Give **Lift** to existing small groups by offering training in group dynamics, disciple-making in small groups and leadership development

Contacts...

If you'd like to get involved with a small group at Community Church, e-mail smallgroups@communitychurch.org, or contact John Smith (jsmith@communitychurch.org) or Mary Jones (maryjones@communitychurch.org).

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry Leadership Application

Name: _____ Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

When did you begin your relationship with Jesus Christ? _____

When did you begin to regularly attend our church? _____ How long have you lived in this area? _____

Information on previous church attended:

Name of church: _____ City/State of church: _____ / _____

May we have your permission to contact your previous church? YES NO

Has anyone ever brought or threatened to bring a civil or criminal claim against you alleging physical or sexual abuse or sexual harassment? YES NO

Have you ever been charged, arrested, or convicted of a felony or misdemeanor? YES NO

Is there anything in your past that might come up as a questionable issue? YES NO

If yes, please explain: _____

Please signify your agreement with these statements of essential Christian beliefs by checking the boxes:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> The virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> A person must be born again to receive eternal life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus is God's son and the only sacrifice for sin | <input type="checkbox"/> The Bible is fully inspired by God and it points people to the truth of Christ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jesus rose bodily from the dead | |

I agree, without reservation or exception, to the following (please write your initials beside each statement):

_____ I agree with the ESSENTIAL BELIEFS of the Christian faith as expressed in the Nicene Creed

_____ I have a growing RELATIONSHIP with Christ

_____ I will fully protect the UNITY and support the mission of Community Church

By signing below, I certify this information is complete and accurate. Furthermore, I authorize _____ to publicize my contact information for the purpose of promoting my new group.

Signature: _____ Date: _____ /07

NAME OF GROUP: _____ PLANNED DURATION OF GROUP (# of weeks): _____
LOCATION OF GROUP: _____ DAY GROUP MEETS: _____
FIRST MEETING DATE: _____ GROUP MEETING TIME: _____ - _____ a.m. / p.m.
WHO IS THE GROUP FOR? _____
DESCRIPTION OF WHAT THE GROUP WILL DO: _____

USE BACK TO EXPAND

The Essentials of What We Believe

Community Church proclaims the same faith in the God of Jesus Christ that the Christian church has proclaimed since its beginnings. This faith is summarized in the Nicene Creed, a statement of faith agreed upon by Christian leaders in the fourth century, and affirmed by most every Christian Church since. No statement of faith has enjoyed wider support among the world's Christians. We ask all those who identify with our church family and decide to serve as a group leader, host, or facilitator to be in full agreement with these essential Christian beliefs as written in the Nicene Creed:

<p><i>In essentials—we have unity In non-essentials—we have liberty In all things—we have charity</i></p>
--

*We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
Light from light, true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us humans and for our salvation
He came down from heaven:
by the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made human.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
On the third day he rose from the dead
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father.
Who, with the Father and the Son, is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the Prophets.*

*We believe in one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen!*

So what are the essentials of what we believe at Community Church? They are the fundamental truths embodied in God's Word and reflected in the Nicene Creed. We believe in one true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully human. We believe that as human beings we are created by God, through sin we are separated from him, and through Christ's death and resurrection we can be restored to intimate relationship with him for all eternity. We believe in God's Word and in the church as His redemptive agent on earth, until Jesus returns and every person recognizes that Christ is Lord!

Community Church

Welcome to Community Church Groups Leadership

As a future leader, it is essential for you to understand and own the vision and values of this ministry. Take a moment to carefully go over the information on the next few pages. If you meet the leadership qualifications listed and agree with Community Church's values, fill out the application and mail it to the address listed at the bottom of the application or place it in one of the offering containers located in the lobby. Your application will be reviewed and someone will contact you with information about the next steps you need to take.

It's that easy!

Our Purpose

We exist to intentionally create safe small-group environments where individuals engage in a lifestyle of authentic community and spiritual growth.

Today's culture is completely "high tech and low touch." It celebrates and promotes individualism over community. Privacy and seclusion are valued over connection. However, God didn't design for us to live our lives alone. He created us for relationship with him and with others. We were made to belong and to be part of a community—a group of people living life together, growing together, and serving God together. That's why we created Community Church Groups.

We're All About People

Community Church Groups are all about people—people connecting with others, people growing in the Lord, and people serving the Lord. We exist to help people connect, grow, and serve. Through Community Church Groups, the church becomes more than a weekly meeting; it becomes who we are. Life changes don't take place in isolation; they take place in the context of authentic, life-giving relationships and meaningful heart connections. Maybe you connect because you have preschoolers, love working on cars, live in the same neighborhood or have similar life experiences. Or maybe you connect because you're passionate about prayer, community service, scrapbooking or Bible study.

However you connect, we encourage you to take it one step further by starting a Community Church Group.

Now is the time to seize your God-given opportunity to grow in relationship and community with others by leading a Community Church Group. This is your chance to experience the blessings that come from connecting with others and with God, from growing with others and in God and from serving others and serving God. When you're truly all about people, there's no way you can remain the same. In turn, your connections, your relationships, and your group can be the very catalyst for people's lives to be changed forever.

The Principles for Community Church Groups: Leaders and Apprentices

- Commitment to Christian character and sound moral conduct inside and outside of Community Church
- Living a balanced life in faith, family, and finances (1 Timothy 3:8–12)
- An attitude of support and submission to the leadership of Community Church (Romans 13:1–5; 1 Peter 2:13–25; 1 Timothy 2:1–3; Hebrews 13:17)
- Commitment to unity by dealing with issues, offenses, and disagreements in a biblical and timely manner (Psalm 133; Matthew 18:15–17)
- Displays an attitude of love, patience, longsuffering, service, humility, compassion and grace towards others (Galatians 5:16–25)

Community Church Groups: Leadership Qualifications

- Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior followed by baptism
- Agreement with the statement of faith and overall vision of Community Church
- Completion of the Community Church Ministry Training Series
- Active in the church for a minimum of six months
- Faithful in tithing to Community Church (Malachi 3:10; 2 Corinthians 9:6–15)
- Commitment to the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)

Prerequisites

- Complete the Community Church Ministry Training Series
- Attend the Community Church Small-Groups New Leaders Orientation
- Decide, coordinate, and communicate to your Small-Group Pastor what type of group you're starting and how frequently your group will meet.

Responsibilities

- Pray regularly for your District Pastor, Section Leader, and everyone on your group roster
- Ensure the pastoral care of your group members by being actively involved in relationships with them
- Provide a supportive atmosphere in which each group member is able to discover, develop, and minister in their spiritual gifts
- Identify and strengthen co-leaders (apprentices, hosts, worship leaders) in order to release them into their ministries
- Share leadership and responsibilities with others in the group
- Maintain unity by representing the philosophy of ministry and theology of Community Church
- Complete and submit Community Church Groups status reports in your assigned area
- Invite and welcome new people into your group, and encourage group members to invite others who are inside and outside of the church
- Follow up on all group visitors within 48 hours
- Contact and invite prospective new members given to you by your small-group pastor within 72 hours
- Attend scheduled Community Church Groups trainings and church leadership meetings

Community Church Groups Leadership Application

Personal Information

Name: _____

Male Female Date of Birth _____

Single Married (Years Married _____) Spouse's Name _____

Number of Children _____ Ages _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ E-mail _____

Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony? Yes No

Have you ever been accused of physical or sexual abuse or harassment? Yes No

If you answered yes to any of the two previous questions, please explain. (Use separate sheet if necessary.)

What is your passion for ministry? _____

Briefly explain why you would like to be a Community Church Groups Leader: _____

Church History and Beliefs

Have you completed the Community Church Groups Leadership Orientation? Yes No

How long have you regularly attended Community Church? _____

What church did you attend prior to joining Community Church? _____

How long did you attend? _____

What was the pastor's name? _____

How long have you been a Christian? _____

Have you been water baptized? Yes No

Do you tithe on a regular basis? Yes No

Please list any ministry-related experience you have, whether it was a volunteer or paid position: _____

Do you agree with Community Church's Statement of Faith? Yes No

What type of group do you want to lead? _____

What will be the primary focus of your group? _____

References

Please provide two personal references (*do not list more than one member of your family as a reference*):

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Relationship Number of years known _____

Name _____ Phone Number _____

Relationship Number of years known _____

Leadership Commitment

By signing below, I certify that the information contained in this application is complete, accurate, and not misleading in any way.

I authorize Community Church to contact references provided in order to obtain information regarding my character and qualifications for Community Church Groups Leadership.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to submit to the policies and procedures of Community Church and to rightly fulfill the responsibilities of Community Church Groups Leadership.

Signature _____

Please mail your completed application to Community Church, 123 Anywhere Drive, Any Town, Any State, Zip. You may also place your completed application in one of the offering containers located in the Lobby.

Community Church

Small-Group Ministries Small-Group Coordinator Covenant

I. Commitment

- A. I will commit 4–6 hours per week on Home Team related issues. In this time I will do the following:
 - 1. Visit each Home Team two to three times per year
 - 2. Have Home Team leaders in my home two times per year for relationship building and ongoing training (budget money available)
 - 3. I will distribute names promptly to available Home Teams and make sure that those that were not placed in a group are refunded in a timely manner
 - 4. I will have regular communication with the Home Team ministry leadership
 - 5. I will ensure that each Home Team and all leaders have the current approved small-group curriculum.
 - 6. I commit to pray for the Home Team leaders that God has entrusted to our church
- B. I will instill leadership characteristics in the leaders in my group

II. Communication

- A. I will maintain regular communication with the Home Teams Leadership. (E-mail, phone, conversations, and so on)
- B. I will maintain regular two-way communications with all Home Team Leaders
- C. I will be dedicated to building meaningful personal relationships with every leader in my group

III. Accountability

- A. I will attend monthly ministry meetings and be prepared to give a reasonable account of the status of my groups
- B. I will hold myself accountable to the ministry leadership for how I represent the church at all times
- C. I will support of the mission small groups at Community Church with my resources

Home Team Coordinator Covenant Statement

I understand as a Coordinator that I am a part-time employee of Community Church.

I agree and will comply with the Small Group Home Team Coordinator Covenant.

I am committed to the vision and leadership of Community Church.

I understand that the failure to comply with the Coordinator Covenant can result in dismissal.

Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Community Church

Small-Group Ministries Small-Group Leader Covenant

As a Leader/Host, I will commit to the following:

1. I will commit to completing Class 101, signing the covenant and backing it.
2. I will commit to completing Class 201 and following the steps it lays out.
3. I will support and defend the vision and direction of Community Church and its leadership.
4. I will recognize that as a Leader I represent Community Church at all times.
5. I will commit to actively multiplying my group by seeking and training potential new leaders from within my group. I will commit to that multiplication a minimum of one time per year.
6. I will commit to regular weekend service attendance.
7. I will commit to faithfully attend ongoing training or appreciation events.
8. I will maintain regular communication with my Coordinator and Ministry Leadership.
9. I understand that the failure to comply with the Leader/Host Covenant can result in dismissal.

As a Leader at Community Church I will commit to the above covenant.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Spouses Signature: _____ Date: _____

Community Church

My Small Group Profile

NAME OF GROUP:			
WHO IS THE GROUP FOR?			
CITY OF GROUP:			
DAY GROUP MEETS:			
GROUP MEETING TIME:	START:	END:	a.m./ p.m.
FIRST MEETING DATE:			
FREQUENCY OF MEETING:			
PLANNED DURATION:			
GROUP LEADER(s):			
LEADER'S PHONE (h):			
LEADER'S PHONE (cell):			
LEADER'S E-MAIL:			
DESCRIPTION OF WHAT THE GROUP WILL DO:			
STREET ADDRESS OF MEETING:			
CITY:		ZIP:	

DRIVING DIRECTIONS (from church building)

1.	5.
2.	6.
3.	7.
4.	8.

CONTACT LEADER REGARDING CHILDCARE

Community Church
Small-Group Ministry
Criteria for Small-Group Facilitators

When choosing potential small-group facilitators look for men and women with the qualities on which good ministry is built.

Potential facilitators should be:

- Perceived as faithful parishioners
- Respected and admired by others
- Good listeners
- Organized, responsible, and competent to complete tasks
- Aware of their limitations and willing to seek help
- Able to work well in a group and put others at ease
- Genuinely concerned and understanding of others
- Tolerant and respectful of differing opinions
- Open to a wide variety of people
- Able to articulate his or her faith and desiring to grow in it
- Encouraging and supportive of others in ministry
- Able to bring out the ideas and gifts of others
- Willing and able to commit time and energy required

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry Introducing the 4Ws

Welcome (15 minutes)

Most small group members are tired when they arrive at the group. They've worked hard all day and probably don't feel like *being spiritual*. Some will attend because they know they *should* be there, not because they *feel like attending*. Begin on a joyful note. Let the group members ease into group life.

The welcome time normally begins with a dynamic question that breaks the ice. The best icebreakers guarantee a response. You can buy entire books on lively icebreakers, so you shouldn't experience a shortage in this area.

Worship (20 minutes)

The goal of the worship time is to enter the presence of the living God and to give Him control of the meeting. The worship time helps the group go beyond socializing. Without Christ's presence, the small group is no different than a work party, a family gathering, or meeting friends at a football game.

The worship leader or others in the group should pick five to six songs or a worship activity *before* the worship starts. I think it's best to concentrate on God during the entire worship time, rather than stopping and starting to pick the song or activity. If singing, try to mingle praise and prayer between songs.

Entering God's presence through worship activities is an important part of the worship time. If singing, make sure that everyone has a song sheet. Why?

- First-time visitors will feel uncomfortable without seeing the words.
- Some new Christians or church members don't know the worship choruses of your church.
- You'll have more liberty to sing new songs.

Word (40 minutes)

The Word time is when God speaks to our hearts through the Bible. Resources abound to prepare a top-notch lesson.

Many small groups follow the same theme and Scripture as the Sunday message. Even if this is the case, it's best NOT to discuss the sermon. The people should interact with God's Word, not with the sermon. If the sermon itself is the reference point, visitors and those who missed the service will feel isolated.

Even if the church provides the lesson, it's essential that each small-group leader examines the lesson and applies it according to the needs in the group.

Without fail, God speaks to the group through his Word and people recognize their needs. I find it very effective to ask for specific prayer requests after the lesson time. Often we'll lay hands on those with special needs. The lesson, or Word time, normally lasts 40 minutes. I like to take 10 of those 40 minutes to pray for specific needs of the group.

Works (15 minutes)

The last part of the small group, the works time, helps the group focus on others. There is no "one way" to do this. The main thought that should guide this time is *outreach*. The type of outreach might vary on a weekly basis:

- Praying for non-Christians
- Preparing a social project
- Planning for a future multiplication of the group
- Deciding on the next outreach event for the small group (for example, dinner, video, picnic, etc.)
- Praying for non-Christian families

The leader might say to the group, "Remember to pray for our new group multiplication that will begin in two months. Pray for Frank, who needs to complete the last small-group leader-training course. Pray that he'll be ready to start the new small group."

During this time, you might promote and plan a social outreach project. I'm convinced that small groups are perfectly positioned to meet the physical needs of both those inside and outside the small group. A small group offers a unique, effective way to reach deeply into the heart of a non-Christian person. The New Testament church was born, grew, and prospered through need-oriented group evangelism. God is calling his church back once again to this exciting method of outreach.

Were the People Edified?

Edification literally means to build up or construct. Paul said to the Corinthian church, "What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening [edifying] of the church" (1 Corinthians 14:26).

The issue of building-up should be the guiding principle of the small group. A successful small-group meeting is one in which everyone is built up and encouraged in the faith. The standard for success is whether or not Christ's body went away edified—not whether you fulfilled the 4W's.

The focus of the small group must be Jesus. Some want to convert the group into a Bible study, others an evangelistic crusade, and still others a worship concert. Lift Jesus high in your group, and he'll give you a gentle balance of study, worship, evangelism, and fellowship. Perhaps one week you'll spend more time in the Word, while another week, you'll tarry in the worship time.

Remember the 4W's are not four laws. They're guidelines to help you focus on Jesus and to maximize participation. Focusing on Jesus helps provide the proper balance.

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry New Small-Group / Ministry Idea

Purpose of the group / team: _____

Affinity / target group: _____

Would you need any resources from the church to get started? _____

How has God equipped and prepared you for this? What is your background and knowledge in this area?

Summarize in your own words your spiritual gifts and abilities: _____

Do you know others that have a passion for this who may want to join you? _____

Name _____ Date _____

E-mail _____ Cell _____

Phone (H) _____ (Other) _____

**Turn in this completed form at the Church Office.
A meeting time will be arranged in the near future to talk about your vision!**

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry Signs of a Healthy Small Group

Upward

Christ-Centered

Spirit-Led

Inward

Real – There are real relationships, real friendships, developing in the group. There is an understanding that we all have different levels of friendships – even in a small group.

These relationships are *redemptive* relationships.

The “One Anothers” of the New Testament are apparent in the group.

Not overly programmed or legalistic..... but rather authentic

Meeting times are consistent. The group meets according to the pulse of the group. The leader helps to determine that pulse.

Forward

The group helps Christians grow. The leader helps the individuals move forward in their spiritual growth. The rate of growth is determined by each individual's spiritual pulse.

Outward

As individuals grow as Christians, the fruit begins to flow outwards. This leads to an excitement and awe that others see. There is a natural – unforced, yet intentional – outflow of both serving the community and sharing Jesus within the group.

Onward

One specific fruit that will ripen will be the fruit of leading others. We recognize that people may grow to lead others in a small group, but they may also grow to lead in other areas of the church or other areas of their lives.

Leader

In most cases the determining factor of the health of a group is the spiritual health of the leader.

- Is the leader exhibiting the “one anothers”?
- Is there a healthy trust of the leader?
- Is the leader excited about small-group ministry?

As mentioned above, we had much discussion about the importance of the pulse of each group. As the leader of the group, it is important to determine the group's pulse – realizing that this pulse fluctuates throughout the life of the small group. After all, we are dealing with each group as a collection of individual people.

Assessing Health

The best – and simplest – way to assess the health of groups is to use five values. For some values, a tool is not really necessary. For others it will be helpful.

Upward

Ask questions such as, “On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) how well are we doing at keeping Jesus the center of our group? If we are really honest, who is the real leader of our group?”

Inward

We use a community evaluation based on the standards of the New Testament church. Groups use this evaluation to self-assess their health for this value.

Outward

We ask every group to be involved in a minimum of one serving project per trimester. (Many of our groups are involved in ongoing serving opportunities to the community.) We also evaluate how many visitors have come to the group in a given trimester and ask groups how often they pray for people in their spheres of influence who do not yet have a relationship with Jesus.

Forward

Our groups regularly (once to twice per year) utilize spiritual evaluation tools that assess spiritual maturity in 30 core competencies. Healthy groups have identified where they need to grow and have a plan for growth based on those findings.

Onward

This is the easiest to assess, and is really the benchmark of health in all the other values as well. We determine group health in this area by asking three questions:

- (1) Does the group embody the values of our church’s small group ministry?
- (2) Is there a leader-in-training in the group?
- (3) Has the leader passed on his or her leadership baton to someone in your group this year? (If not, when will this happen?)

If the group is healthy in the other four values, the natural outflow will be that spiritual leaders will be developed and deployed. Therefore, the outward Assessment is the culminating assessment. Ultimately, a healthy group is strong in all five values, although, as a group, they may focus on one or two above the others.

We align our small-group ministry around these five values to grow healthy groups. All of our training – both up-front and ongoing – involves these values. This allows us to focus leadership training in areas where our assessments show that we need the most growth.

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry Health and Wellness Diagnostic

At Community Church, we know that every small group moves through a life cycle. Sometimes, the group does not seem to function very well, or attendance seems to be in a slump. Here are some questions that small group leaders should ask from time to time.

Is it time for a shift in leadership?

- Has the leader grown tired of leading?
- Was the leader ever effective as a small-group leader?
- Is more training needed for the current leader? Does the leader need to recruit a co-leader, to share the load and to prepare for future leadership of additional groups?
- Is it time for someone else in the group to “step up to the plate” and lead?

Is the study material meeting a need? Is the study guide too basic for the spiritual life of the group members? Is it too challenging? Is it time to get back to just the Bible? Or to try a topical approach instead of verse by verse?

Is it time to invite? If numbers are small, is it time to challenge each person in the group to bring one new friend? Is it time to ask the church’s small-group director to send new people to the group? Is there a need for the “fresh air” brought by new group members?

Is there a polarizing personality in the mix? Is there a person who dominates the discussion who is driving away group members? Is there someone who needs emotional or spiritual support beyond what the leader or other members can provide? Has a good enough relationship been built with this person that it’s time to “do lunch” and discuss their situation?

Does the group need “a new outfit”? Does the group need to change meeting locations -- perhaps the same meeting in the same living room for too long has allowed the group to get “sleepy”? How about meeting in a different home? Multiple homes? A restaurant? Someone’s office after hours?

Do we need to get out and serve? Does the group need to be stretched by getting out of that living room and serving somewhere in the name of Christ? Does an elderly church member need leaves raked? Does the local rescue mission need a group to conduct a chapel service?

Is it time for a new approach? Is there a need to spend more evenings in prayer and less in study? Or more events just to have fun together? Or less fun events together and more serious Bible study? Is it a good time to introduce some exercises to help group members become more intimate with one another?

Has enough time passed? If the group is new and got off to a slow start, is there a need to persevere for a while and see what God’s will and timing are? Is the idea of quitting being considered too soon?

Is it time to break up the party? Are there too many people to really call this a “small group”? Is it time to send a few members off to begin another group, so others can enjoy this rich small group experience? Is it time to become a “supergroup” and break up into smaller groups within our meeting?

Is it time to die? Is it time to acknowledge that every small group that has ever existed eventually comes to an end? Is it time to rejoice together for all God has done with this group, have a final celebration together, and the individual members of the group move on to their next small-group experience?

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry Group Icebreakers

Graded on Life

If you had to give yourself a grade (A, B, C, D or F) in the following areas, what would it be and why?

Spiritual

Physical

Relational

Emotional

Favorite Room

Think of your favorite room in your present home. Why is that room your favorite?

Change Now!

If you could change one thing about your life right now, what would it be?

Clay in Your Hands

Give each person a piece of clay or Playdough. Ask them roll it, stretch it, and play with it for a minute or two. After a minute, ask them shape it into something that would be symbolic of what attracted them to Christ.

Investing Your Life

Using the following scale, would you say you have you invested your life in earning dollars or invested your life in people's destinies? Why do you feel you are at this place on the continuum?

1 _____ 10
\$\$\$\$\$\$ DESTINIES

Advice from the Oldies

If you could ask advice from one biblical character whom would you choose, and what would be your question?

Bedtime Stories

As a child, what was your very favorite bedtime story? Why?

Color Me

Bring a box of colored pencils to group. Pass around the box and ask everyone to pick one colored pencil that best describes their mood today. Give everyone an opportunity to explain why they chose that pencil.

Going Back

If you were afforded the opportunity to go back to college, what would you want to study? Why?

School Days Fear

Think back to your school days, either grade school or junior high. What was something or someone you feared?

Measuring My Life

Bring a ruler to your group. Ask people to tell you the purpose of a ruler. Then, ask people to think of their spiritual life. If they were to measure their walk with God, a full 12 inches being awesome and complete, what would be their spiritual measurement?

A Person of....

Which of the following would you most want to be called:

- A man/woman of faith
- A man/woman of joy
- A man/woman of peace
- A man/woman of integrity

Double Months

If you could repeat one month of the year twice in a row which one would you choose?

Shopping Spree

If you were given 7 minutes to go shopping at Wal-Mart and had unlimited money to use for those 7 minutes, what would you buy?

Fireworks

Tell the group about one thing you did this 4th of July and the thing you most enjoy about the 4th of July holiday.

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry 10 Hospitality Hints

Prayer. Pray for the right mindset before you minister to God's people. There are times when we cannot be hospitable in our own strength. It is then that we must humble ourselves and ask for God's strength to take over (2 Cor. 12:9 NIV).

Plan ahead. Discuss scriptures you will cover in advance. Try to make arrangements for refreshments to be ready in advance so that the group can be the entire focus for the meeting.

Give good instructions. Keep an open line of communication with your members to remind them of upcoming meetings. Provide good directions to the meeting place, along with details such as starting and ending times.

Keep group size small. The more people you have, the less opportunity you will have for ministry and the more risk you take of leaving someone out. Divide large groups into smaller groups for better intimacy and fellowship.

Greet people when they arrive. Let the love of God shine through you when your guests arrive. Greet your guests with warm hugs and handshakes. If possible, open the door before they knock. Tell them you are glad they came.

Remembering the individuals. Keep notes on your guests. Record their names, needs, and prayer requests. Recalling facts about their lives in conversation shows you care about them, and this will help them to trust you so that you can minister to them.

Show a servant's heart. Ask your leaders and apprentices to help in getting visitors acclimated to the group. Get regulars to pitch in to assure everyone has full drinks and is comfortable.

Direct the meeting. Obviously the small group leader should bring up the topic of discussion and should keep the conversation flowing. It is also good to gently steer the conversation away from those who are overly talkative. If someone is quiet, ask for that person's opinion from time to time.

Avoid favoritism. Make each guest valued, loved and appreciated, and do not have favorites (Gal. 2:6). If you see someone being left out, introduce that person to others in the group as a courtesy.

Bring the evening to an end. Close your meeting on a strong note, offering your guests the option of staying a little longer for fellowship or leaving. Say good-bye to everyone personally. Invite them to come back again.

Community Church

Small-Group Ministry Basic Listening Lessons

At Community Church, small-group ministry involves careful conversation—and the leader of the group needs to demonstrate careful listening skills so that every member has a chance to participate. Here are ten key listening lessons.

1. **Be quiet.** This should be obvious, but it often is the biggest obstruction to listening. The leader should be part of a discussion without monopolizing it.
2. **Try to understand.** The goal of listening is to understand what the person is *really* saying.
3. **Eliminate distractions.** People feel comfortable sharing when they are not interrupted. Turn the ringer off on the phone. Make sure you have childcare arranged. Don't look at your watch or lesson plan when someone is speaking.
4. **Empathize.** Interject short statements to show you understand and accept what the person is saying. "That sounds exciting!" or "That must have been a hard decision to make" are good examples of how to show empathy.
5. **Don't judge.** Especially when someone is already hurting, a judgmental attitude can do more harm than good. Don't condone sin, of course, but recognize the difference between acceptance and approval.
6. **Avoid advising.** Unless they ask for it, people usually do not want or need you to try to solve their problem. They just need someone to listen.
7. **Verify and clarify.** If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask: "Here's what I hear you saying. Am I right?"
8. **Listen for what is not said.** Try to hear the meaning behind the words. Watch body language and listen to tone of voice. Sometimes what a person is saying is lost behind a clutter of words.
9. **Watch body language.** Sometimes a person's posture or gestures can say more than words.
10. **Affirm.** Say, "Thanks for sharing that. I'm sure it isn't easy to talk about right now." This builds acceptance for talking about difficult things.

Community Church
SUPPORT REQUEST

Leader's name: _____ Date: _____

Your name: _____

Describe how things are going with YOUR GROUP:
(What's working? / What's not working as well as you'd like?)

Please let us know how YOU personally are feeling:

<input type="checkbox"/> Wonderful	<input type="checkbox"/> Okay	<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated
<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Not so well	<input type="checkbox"/> S.O.S.
<input type="checkbox"/> Excited / Hopeful	<input type="checkbox"/> Kind of tired	<input type="checkbox"/>

How can I, as your coach, SUPPORT YOU/ BE PRAYING FOR YOU over the next month?

What was your average attendance this past month?

Names of newcomers to your group: _____

If anyone has discontinued coming to your group, please provide a brief explanation of why they are no longer participating:

OPTIONAL: SHARE A STORY WITH US!

Did God do something exciting in your group last month?
Please tell us so we can share it with others!



Additional Resources

Resources for small-group ministries

Organizations and Electronic Resources

Smallgroups.com: Small-groups training resources from Christianity Today International:

- “Small-Group Leader” Orientation Guide
- “Leading a Great Small-Group Bible Study” Practical Ministry Skills
- “Planning and Leading a Life-Changing Meeting” Practical Ministry Skills
- “8 Key Practices for Effective Small-Group Leaders” Practical Ministry Skills

An excellent resource for starting, monitoring and evaluating the performance of small group ministry is a web site called **Why Didn't You Warn Me: Dealing With Small Group Challenges** at <http://whydidntyouwarnme.com/resources>.

The Serendipity Bible is a familiar small group study Bible filled with many exercises and discussion-starters. But there's much more at Serendipity House, the web site that offers a huge variety of small group materials for many purposes and also for many age groups. Check it out at www.serendipityhouse.com/store/smallgrouptypes.

Books and Printed Resources

Coaching Life-Changing Small Group Leaders: A Practical Guide for Those Who Lead and Shepherd Small Group Leaders by Bill Donahue and Greg Bowman. (Zondervan, 2006; ISBN 978-0310251798)

Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits. (Multnomah Press, 2004; ISBN 978-1590523964)

Go Big With Small Groups: Eleven Steps to an Explosive Small Group Ministry by Bill Easum and John Atkinson. (Abingdon Press, 2007; ISBN 978-0687491353)

Help! I'm a Small-Group Leader by Laurie Polich. (Zondervan, 1998; ISBN 978-0310224631)

Leading Life-Changing Small Groups by Bill Donahue. (Zondervan, 2002; ISBN 978-0310247500)

Making Small Groups Work by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. (Zondervan, 2003; ISBN 978-0310250289)

Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-Changing Discussions by Garry Poole. (Zondervan, 2003; ISBN 978-0310242338)

Small Group Idea Book: Resources to Enrich Community, Worship, Prayer, Bible Study, Outreach. Cindy Bunch, ed. (InterVarsity Press, revised expanded edition, 2003; ISBN 978-0830811243)



Small Group Ministry In The 21st Century, M. Scott Boren, ed. (Group Publishing, 2004, ISBN 978-0764427695)

The 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders by Dave Earley. (Cell Group Resources, 2001; ISBN 978-1880828342)

The Big Book on Small Groups by Jeffrey Arnold. (IVP Connect, 2004; ISBN 978-0830823703)

The Spirit-filled Small Group: Leading Your Group to Experience the Spiritual Gifts by Joel Comiskey. (Chosen Books, 2005; ISBN 978-0800793869)

The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry: A Troubleshooting Guide for Church Leaders by Bill Donahue. (Zondervan, 2005; ISBN 978-0310267119)