



WHITE'S CHAPEL METHODIST CHURCH



COMMUNITY GROUPS

This training manual will provide an overview of our Community Groups ministry including (1) purpose of the groups (2) expectations of the leaders/facilitators (3) conduct of group meetings.

Tracy Christensen
Director of Adult Discipleship

What is a Community Group?

Community Groups are small groups that meet in homes for the purpose of permitting participants to **belong** to an authentic nonjudgmental community, to **share** joys and concerns, and to **practice loving** God and neighbor.

Why Do We Need Community Groups?

1. To live as God intended through Community.

According to Genesis 1:27 we were created in the image of God, the Triune God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-- the God who is three in one. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit dwell in community and are bound together in love. Next in Genesis 2:18, God says, *"It is not good for the man to be alone."*¹ So God created woman. This demonstrates that God intended for us to live in community or in communion with other Christians. The Fall of Adam and Eve caused alienation between God and humans, and alienation between humans as well.

2. To grow spiritually through sharing God encounters (Growth)

Through our baptism we are incorporated into the body or the community of Jesus Christ. The question is, "What does that look like?" It looks like the description of the Church immediately following Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:42-47:

*"⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*²

A Community Group is also a community of people where we:

¹ <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%202:18;&version=31;>

² <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%202:42-47;&version=31;>

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*“Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.”
(Galatians 6:2 CEB)*

Through our Community Groups we can reflect the image of the early Christian communities of faith mentioned in Acts 2:42-47 and Galatians 6:2. Community Groups are a place of ministry shared among members. Each member of the group should use his or her gifts to serve God, other members of the group, and their neighbors. In other words, each member has a responsibility to share his or her spiritual gifts to promote the growth and development of the group.

Community Group Leaders cannot provide a successful group experience without the participation of every member. Engaging the combined gifts and graces of every member will provide an awesome group experience.

Why do we meet in homes or other places off campus?

- 1. It helps church members and regular attendees of our church get to know each other and grow in their faith in a more intimate environment.**

There are examples of the effectiveness of this house meeting model found in the bible, Methodist history, and presently in many churches today. The house meeting model worked in the New Testament. Examples are found in the book of Acts with the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:42-47) and in the book of Philippians (Philippians 1:3-9, 1:27 -2:18)

The house meeting model worked for John Wesley who founded the Methodist church. He established house meeting groups wherever people accepted Jesus Christ. He discovered that people were more likely to fall back into sinfulness when they did not join or actively participate in a house meeting. People’s lives were changed through the sharing of their experiences of God, praying for one another, adhering to the Three Simple Rules of the Methodist church, and encouraging one another.

- 2. It gives us the opportunity to share our faith stories with people not presently connected to our church.**

This house meeting model is effective today because it provides a less intimidating entry point into the life of the church for a culture that perceives the church as irrelevant, archaic, and disengaged with the world. More and more people are growing up with little to no experience with Jesus or the church. Moreover, society no longer pushes people into church, in fact there

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are many competing interests on Sunday mornings and Wednesday's which are traditional days that people attend church for worship and bible study. People are forced to choose between work, children's extracurricular activities, school, and even much needed rest.

Some people who are not presently connected to a church may not feel comfortable coming to a church, but they may feel more comfortable coming to your home or neutral public place like a café shop.

This house meeting model allows us to engage them by first forming a relationship with them in a small group setting outside of the church building. In this context, we can show them the grace of God through giving them a place to belong, sharing our experiences of God shaping our lives, and loving them unconditionally as we grow in our love of God.

What will we do when we meet?

1. **There is diversity among groups. Here are some of the primary areas of emphasis for our groups.**

- a. Bible Study (Sermon Series discussion guides or other curriculum provided through Adult Discipleship Library)
- b. Spiritual Formation
- c. Missions
- d. Fellowship

2. **While there is diversity among the groups there are seven things that every group has in common:**

- a. Pray for each other.
- b. Ask and answer the question: "How is your life in God?" "Where have you seen God at work in your life?"
- c. Review the 3 Simple Rules: Do no harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God
- d. Watch over each other in Christian love (encouragement and accountability)
- e. **Meets weekly or at least twice a month (at a time other than Wednesday evening or Sunday morning.)**
- f. Seeks to experience life changing spiritual transformation.
- g. Meets off campus (With exception of young family groups that may have an option to meet on campus for childcare.)

What are the qualifications for group leaders?

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All of the leaders must have the following qualifications:

1. **Connection.** They are members of *White's Chapel*.
2. **Character.** They are recognized for their integrity by those who know them best.
3. **Chemistry.** They have interviewed with church leadership.
4. **Competence.** They have demonstrated competence through training or previous experience in Community Groups.

A. Community Group Leader(s):

Purpose:

The group leader facilitates and nurtures the Community Group to grow towards spiritual maturity and community. Group Leaders receive their care and guidance directly from the Coordinator of Community Groups. There may be more than one group leader/facilitator. One group leader may carry out the administrative functions of the group and one may fulfill the functions of encourager, conflict manager, and peacemaker.

Priorities:

- Lead the group by facilitating the group and monitoring its health.
- Guide discussions in relation to the group covenant and *White's Chapel Discussion Questions*. (Avoid controversial topics especially those that are political in nature. Avoid gossip and focus on the gospel.)
- Carry out the five leader essentials:
 1. Creating an open and safe environment where people can experience authentic biblical community and spiritual growth.³
 2. Promoting and encouraging participation of all the group members.

³ Ibid., 155.

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3. Providing care to deal with challenging situations in the group. Also informing them of additional care ministry resources available from the church.⁴
 4. Identifying apprentices in the group. This will enable the group to be fully prepared to multiply.
 5. Multiplying groups in order to open the door for others to participate in Community Groups.
- Communicate updated group information via *email* tchristensen@whiteschapel.org after each Community Group Meeting. This includes group attendance and gathering new member and guest data.
 - Be great group facilitators:
 1. **Prepared**
 - a. Know the discussion material ahead of time.
 - b. Arranges the room for success – create community and discussion.
 - c. Has a basic outline for time purposes.
 2. **Timekeepers**
 - a. Start on time.
 - b. Keep track of time and moves the group forward.
 - c. End on time.
 3. **Discussion Leaders**
 - a. Ask opened ended questions.
 - b. Involve everyone.
 - c. Stop judgmental or demeaning statements.
 - d. Keep discussion on track.
 - e. Move discussion to action steps.
 4. **Prayer Coordinators**
 - a. Lead the group toward connection with God.
 - b. Creatively involve everyone in prayer
 - c. Make sure the group closes with prayer.

B. Community Group Leader Apprentice:

⁴ Ibid., 158.

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Purpose:

Apprentices are people who have been selected by the Group Leader to be a “Group Leader in training.” The apprentice assists the Group Leader with the meetings while learning from the Group Leader. The primary goal of an apprenticeship is to prepare the apprentice to lead his or her own group in the future.

Priorities:

Apprentices are expected to follow the same priorities as the Community Group Leader.

How do people join Community Groups?

There are three entry points into groups:

- 1. By personal invitation:** Church members, regular attendees, friends, family members, and neighbors, are invited to attend the group meeting by the group leader or group members of the Community Group. If their person is interested in joining, the person agrees to the group covenant, the group leader sends that person’s information to the Community Group Coordinator who adds the new group member’s name to the group’s official membership roster.
- 2. By information request:** People fill out information request cards or fill out an online form that indicates whether they are interested in receiving information about ministries at White’s Chapel. If the person requests information about Community Groups, then the Community Group Coordinator sends that information to the Community Group Leader. The Community Group Leader then extends an invitation to that person to attend a group meeting.

How are we expected to treat one another?

Priorities:

Group members are responsible for using their gifts and graces and following the group standards of behavior.

Members:

Members of the Community Groups are members of the church, some are regular attendees of the church, and others may have the Community Group as their only connection to the church.

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Standards of Behavior: Members can enhance their experience in a group by helping to create a trusting climate. The standards of behavior include:⁵

- 1. Confidentiality:** What is said and discussed in this group stays in this group except in cases when members pose a danger to themselves or others i.e., child abuse, suicidal/homicidal threats.
- 2. Safe Place:** Physical threats, intimidation, coercion, and undue peer pressure will not be tolerated.
- 3. Attendance:** Group Members are expected to attend regularly and show up on time.
- 4. Sharing:** Group members are encouraged to be personal and share meaningful aspects of themselves, communicating directly with others and becoming active participants. Focus on personal thoughts and feelings and express them rather than talking about them in a detached and intellectual manner.
- 5. Non-Judgmental:** Group members are encouraged to provide support which encourages self exploration.
- 6. Listening:** Listen without thinking of a quick rebuttal and without becoming overly defensive. Hear what others are saying before responding.

What does the Community Groups Coordinator do?

Purpose:

The Community Group Coordinator is responsible for sharing the vision with the Community Group leaders. The Community Group Coordinator is responsible for overseeing, supporting, and guiding the Community Group leaders. The Community Groups Coordinator equips the group leaders to effectively lead the groups.

Priorities:

⁵ Kevin Applegate, CellStart Class Curriculum, "Establishing Group Ground Rules/Standards of Behavior" (Ginghamsburg Church).

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A. Equip and Support the Group Leaders

1. Meet with group leaders whenever requested or needed.
2. Equip and develop each leader around the following five leader essentials:
 - Cultivating relationships
 - Promoting and encouraging participation
 - Identifying apprentices
 - Providing Care
 - Multiplying groups
3. Monitor the health, effectiveness, and duration of groups through use of data compiled via ACS, one-on-ones with group leaders, and group visits.
4. Be available to minister with and serve each leader.

B. Enlist Leaders

1. Interview all new leaders.
2. Identify apprentices and begin the leader development process.
3. Constantly recruit new group leaders

C. Oversee Multiplication

1. Track group progress through group life commitment duration
2. Identify apprentices and enlist them before multiplication date.
3. Ensure timely multiplication of all groups.

D. Administration

1. Oversee the weekly/monthly update of group data.
2. Distribute list of people interested in joining Community Groups to group leaders.
3. Verify that all group information is current and accurate.

COMMUNITY GROUP COVENANT

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1. The Community Group will meet from _____ through _____.
2. The Community Group will meet on _____ night.
3. The Community Group meetings will begin at _____ and end at _____.
4. The Community Group time will generally consist of _____ minutes of sharing, _____ of study/discussion, and _____ of prayer.
5. The Community Group will be an open group until the group averages twelve to fourteen regular attendees.
6. Community Group members will attend and participate on a regular basis.
7. Members agree to pray for other group members on a weekly basis.
8. We will maintain confidentiality, respect one another, attend regularly, and be nonjudgmental.

I covenant together with the other members of this group to honor this agreement.

Community Group Leader(s)

Sign:

Community Group Members:

How do we conduct our group meetings?

BASIC COMMUNITY GROUP AGENDA

Gathering Time - 20-25 minutes (Eating and Refreshments)

Cheer and Care Time - 30 minutes

1. Ask people to share prayer requests and praise reports for the week.

Pray together as a group acknowledging God's goodness and praying for the individual requests that were shared.

2. Ask a get-to-know-you question like:

- "What is the strangest or most peculiar job you have ever had?"
- "Tell the story behind a physical scar you have on your body."
- "If you had a free week all by yourself, where would you go and what would you do?"

3. Ask a focused spiritual question such as:

- "What was one God moment you experienced this week?"
- "What is one blessing you experienced this week?"
- "Did God answer any prayers for you this week?"
- "Who has been a spiritual mentor in your life and why?"

4. Review the Three Simple Rules (for more information Read Bishop Reuben Job's book *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*)

- **Do no Harm-** avoid evil of every kind. (Gal. 5:15)
- **Do Good-**as far as possible, to all persons. (3 John 11b; Acts 10:38, Galatians 6:6-10)
- **Stay in Love with God-**Spiritual disciplines and works of mercy and justice. (Psalm 105:4; Colossians 2:6-7)

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White's Chapel Discussion Guides - 25-35 minutes:

1. **Use the *White's Chapel Discussion Guides*:** Community Group discussion guides are based on the weekly message and will be sent via email the week before each sermon weekend.
2. **Read chosen Scriptures aloud and answer discussion questions.**
3. **Discern life application from the Scripture.**

Provide Updates-5-10 minutes.

- Provide important Group Information about upcoming meeting locations, parties, events, or service together.

Close in Prayer-5 minutes

- Pray that God brings others into your lives who you may add to your Community Group to increase God's kingdom.
- If your group needs individual instruction on how to move forward, please contact Tracy Christensen via email at tchristensen@whiteschapel.org to schedule a time to meet.

What do we do about our children?

The purpose of keeping the children in the Community Group is to keep families together. Also, children can learn a lot participating in worship, listening to testimonies of what God is doing, giving testimonies, asking for prayer, receiving prayer, and being part of the life of the group. Sometimes children are more open to God than are adults. That being said, children are still children, and their attention spans can be short.

Here are some possible childcare options:⁶

1. Have each family provide childcare for their own children.
2. Provide childcare at a home near where the group meets (childcare at one home while the Community Group meets at the other).
3. Dedicate a room for childcare in the home where the group meets (with each family contributing money for childcare costs).
4. Rotate two unrelated members out of the Community Group each time to provide childcare.
5. Conduct a family-oriented Community Group so the children can be included.
6. Ask high school students to provide childcare as part of their "ministry project."
7. Trade childcare responsibilities with another group.
8. Contact Tracy Christensen if no other options are available. Some Community Groups with several small children may be able to meet on campus depending on the day and time of meetings.

⁶ Kevin Applegate, CellStart Class Curriculum, "Childcare Issues" (Ginghamburg Church).

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