



Go Small at St. Paul

Small Group
LEADER'S
HANDBOOK

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Thank you!

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- Introduction -

Welcome to our Small Group Leader's Handbook. From the bottom of our hearts, we at St. Paul Lutheran Church, want to thank you for taking up the privilege and responsibility of being a Small Group leader! It won't be an easy role, but we do believe it will be an enjoyable position, and most importantly, one through which you'll be doing God's work to furthering His Kingdom!

This handbook includes all that you need to know to get started as a Small Group leader. Most likely, you'll find it to encompass more than you anticipated. We are taking a very intentional approach towards Small Groups because we believe that God will work mightily through them to bring people closer to Him – both inside and outside of our church. **With a BIG vision comes a BIG job and a BIG responsibility. But don't forget that we also have a BIG God who WILL work through you.** You might be intimidated by all you're asked to do but don't be deterred. We need courageous Christians like yourself to lead our Groups; we will support you through it all; and most importantly, **God is always supporting you!**

We hope that as you go through this handbook, the reasons for doing Small Groups so intentionally and rigorously will become clear, and we hope that you'll share in our enthusiasm! However, if you disagree with something that you read or don't fully understand it, we encourage you to contact us. We believe that everything that we're hoping Small Groups will be and everything that we're asking you as a leader to do is Biblical and is, therefore, God's will.

We want to be honest with you up front – being a Small Group leader will not always be easy, but we believe that all of it is good. Jesus says, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”* (Luke 9:23-25). Just as Jesus says, as a Small Group leader, you will “lose” some things. You'll lose time; you'll lose some money; you'll lose some comfortability; and you'll probably lose some sleep at night. But what you'll gain is so much better! You'll gain faith; you'll gain good, Christian friends; and you'll gain the joy of doing God's work.

Ultimately, as Jesus says, as you give more of yourself for His Kingdom, you'll more firmly grasp true life – the eternal life that can only be received through faith in Him.

Read this Handbook with that perspective. Dive into learning about Small Groups and leading Small Groups! Along the way, you'll read our Small Group Vision Statement. You'll come to understand the Biblical Basis for Small Groups. We'll take you through the Purposes and the Goals of Small Groups. You'll gain insight into Leading a Small Group. We'll talk about the Look of Group Life. You'll take an in-depth look at the Small Group Meeting. And you'll learn about the Multiplication Strategy for Small Groups. We hope that you're excited about leading your Small Group, and we hope that this is a helpful and useful resource for you. Without further ado, let's jump into this Small Group Leader's Handbook and all that God has planned for you to do!

- 1) Vision Statement -

Small Groups 'Connect People to Christ' in a culture lacking in community, truth, and direction by fostering supportive relationships focused around the discussion of God's Word, prayer, and outreach where we live, work, and play.

The Groups may be Small, but our vision for them is very BIG. We have seen that God has used Small Groups in amazing ways in other churches, and we believe He will do that at St. Paul, too.

Your Group will look different than the other Groups, **but at the heart of each Group is this vision.** It is important that you always keep this vision in mind; review, share, discuss, and pray over it often with your Group so that you're consistently working towards being all that your Small Group can be. The rest of this [Small Group Leader's Handbook](#) will elaborate on this [Vision Statement](#) and describing in more detail.

As a Small Group leader, it will be your duty to direct your Group towards this vision. You will provide the environment and the guidance through which your Group will be connected to Christ and through which your Group will work to connect others to Christ.

- Things to Think About -

- 1). Do you see the culture around you lacking in community, truth, and direction? If so, how can Small Groups combat that?
- 2). Supportive relationships are at the heart of Small Groups; why is it so important for Christians to form those relationships?
- 3). Who is the most important person we all should have a relationship with? How might a Small Group foster that relationship?
- 4). Often, outreach will be the first thing to go from a group's pursuit of this vision; why is outreach so important for a Small Group to be doing? How can you ensure that it remains an important action that your Small Group does?

- 2) Biblical Basis for Small Groups -

If you're going to lead a Small Group, it's important that you buy into our Vision Statement. Therefore, we want to show you that our vision aligns both with God's Word and His will. We would not be encouraging this type of Small Group ministry if we didn't believe that this is what God wants us to be doing as a church. And, indeed, we see justification for it in the Bible:

A. Jesus operated in a Small Group. He taught a lot of people, but He kept twelve people very close to Himself whom He taught and disciplined to be future leaders. (See: Matthew 13:10-23, 36-43; Mark 10:23-31; Luke 16:1-13; & John 13-17)

B. The early church operated in Small Groups. The churches of the Bible were small communities that met regularly in people's houses to worship, fellowship, and learn. (See: Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 11:17-22; 1 Corinthians 16:19; & Colossian 4:15)

C. Hebrews 10:24-25 describes a tight-knit community of believers doing what Small Groups do. "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (See also: Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 18:20; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 2 Timothy 2:2, & James 5:16)

Our Vision Statement expects Small Groups to do three main things; these three expectations are also Biblical:

A. Foster supportive relationships. "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" – 1 Thessalonians 5:11. (See also: 1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 3:13; & Hebrews 10:25)

B. Draw closer to God through Word & prayer. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God" – Colossians 3:16. (See also: Ephesians 4:11-16 & 2 Timothy 4:2)

C. Evangelize. "For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" – 1 Corinthians 9:16. (See also: Matthew 9:37-38; Matthew 28:19-20; & 2 Corinthians 5:20)

These are but a few of the many passages that we could provide. From this small sample, we hope that you see that God loves Small Groups and our vision for them! **Having seen how our Vision Statement aligns with God's Word, we hope that you're enthusiastic to lead your Small Group and further God's Kingdom through it.** If you're still not convinced about our vision for Small Groups, please contact us so that we can discuss it further.

- Things to Think About -

- 1). Do you understand why we are encouraging Small Groups?
- 2). Are you supportive of what we are trying to accomplish through Small Groups? Why or why not?
- 3). Are you ready to be God's instrument through which He works His purposes?

- 3) Purposes & Goals of Small Groups -

At St. Paul, we are intending Small Groups to be a very intentional endeavor. As you perhaps noticed in the Small Group Vision Statement above, Small Groups have some very important and specific purposes and goals. The Purposes & Goals of Small Groups outlined below are aimed at fulfilling the biblical mandates for ministry described above. **All Small Groups will strive to realize these purposes and goals.** Small Groups shouldn't be less than what is outlined below, but that does not mean that all Small Groups will look the same. In fact, we hope and pray that Small Groups will go above and beyond meeting these purposes and goals.

This list is not meant to constrain you, but rather it is meant to direct you towards leading your Small Group towards being all that it can be for the glory of God and the furthering of His Kingdom.

As a leader, it is your job to know these purposes and goals, to share them with your Group, and to continually strive towards them. We hope that you'll take this job very seriously because we believe that Small Groups have a big role to play in our mission of 'Connecting People to Christ.' **Yes, Small Groups are a Bible study, but they are so much more than that; they are Christian communities, leadership training grounds, and doors through which people can enter the church and come to an eternal-life-saving relationship with Jesus Christ!**

We hope that you're excited to lead a Small Group that will embody these purposes and goals because they are an essential component of our church and will be used by God to do wonderful, eternally relevant things. We ask that if you're unsure about, confused by, or not on-board with any of the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups detailed below that you would contact us. We view them as essential aspects of Small Groups and want to work with you to share that vision.

A. Small Groups will be tight-knit communities that are fun, open, supportive, safe, kind, and holding members accountable to their faith. God created us for community. In our private, individualistic society, we tend to think our faith should be a private, individual affair, but that's not at all the case.

**Christians need fellowship. Christians need close relationships with other Christians who will encourage, support, and challenge them.
Christians need other Christians to grow in faith together.**

It's hard for churches to adequately supply such community; we get together for an hour of formal worship once a week where there isn't much opportunity for relationships to be built. So, we as a church want to provide Small Groups, not as an alternative to church but a supplement where an individual can be a part of a community and receive the fellowship that all Christians need.

On the lighter side, **Small Groups are meant to be fun and are to provide opportunities for relationships to form.** On the more serious side, **Small Groups are meant to develop deep, intimate relationships in which Christians care for one another and hold each other accountable to the faith they profess.** It's important that both these aspects of relationships are being built so that true, beneficial fellowship results.

B. Small Groups will serve. There's no way around it, God calls all Christians to serve other Christians and to serve their communities. **We serve because God came to earth to serve us.** Our service is a response to the abundant love with which God has loved us; He has filled us up with His grace and mercy, and we pour that out in service towards others.

By our service, we show others the God who serves and, by our actions, proclaim to them the Gospel. Our constant prayer when serving is that others will see God through us and want to know more about Him.

For this reason, Small Groups will serve – both formally and informally. Formally, we encourage all Small Groups to serve together at least once a year. However, we do encourage each Group to serve much more; **consistently serving together as a Small Group is great for your Group fellowship and it also benefits the surrounding community.** Our church provides many opportunities for your Group to serve consistently. However, if you would rather serve consistently at a place in the community not associated with St. Paul, we absolutely encourage you as a Small Group to do so and be a light for Christ to them.

More informally, Christian service should be a constant theme of Small Group discussions and members should be encouraged often to serve each other and to serve those around them. Of course, this serving each other goes a long way in fostering the deep relationships that are so much a part of Small Group.

For example...
If one member is hurting, others should reach out.
If one member is hospitalized, others should visit.
If one member needs a ride, others should drive.

C. Small Groups will be centered around and teach God's Word, hold it to be truth, and demonstrate its relevance for the lives of participants. Communities need to be organized around something – for Small Groups, that something is God's Word. **It's in the Bible that we find absolute, ultimate truth.** It's only in God's Word that we learn that we're all sinners saved by the gracious work of Jesus through faith. The Bible contains real wisdom for our daily lives. In this information age, the only information that we truly need is that which is found in God's Word.

The Bible is God's truth for us; in it He teaches us the truth about Himself and the truth about ourselves. There is nothing more important for each one of us than to know and trust this truth.

Therefore, Small Groups will spend a lot of time in the Bible. They'll teach God's Word. Bible studies will be a staple of what Small Groups do. They discuss God's Word. Their conversations will be informed by the biblical truth.

As Small Groups use the Bible, their focus should be on applying God's truth to their lives. In our large group church gatherings, it is difficult to make a sermon relevant for every person there. Small Groups provide that necessary supplement to large group church gatherings: a comfortable, intimate community where God's Word can be made relevant to the lives of everyone there. Through teaching, discussion, conversation, and example, God's Word will be communicated in a personal, applicable manner.

D. Small Groups will grow. The greatest need that ALL PEOPLE have is deliverance from death and hell – amazingly, we know the Deliverer, and others need to know Him, too. For this reason, growth is a major Purpose & Goal of Small Groups. **Evangelism must be stressed and exemplified by you, the leader.** Members should be encouraged often to invite their family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, anyone, and everyone! We hope that you come to love your Small Group and each person in it, but you must always be willing to welcome others in and multiply into more Groups. This willingness to sacrifice and to welcome others comes from both a respect for the command of Christ to share His message and also from a deep desire for others to be saved.

It's important that Small Groups always remain open and never become complacent and satisfied with the Group of people they have at any given moment.

Small Groups Provide an Ideal Setting for Evangelism

1. The world leaves people lonely & confused; Small Groups offer community, truth, & hope.
2. Small Group members can practice & do evangelism together; it's often intimidating to do on your own, but less so with friends.
3. Small Groups present a warm, welcoming environment to invite seekers into.

Small Groups have the thing that all people need: **Jesus**. Don't keep Him to yourself; rather work together to share Him and draw people to Him. For this reason, Small Groups will be open to all people – an individual's faith background, socioeconomic status, interests, etc. should never bar them from coming and joining your Small Group.

E. Small Groups will multiply into other groups. As Small Groups grow, they will need to multiply into other Groups to keep Small Groups 'small.' **Small Groups start to lose their effectiveness in fostering community, communicating the relevancy of God's Word, and encouraging evangelism when they get too large.** Generally, this starts to happen when a Group reaches about twelve members; though the situation doesn't become critical until they begin to near twenty. **In order to maintain their efficacy, then, a large Small Group must multiply into two Groups.**

It is your goal to grow continually so that you can multiply.

Though you and your Small Group may grow very close, you must always be willing to multiply. **Keep in mind that the mission of a Small Group is ultimately to 'Connect People to Christ' – people outside your Group need to be brought in and your Group needs to be small enough to continue to effectively fulfill this mission for your members.** Though it can be tough, an important Purpose & Goal of Small Groups is to multiply so that your Group can continue communicating the Gospel as successfully as possible.

F. Small Groups will foster leadership. Since a Purpose & Goal of Small Groups is to evangelize, grow, and multiply, fostering leadership must also be a goal. As growth happens and new people are brought in, new leaders will be required to lead the new Group that yours will birth as you multiply.

One author says, "There is no lasting 'success' without 'successors' – Small Groups prepare to multiply into other Groups by constantly preparing and developing leaders to lead those new Groups."

We see type of leadership development in the Bible. For instance, consider Jesus; He didn't just teach disciples; He trained them to be the leaders of His church after He ascended. Or consider Paul; in each city that he went to, he raised up leaders to continue his work after he left. **You, as the leader of a Small Group, are in an excellent position to continue this important work of raising up leaders so that Small Groups and God's Kingdom will advance.** You should identify potential leaders, come alongside them, and begin to mentor and train them to be future leaders and thus.

G. Small Groups will live the Christian faith. This purpose and goal sums up all the others well. Small Groups aren't just a Bible study nor an exchange of information – they are those things, but they are also about putting the Bible and that information into practice. Small Groups are a place to 'preach', but even more they are a place to practice what's been preached – this is one thing that makes them so valuable. **They are communities centered around and living out God's Word.** In other words, they are communities that serve, that evangelize, and that sacrifice for the good of the mission and the benefit of God's Kingdom.

One author says that Small Groups walk the fine line between a 'class' and a 'support group' – a Small Group is neither and at the same time both; it's biblical teaching applied to life.

- Things to Think About -

- 1). Do you agree with these Purposes & Goals of Small Groups? Why or why not?

- 2). Which of these goals and purposes are you intimidated by?

- 3). How do these Purposes & Goals of Small Groups fit with God's mission?

- 4). Which of these goals and purposes are you excited about?

- 4) Leading a Small Group -

So far, you've read about our vision for Small Groups, the Biblical basis behind them, and what Small Groups are all about. That's all good and well, but now it's time for the rubber to meet the road. In this section, we'll take a look at the practical – we'll focus on actually leading a Small Group. Of course, we cannot cover everything here. But what we can do, is **provide you with an overview of what being a Small Group leader looks like** as well as some **general, overarching advice that will go a very long way towards helping you to be an excellent Small Group leader** who'll be used by God to further His Kingdom here on earth.

Know that you're not in this alone.

You don't have to be and you never will be an expert on every scenario that a Small Group leader might face. As time goes on, as Small Groups develop and grow, we'll be providing more specific, pointed training on those areas you feel that you need more instruction on. As challenges arise, we'll be here to support you. Most importantly, God will be your constant source of strength, wisdom, and guidance. Together, we'll all work to help you be an effective leader of an amazing Small Group!

For more information...

I would encourage you to request a copy of *The 8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders* by Dr. Dave Earley from us; we've order several to loan out to Small Group leaders. It's a short, quick read and an excellent book that provides very practical insights into being an excellent Small Group leader.

Being a Small Group leader is a big responsibility, and it's far from easy. It takes commitment, sacrifice, wisdom, and strength. **Thankfully, God provides those things to all who look to Him and ask.**

Never forget why you're doing this: because God has given everything to you. God has sacrificed for you; God has filled you up.

Being a Small Group leader will **connect you closer to God**, who is all that you need, and will empower you to connect others to God, who is all that they need, too! Being a Small Group leader is a challenge, but it is also a great benefit and blessing to be in this position!

When you struggle, never forget that **God will never ask of you more than you can handle** (1 Corinthians 10:13). Never forget that **you "can do all things through God who strengthens you"** (Philippians 4:13). Never forget to ask God for wisdom for **"it will be given to you"** (James 1:5). And never forget that God will never ask you to give more than he has given to you; Romans 8:32 assures us: **"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"**

If you ever feel inadequate, remember Jesus' disciples. This ragtag band of fishermen, a tax collector, a revolutionary, etc. doubted, made mistakes, and continually sinned; yet they were empowered and used by the Holy Spirit to change the world! God can use anyone, and God can use you. I hope that brings you a humble, healthy confidence as

It's often been said: "God doesn't call the equipped, he equips the called."

you become a Small Group leader! Below, you'll find a few more verses that remind you that you're not in this alone, but instead the all-powerful, all-loving God of the universe on your side!

"For the LORD God is a sun and a shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; He withholds no good thing from those who walk with integrity." – Psalm 84:11

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him." – Matthew 7:11

"His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness." – 2 Peter 1:3.

A. Small Group leaders are supported. First, know that we, as your church, are here to support you. We will regularly contact you to see how things are going. We will meet with you to listen, encourage, and advise. We will offer regular trainings. We will be here to direct on any questions and situations that you bring to us. We will be here to provide materials for you to use with your Group. And we will be here to visit your Small Groups to show our support. **Ultimately, we want to be here for you in any and every circumstance. Please know that you can always reach out to us.** We'll be praying for you. Thank you for doing God's work by being a Small Group leader!

We've asked you to support your members, and we in turn want to be there to support you.

Even more importantly, **God is absolutely always with you to support you.** Jesus says, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Furthermore God promises, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Be faithful to Him, pray to Him, trust in Him – **He will work through you, He will build you up when you are low, and He will supply you with what you truly need.**

B. Small Group leaders pursue spiritual health. In order to be an effective Small Group leader and communicator and demonstrator of God's Word, **you need to be spiritually healthy.** You will only be a good leader if God is working through you. In the Bible, God tells us that there are barriers to His working and also that there are places He promises to be.

As a Small Group leader (and generally as a Christian), you should strive to remove those barriers and be in the places that God promises to work – in other words, seek to be spiritually healthy.

Then, and only then, will you be as effective of a Small Group leader as you can possibly be.

One obstacle to God's presence is **pride**; "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). Recognize when you're being prideful, get on your knees, repent, and ask God to give you humility that recognizes your lowliness and inadequacy next to Him. Humbly seek to do His will.

A second obstacle is **unresolved conflict**; "So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24). Consider who you are at odds with, forgive them in your heart, forgive them to their face, and humbly seek reconciliation.

Another barrier to God's presence is **sin**; "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18). If you are willingly and knowingly living in sin and refusing to repent, that will be a detriment to your salvation. God is abundantly gracious and will forgive the repentant; go to him always in that repentance.

It is of the utmost importance that you daily consider your sinfulness, repent and confess those sins to God, and receive His forgiveness.

On the flip side, God also provides many avenues through which He promises to be with you, strengthen you, and equip you. The first of these is **prayer**. God promises: "Call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you" (Jeremiah 29:12). And: "The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).

An experienced Small Group leader has shared: "Prayer...is the biggest single factor in being an effective leader."

Pray daily for your Group members. Pray for the mission of your Small Group. Pray that God would work, lead, and teach through you. Pray that the Holy Spirit would be present at your Small Group meetings. **Prayer puts your work in God's hands and that's the best place for it to be.** Prayer taps into God's omnipresence and omnipotence; you can't lead your members 24 hours a day, but God can. Prayer saves time and effort because it turns your Group and your life over to God and makes Him the true leader. **Maintain a set time to pray for your Group each and every day.**

Second, **be in God's Word**. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). **Through the Bible, God comes to you to strengthen your faith.** The Bible is how God most often communicates with you; this is where He teaches you, leads you, and equips you. God's direction will give you direction as you lead. **When you know what God says, you'll be better able to teach and to answer questions.** Understanding God's way will allow you to give and receive spiritual correction. Follow a reading plan so that you're in the Bible every day. Find other spiritual leaders who you can read, watch, and listen to as they proclaim God's Word. As you cultivate this private devotional life the Spirit will grow and empower you.

In order to lead others, you'll need to be led by God. He communicates to us in His Word, be there.

Third, **be in church**. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matthew 18:20). As you worship with other Christians, God is present and is bolstering your Spirit. In church, you will also receive Holy Communion, the gift through which God physically enters into you and fills you with Himself.

It is of the utmost importance that you be committed to personal, spiritual growth. It isn't a one-time fix; rather it's a life-long, everyday commitment.

No one is ever spiritually strong enough; and when you quit, decline is rapid. Form a routine that you can stick to. Set aside a few minutes each morning and evening to pray. Set aside ten minutes over lunch to read the Bible. Listen to a Christian podcast when your driving, working out, or doing chores. **Make spending time with God a habit, and you will absolutely not regret it.** God is what we all need above everything else, He's gracious enough to give Himself to you; put yourself in the places that He is!

Finally, **examine yourself often**. Are you living according to God's will or your will? Are you letting the Holy Spirit dominate in your life? Are you grateful to God for the opportunity to serve others as a Small Group leader? Are you applying God's Word and really living the Christian life? Are your time, money,

and gifts being used for God's purposes or yours? If your answer is, "No," repent, ask for God's forgiveness, return to be where He is, and receive His forgiveness, guidance, help, and strength.

C. *Small Group leaders teach the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups.* As you read through the purposes and goals above, did you ever think, "This seems hard" or "I don't really want to do that"? Let's be honest, it's generally much more appealing to keep the Group that we love together than to multiply into two groups. It can be scary to actively do evangelism. It will be time consuming to serve. **Our sinful human nature is predisposed to doing what's easiest, what's comfortable, and what's against God's will.** Many of the purposes and goals that we laid out for Small Groups are challenging and difficult, but **they are also God's will – which makes them important.** For that reason, it's important that you continually teach the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups to your Group members; **doing so will help keep your Group accountable to putting them into practice.**

In order to properly teach them, **you first need to be open and honest about them with your group from the beginning. Let them know up front what your Small Group will really be about.** Take your first meeting to go through them and talk about them.

Second, **explain the reason and Gospel motivation for them.**

The Purposes & Goals of Small Groups aren't there to make your life difficult; rather they are there because everyone needs God and Small Groups focused on these purposes and goals bring God to people.

These purposes and goals are directives from God and should be embraced by His people. Additionally, **the Gospel motivates you to adopt and live these purposes and goals.** Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25). **Christians pick up their crosses and do this ministry that is often difficult and challenging because Jesus picked up His cross for us first.** He struggled for our benefit, and now He asks us to struggle for the benefit of others as we follow in His footsteps. But also, **as we lose our lives in service to Him, we receive from Him true, abundant, and eternal life.** God gives us good, Gospel reasons and motivation to embrace these Purposes & Goals of Small Groups.

Third, **continually remind the Group why they exist.** As time goes on, mention the Small Group purposes and goals often, teach on them, and connect them to the lessons that you'll be leading. Keep them and the reasons for doing them in front of your Group. **Remind them frequently of what you're accomplishing and working towards: 'Connecting People to Christ.'**

D. *Small Group leaders live the Purposes and Goals of Small Groups.*

As important as it is to teach the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups, it's even more important to model, exemplify, and live them. Don't forget: **you're the leader and your members will follow you.** If they see you serving, bringing new members to Small Group, and living the Christian faith, they'll be more likely to do so as well. **Effective leaders lead by example.**

Your actions have a greater power to convince than your words ever will. Your inactions will also have a greater negative consequence towards your members embracing the Small Group Purposes and Goals than your positive words ever will.

First and foremost, you need to understand that you are in a position of leadership. Your members will be observing you, and how you act has a big influence on them. **Take your position of leadership seriously and understand the power of influence that you and your actions or inactions have.**

Considering that, you'll need to buy into the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups. If you don't believe they're important, your actions will show it, and your members will follow suit. However, if you're convinced of their significance, are excited about them, and on fire for them, your actions will also show it, and your members will follow suit. If you remain unconvinced and/or unexcited about the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups, please talk to us; we firmly believe that these purposes and goals are God's will and would love to discuss them further and dig into God's Word with you.

Living It Out

Once you've bought into the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups, **you'll need to do the hard work of living them out.** Below are some concrete examples for putting these purposes and goals into practice.

- 1. Take the lead in fostering an inviting, fun, open, supportive, safe, and kind community.** Be warm and welcoming. Create fun icebreakers and events. Support your members, call them, and care for them. Keep the environment safe by gently rebuking those who are poking fun at others. Talk about accountability and hold members accountable to their faith when it's obvious that they aren't living it.
- 2. Take the lead in serving.** Plan serving events for your Group to get involved in. Serve outside of Group so that your members can see your example. When you're serving as a Group, make sure you're working hard to serve.
- 3. Keep your Small Group focused on God's Word.** Use it to teach, to reproof, to correct, and to train in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). Rein in the Group when they start focusing on something different.
- 4. Take the lead in inviting others to join your Group.** Invite them from church, from among your friends and family, and from among the community. Invite people regularly. Talk constantly about inviting others.
- 5. Seek out other leaders in your Group and train them.** Sense when your group is getting too large and lead the process of multiplying into two Groups.
- 6. Live the Christian faith.** Put God's Word into practice, not only in Small Group, but also in your communications, family life, career, community, and our church.

As you lead your Small Group, you'll be a role model. You'll need to practice what you preach. **The good news is, as you do that, it will influence others; their faith will deepen; and you'll be furthering God's Kingdom here on earth.**

E. Small Group leaders facilitate a welcoming, safe, and enjoyable space. Being a leader is about more than just being a role model or example; it also means taking charge when necessary. **As a Small Group leader, it is your duty to facilitate a space that is welcoming, safe, and enjoyable for everyone there and putting a gentle, but firm stop to behavior that counteracts that goal.**

First, you need to be aware that the Group is not first about you. Small Group leaders don't seek to be dynamic for their own purposes. You shouldn't be the reason that people are there. Rather, **you should facilitate the Group so that people are there for God and for the Group, and so that they are enjoying God and the Group.** Sometimes you will be working in the foreground – initially, at least, you'll lead the icebreakers, the Bible study, and the prayers. But, at the same time, you'll also need to be working in the background more and more to keep the Group healthy and focused not on you but on God.

Some Practical Tips for 'Working in the Background'

- 1.** During informal conversation time, don't put yourself front and center but have one-on-one conversation and let the other members converse together.
- 2.** During Bible Study, start a discussion but let it flow naturally between members.
- 3.** As the Group progresses, hand off more and more duties to others. As you let others lead the icebreakers, prayers, and Bible studies, not only will you be letting the Group be about God and the Group, but you'll also be training future leaders.

Second, you'll need to moderate conversations and discussions in order to keep them safe. If people start asserting political views or putting down a group of people, you'll need to step in and gently, but firmly, ask them to stop. Even if you agree with the views being spoken, you need to take care not to put your views ahead of the comfortability of the group. **Biblical truth should be gently asserted at Small Groups**, but the Bible isn't Republican or Democrat, black or white, misogynist or feminist. Each Group can find things in the Bible that they agree with and disagree with – **your job is to teach the whole of the Scriptures and not make comments or allow comments that take only part and leave out another part.**

"Speak the Truth in Love" -Ephesians 4:15

The best way to both uphold the truth of the Bible and keep your Group safe is to do exactly what the Bible says: "speak the truth in love."

The words of 2 Timothy 2:23-26 explain it further:

"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."

Even when you do have to correct a view with the truth of the Scriptures it should be done kindly, gently, and in love.

With ‘truth’ and ‘love’ in mind, do your best to keep your Group safe. If harmful or hurtful words are spoken, talk gently to the offender, explain the biblical passages above, and encourage repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. **God is at your Small Group and you want people to experience Him, learn about Him, and develop a relationship with Him – that means you want people to be there. If they feel unsafe, attacked, or offended, they won’t stay long.** Don’t so desire attendance that you sacrifice the truth but also speak the truth in such kindness and love that you won’t sacrifice attendance.

Third, **involve those who want to be involved and don’t force involvement on those who don’t initially want to be involved.** Shy people and newcomers may desire to be involved but may find it difficult. As the leader, you should facilitate the Group in such a way that they have the opportunity to be involved. During dinner or hang-out time, go and talk with the people who aren’t talking to anyone else. During discussion, don’t let a few people monopolize the conversation; rather, sometimes call on people who might want to be involved but are having a hard time squeezing in. At the same time, you may have people there who are more comfortable sitting on the sidelines for now. That’s okay.

On the flip side, you may have people who monopolize the conversation. If they’re crowding out other members of the Group, and you deem it to be an issue (or other Group members have approached you about it), you’ll also have to do something about it.

The best way to handle those who talk too much and those who talk too little is to simply talk with them privately. If a person tends to monopolize the conversation, pull them aside, kindly explain to them what’s going on, and gently ask them to tone it down. If you notice someone having a difficult time participating, pull them aside and ask whether or not they would like to be more involved.

Fourth, **be willing to listen – that is the key to good communication.** During hang-out time, seek out conversations and simply listen. Ask leading questions to get and keep others talking and listen. During the icebreaker, you shouldn’t have a comment for everything, listen. During discussion time, listen. If someone comes to you with a problem, listen. It sounds easy, but very often it’s not. To be an effective communicator, learn to listen. And **if someone should share something confidential with you, keep it confidential** (unless they are planning to harm themselves or someone else; then take it to the proper authorities).

Facilitating this welcoming, safe, and enjoyable environment is a key to a successful, growing Small Group. If you want people to come and to stay, they need to feel comfortable there. Teach this attitude to your Group and, as the leader, continually strive to facilitate this type of environment.

F. Small Group leaders contact their members. One specific, important duty that you’ll have as a Small Group leader is regularly contacting your members. This will serve to not only keep your Group and community strong, but it will also help your Group to grow.

It may not seem like much, but many Small Group experts have identified ‘regularly contacting members’ as a key component of developing and maintaining a healthy Small Group.

Contacts can and should be done however it works best for the members of your Group. Some people prefer a phone call, others a text, and still others an email, Snapchat, or Facebook message. Be open to

contacting members in the ways that best suit them and make it a point to ask for their contact information and preference on their first visit to your Small Group.

When contacting, be aware that **prayer always helps contacts**. Before you contact someone, say a quick prayer putting it in God's hands and asking Him to work through this contact. Additionally, pray during the contact. Prayer is powerful. **Offering to pray with those who you talk to over the phone or in person or even sending a prayer via text or email is an excellent, personal, Christian touch that often means a lot to a person.** Prayers show that you care, they also help your contact to open up to you and share, and they put things in God's hands – the best place for something to be!

Important Times to Contact

While contacting in general is a good thing, there are certain times when contacting is particularly important. Below are specific situations when you should be sure to contact your members.

- 1. Contact a person within 1-2 days after their first visit to your Small Group.** Thank them for coming, ask how they liked it, and invite them to come again. If they return, you should make it a point to reach out each week after their first few visits. If they don't return, wait a couple of weeks and reach out, inviting them again to come.
- 2. Contact regularly attending members after an absence.** Simply reach out and ask them how they're doing.
- 3. Contact a person after they have revealed that they're going through a particular trial.** Maybe they have an upcoming surgery, are going through something at work, are having a family difficulty, are struggling with a particular temptation, or any number of things. Write down what they're going through and make it a point to reach out to offer friendship, a listening ear, prayer, and an encouraging word.
- 4. Contact someone after a tense moment in group.** Perhaps you had to gently rebuke someone for something they said, there was an intense theological debate between a couple members, or someone said something rude. After these moments, it's a good idea to gently reach out, listen, and console.

Additionally, it's also good to regularly reach out to members for no particular reason at all. Every few weeks or once a month, just try to reach out to members to keep them in the loop and show them that you care. **Contacts also don't always have to be from a distance. If you have the time, it can be a good thing to meet up with your members to do a mutual hobby you enjoy or for a coffee or lunch.** Having these more personal contacts will certainly serve to strengthen your relationships. Undoubtedly, there will be people in your Small Group who you become fast friends with and others who you might find more difficult to get to know; be sure you aren't leaving behind the more difficult and **work to stay in touch with everyone.**

G. Small Group leaders raise up other leaders. One of the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups is to raise up leaders in the church. As a Small Group leader, this will initially be your responsibility. After you have identified and taken a potential leader under your wing, we as a church will train them more formally **Perhaps your part is best understood as 'mentoring an apprentice.'** And just like with everything else you'll be doing as a Small Group leader, you won't be doing it alone – God is the one who does the real

work. Still, He wants to work through you and cooperate with you to do it. Below are five steps to raising up future leaders.

First, always be on the lookout for potential leaders. This is the main reason that raising up leaders begins with you – you’ll be spending time close to many potential leaders: the members of your Small Group. As a leader who’ll be connecting with them on a regular basis, you have the advantage of getting to know them and thus, can better evaluate them on a deep level. **As you’re looking out for leaders, remember that there is no particular skillset that a leader must possess – God can and does use anyone.** Still, there are a few important factors to consider. First, will a person let God use them? Second, is this who God wants to use right now? As you search for leaders, be praying. Pray that God would reveal a person to you who you can begin training and mentoring to be a leader.

Second, as you discover potential leaders, deepen your relationship with them. Spend a little extra time with them, dig a little deeper, and get to know them more. Describe the Small Group Vision Statement in greater detail, share with them more on the Purposes and Goals of Small Groups, and talk about God with them. Where is their faith at? Where does their trust lie? Are they willing to submit to God and be used by Him?

Third, if you think you’ve found a good candidate to be a future Small Group leader and you believe it’s someone that God wants to use, then sit down and talk with them about it. Be straightforward with them: “How do you feel about apprenticing towards becoming a future Small Group leader?” Share with them the things that you noticed in them that led you to asking them that question. Share with them your prayers about it. Encourage them. Finally, give them some time to think and pray about it.

Fourth, assuming they agree, take them under your wing and apprentice them towards becoming a Small Group leader. First, sit down and determine the commitment to be made. Explain that you’ll be praying for them. Let them know that you’ll be committed to them, that you’ll be available to them, and that you’ll communicate with them. Ask them to come early and help you prepare for the Bible lessons. Ask them to stay late to discuss how Group went – what did you do well and not well? What did they do well and not well? Let them know that they’ll slowly take over individual sections of the Small Group meeting and eventually work towards leading everything themselves. Finally, start instilling in them the Vision Statement and the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups. Don’t stop at telling them what they are but also explain why they are important.

Finally, when you start to apprentice someone, tell us at the church. When we have trainings, they’ll be included and eventually they’ll go through the same training that you participated in. After that, we’ll send them out to lead a Group! Just like that, another Christian leader is made who God will use to achieve His purposes, further His Kingdom, and ‘Connect People to Christ.’

Just like that, another Christian leader is made who God will use to achieve His purposes, further His Kingdom, and ‘Connect People to Christ.’

H. Small Group leaders are engaging Bible study leaders. While Small Groups are so much more than a Bible study, that is still an important aspect of what they do. **As a leader, you will be the primary Bible study facilitator for your Small Group.** This is an important responsibility but know that it isn’t one that you’ll be doing alone. We’ll provide some resources for you and will help you to discover other resources

for specific studies for your Group to do. We'll also provide periodic training on leading Bible study. Finally, we are always here to answer specific questions you may have or to meet and talk through specific challenges you might be facing.

Our support to you is important, but most importantly, God is constantly with you, supporting you, and teaching through you. It is so important to remember that always.

It's not really you doing the teaching; it's the Holy Spirit working through you. This can be a relief – you don't have to be a perfect facilitator. At the same time, it heightens the responsibility; God wants to use you – what a privilege and weighty thing that is! Your leading of Bible study is thus something to always entrust to God and put in His hands. At the same time, it's a skill you should always work to hone as you seek to be a faithful instrument through which He works.

Considering this, the first and most important piece of advice for leading Bible study is **to always pray**. I'll tell you from personal experience that when I fail to entrust a Bible study to God through, there is a marked difference in the quality of my teaching than when I do give it to Him. **Every time you lead a Bible study, pray personally and privately that God would work through you and use you simply as His instrument, that He would give you wisdom, and that He would help you to be both true to His Word and engaging.** Then, pray again with your group before starting the study. Pray for the same things and pray that the Holy Spirit would be present and teach everyone in the room.

Second, prepare for lessons. Most likely, you'll be leading from premade Bible studies, but you still need to prepare. Either the day before the lesson or the day of the lesson, take an hour or so to read through everything, make sure you understand it all, and know the direction that you want to go with the study.

Preparing for Bible Study

- 1. Look up the Bible verses and figure out how they connect to the lesson.**
- 2. Look at the questions and have Biblical answers prepared.**
- 3. Prepare some of your own questions.**
- 4. Come up with real life examples that you can use to illustrate the points of the study and connect God's Word to your members' lives.** Often these examples are hard to come up with on the spot, so come up with a few and write them down beforehand.
- 5. Prepare real-life applications for the study.** You'll want to explain how the lesson really applies to your members lives. Consider how it applies to you and your life; often how it applies to you will be how it applies to others.
- 6. Make sure you connect every lesson to Jesus Christ.** Paul tells us, "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). If Jesus and His Gospel isn't explicit in the lesson, figure out how you'll connect it to Him.

Preparation will take some extra time, but the benefits far outweigh the costs. First, your study will go much more smoothly, and this will go a long way in helping you to garner the respect of your members. People can tell when you're winging it, and they can tell when you're prepared. Second, as you prepare and spend more time in God's Word, you'll grow spiritually and draw closer to Him. Third, preparation will increase your confidence and will make your leadership much more enjoyable. One author says, "Preparation increases quality. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the prepared leader will lead better than the unprepared one. They use the meeting time most wisely. The interpretation of the Bible will be more

accurate. Potential sidetracks will be skillfully avoided. Distractions will be minimized. Taking the time to prepare will increase the quality of the Group meeting.”

Third, focus more on facilitating than teaching. Certainly, there will be times when you will have to teach directly. However, **Small Group studies are intended to be more about Group discussion – a discussion which you will need to facilitate.** These discussions build the community that Small Groups will develop; they help the study to be more engaging; they keep the Group being more about the Group and less about you; and they bring in the contributions of everyone. Together you’ll have a more complete, applicable lesson than if one person were simply doing all the talking.

Asking Open-Ended Questions

The key to having good discussion, is preparing and using good open-ended questions. Open ended questions:

- 1. Don’t lead to a specific or ‘right’ answer.**
- 2. Welcome an individual’s thoughts and opinions.**
- 3. Encourage discussion because there’s no fear of giving a ‘wrong’ answer.**

Here are some examples of open-ended questions:

- “Why do you think Peter acted like he did?”
- “What’s a better way that Peter could have handled that situation?”
- “Have you ever been in a situation like Peter? How did you respond?”
- “What can we learn from what Peter did?”

When you ask a question, give people at least seven seconds to respond. This gives them a chance to think. If no one answers after those five seconds, then try to rephrase the question or ask it in a different way. Do your best to not answer it yourself. However, if no one answers after several attempts at re-asking the question, give an answer not as an absolute but hopefully as a way to spark discussion. Beginning with “Well, I think...” is a good way to do this. As the leader, you should share your thoughts and opinions with the Group, but always try to do it as part of the discussion and avoid getting in the habit of always having the ‘final say’ on each discussion.

Part of facilitating is also gently correcting answers that are incorrect. While we do want to hear everyone’s opinions, don’t forget that **we also hold the Bible as ultimate truth.** If a response is unbiblical, it will need to be corrected. However, do so gently – you don’t want to discourage that person from participating in the future. For instance, say something like, “Thank you for your input (name), but actually the Bible says....”

As the facilitator, it is also your job to get everyone involved. Some people will be prone to dominate the conversation. If you have a person like this in your group, it is usually best to address the matter one-on-one. After the time together has ended, pull them aside and kindly explain that you felt like they dominated the conversation, thank them for their involvement, and ask that they take a step back and allow others to speak as well. On the flip side, you’ll have people who will rarely participate. Never force someone to answer or put them down for not contributing, but after you’ve given quiet members a few

meetings to get comfortable, it can be a good thing to call on them occasionally and ask for their thoughts.

Additionally, know that there are mysteries in the Christian faith. There are debates on things that don't have an absolute answer; often, they are intriguing and inspire passion. As the leader and facilitator, be aware of this and **don't let discussion or debate on a specific 'mystery' dominate the discussion**. If some of your members really start going on something, let it go for a little bit but then work to rein it in.

Finally, know that that sometimes points that are good need to go unsaid. The Bible is an inexhaustible mine of incredible wisdom, truth, and knowledge, you'll never get to it all in one meeting and that's okay. **Show your members that you respect them and their time by ending on time**. You'll always have a chance to pick up where you left off at your next meeting.

As the facilitator, you need to make sure that the meeting ends on time.

We hope that you're excited to be used as God's instrument to communicate His message to people! **As you go out to lead a Small Group, especially the Bible study portion, pray for God to be with you, prepare, and work to facilitate instead of teach**. By God's grace and help, your studies will go well and your members will come to know better God's Word and how it applies to their lives.

I. Small Group leaders are real with their members. While you are a leader, you're also a part of your Group. Do lead, but also don't be above your Group.

Small Groups are intended to develop into tight-knit communities – this means that your members will have to be honest, open, and vulnerable with each other. As the Small Group leader, you will also have to lead in doing this.

It may sound weird, but often people have a hard time being themselves in groups. Sometimes we put on a 'face' and try to be what we think people want us to be rather than being ourselves. But Christianity, and Small Groups, aren't for fake people, they're for real people. You'll have to lead your people in being 'real' with them. **Reveal yourself to be a person who is flawed, imperfect, and a sinner – a person who is very much in need of a Savior.**

Being 'Real' With Your Group

Below are some specific ways you can take the lead in being 'real' with your Group:

- When you ask for prayer requests, share your own.
- When leading discussion, share stories from your life that illustrate what you're talking about.
- At appropriate times, share your shortcomings and struggles as well as your passions and joys.
- Give your testimony.
- Let your Group know of your love and passion for the Lord and how you're serving him.

As a leader, be yourself – you're whole self, the good and the bad. **As your members see you being 'real,' this will endear them to you, build their respect for you, and help them to be comfortable doing the same things.**

J. A few more general thoughts for Small Group leaders. There are a few other pieces of advice that don't merit their own section, yet they're still important. Below, in no particular order, are various tidbits Small Groups leaders show know.

As a leader, people may come to you in confidence and reveal information to you that they expect you to keep private. Pray with them, advise them with God's wisdom, and keep it to yourself. **The only exceptions to this are when someone reveals to you that they intend to hurt themselves or someone else; in that case, you need to let them know that you are obligated to tell the proper authorities.** Follow through.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that you honor the request to keep things confidential; if one has trusted you, and it's important that you respect that trust.

The reality of people getting together is that there will likely be conflict from time to time. As the leader, it is your job to handle this. **Acknowledge the conflict and arbitrate the disagreement in an unbiased way.** Listen to each side. Consider God's Word and pray to Him for wisdom. Then, confidently and firmly guide their disagreement in love. **If the matter is over your head, bring the disagreement to us, and we'll either offer you advice, or we'll come to the next meeting and offer help.** Ultimately, bring the conflicting parties towards repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Always remember that God does the real work, and often, God works over a period of time – be patient with Him.

While you should be prepared, don't take each Small Group too seriously. If something goes wrong, it'll be okay. If someone criticizes you, learn from it, but don't let it ruin you. Not every meeting is going to be perfect. Intimate community won't be built in a day. **It's not your job to make sure that people have a great time, grow in their faith, and like the study. It is your job to give them every opportunity to do these things – be faithful, humble, welcoming, prepared, etc. – but you can't force anyone to grow or to enjoy.** If you're struggling consistently, contact us, encourage your Group to offer suggestions, be willing to try new things, and look closely at yourself and consider what you could be doing better.

Allow for messiness in your Group. You're a messy, imperfect person, and so are they. Don't shame people for things that they've done wrong. Don't rebuke or correct at every mention of sin. Often, you do need to correct in love with God's Law and Gospel, but you also need to recognize that everyone at your meeting is sinful, and you need to allow them to be real. It's important to pick your 'battles' wisely, but it's also important to not be so cowardly that you never 'fight.' Don't brush off every sin or imperfection; you do still need to use God's Word to gently correct, rebuke, and forgive.

As a leader, be honest and keep your word. Jesus says, "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:37). If you say that you're going to do something, do it. If you promise not to do something, don't do it. **If you mess up, have the humility to repent in front of your Group.** This is incredibly important in gaining the respect of your Group; if you're upfront and honest with them, if you keep your word, and if you repent when you fail you will be giving them a powerful example of Christian living, and will endear them to you.

If you don't know an answer to a question or if you don't know how to handle a particular situation, just be honest about it with your Group. It's so much better to admit that you don't know than to make something up or to respond incorrectly. Simply be upfront and let them know that you don't know **but promise to find out. Then follow through.** Do your own research or contact us and ask for our advice. We would be so happy to help!

In this section, we threw a lot of information your way. Perhaps you're feeling uneasy or overwhelmed. **We won't lie, leading a Small Group isn't easy. It is a sacrifice.** It will cost you money and time, and sometimes it will wear you out emotionally. But never forget why you're doing it. **You're doing it because God has sacrificed His very own life for you. You're doing it because God has given you everything!** Jesus bore a cross for you, and you respond by bearing a cross to further His Kingdom through showing and telling people about Him. God is your motivation. And He is entirely worth all of the difficulty that you will face. **As you do His work by leading a Small Group, you will also find your faith strengthened.** You'll discover yourself drawing nearer to Him, and that is the most wonderful thing there is! Faith alone receives eternal life. As a Small Group leader, you have the privilege of bringing that faith to and strengthening that faith in others, and the blessing of building that faith in yourself also!

- Things to Think About -

- 1). What do you feel prepared to do as a Small Group leader?

- 2). What do you feel unprepared to do as a Small Group leader? What would you like further discussion/training on?

- 3). What could be added to this section that you would find helpful?

- 4). As a Small Group Leader, do you feel adequately supported? If not, how could we better support you?

- 5) The Look of Group Life -

In this section, we'll get into the day-to-day happenings of a Small Group. We'll focus on concrete things that Small Groups will be regularly doing. No longer will the focus be as much on you as the leader, but rather, as the leader you'll get a better understanding of Small Group life – the life that you'll be leading. **We'll look more closely at what you as a Group will actually be doing and how you'll actually be operating to fulfill the Small Group Vision, to achieve The Purposes & Goals of Small Groups, and to lead your Small Group towards being all that it can be for Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.**

It's essential that you keep in mind all that we've talked about so far, and it's important that you work to realize all of these purposes, goals, and visions. **But it's just as important that you have fun along the way. It's just as important that you and your Group grow together, learn together, and live life together.**

Small Groups aren't a burden. They aren't another item on your list. They aren't something to 'do' and then be done with. Instead, they are a staple of your life. When you view Small Groups not simply as a box to check, but rather as an essential component of your life, a component that you love, benefit from, and believe in, then you'll be an effective Small Group leader, and you'll enjoy yourself while doing it.

This is your work for God and His Kingdom and that makes it eternally meaningful, infinitely important, and absolutely amazing!

Buckle up! Let's discuss the Look of Small Group Life. What should you expect from your Group? How are you functioning on a regular basis? What are the real things your Group will be doing to increase Christian fellowship, draw closer to God, and take His word to the community? (Note: This section doesn't include anything about your regular Small Group meetings – those will be discussed in the following section.)

A. Small Groups will take time to create a covenant. Most of this handbook has been about how Small Groups will be the same. They share the same vision, purposes and goals, and do many of the same things. This is important; **it's imperative that your Group not be less than they're meant to be. But it's also important that they be unique and even more than they're required to be.**

So, one of the first things to do with your Group is sit down with them and define yourselves.

First, you'll share with them what they need to be – what being a Small Group really encompasses. You'll share with them the church's vision for Small Groups. You'll discuss with them The Purposes & Goals of Small Groups. You'll explain what's expected of them: being committed, serving, holding each other accountable, maintaining a safe space, growing in faith, inviting people to the Group, etc. You'll let them know what they can expect from you: biblical teaching, leading by example, communication, friendliness, dedication, etc. **You don't want people to sell themselves or the Group short. So, right away tell them about all that a Small Group is intended to be.**

After this explanation, you'll ask for their input regarding specifics of your Group. What will your Group's identity be? How can you go above and beyond the baseline? At the back of this handbook is: [Appendix I – Planner & Covenant](#). It's a worksheet that you should go through with your Group that will help you to develop your identity. It provides several questions to ask and points to discuss, and important tenets to hold to. After completing the document **together**, each member should sign the document showing that everyone agrees to hold to it. We recommend having it displayed whenever your Group gathers. Occasionally, take time to review of your [Planner & Covenant](#) so that no one forgets what your Group is all about. **It's also important that you give or send a copy to St. Paul Lutheran Church so that we have one on file.** When someone approaches us looking for a Small Group, having your Planner & Covenants available will enable us to match them with a Group that best fits them.

Your Group's [Planner & Covenant](#) will set up both practical and 'passionate' matters. For instance, it will lay out when, where, and how often you'll meet. But it also asks what your Group is most passionate about – are you more doctrine, service, or worship minded as a Group? Which kinds of ministries will you support? Are there any shared hobbies that Group members can do together?

Your Group's [Planner & Covenant](#) defines your Group. It gives you direction. It gives you a vision – something to shoot for. It holds you and your members to a certain standard. Even more than that, as something that is done together, it gives your members ownership in the Group.

Together, you made the dream and cast the vision, therefore, everyone will be more invested in the Group. It's not just a Group that they join; it's a Group that they're a part of – it's 'their' Group. Because it's so important for your members to participate in this [Planner & Covenant](#) making, to start the dream, and to buy into what you're doing, **it will be important to rewrite your Planner & Covenant each year so that new members will have a chance to participate in it also.**

Finally, it's important to add that, while your [Planner & Covenant](#) gives your Group a direction and vision, don't let it hold you back from being even more – particularly in the area of who you invite into your Group. While your Group may be made up of mostly 20-30-year-olds, but don't let that stop you from inviting that 60-year-old cashier at Walmart. Maybe your Group likes to go hiking together, but don't let that stop you from inviting that person who uses a wheelchair who you met at the library. Get them connected to your Group – maybe they'll love it and want to stay in spite of their differences. If not, try to connect them to another Group that they might fit in better with. Paul says, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Corinthians 9:22-23). **As Christians, sharing the Gospel with anyone and everyone is our top priority – never turn someone away from your Group.**

B. Small Group members form deep, meaningful relationships. Part of our vision for Small Groups is that they be a place where real, Christian fellowship happens. **We all need Christian friends.** Unlike the world, Christians understand that faith and Jesus Christ are the most important aspects of our lives. When we struggle, they give real, Biblical advice that strengthens our faith and relationship with Jesus Christ. They give true comfort because they know the true source of comfort. They really care and really serve when we need help. They do the hard work of holding us accountable when we sin. They provide avenues for fun that aren't sinful but rather uplifting and edifying. They give true encouragement from the Bible.

Without a doubt, having other Christians to walk through life with strengthens faith in a way that few other things do. Christian fellowship is so important!

It's necessary that your members understand just how important this Christian fellowship is. Let your Group members know from the beginning that these are the types of relationships that you're hoping to foster in this Group. They need to understand that your Small Group is not intended to just be a place to come and punch their 'Christian card'. It's not just meant to be another Bible study. You want your members to be willing and ready to form deep, meaningful relationships. These are the kind of relationships that require some work and some vulnerability. But they are also the kind of relationships that Christians need to have with each other – relationships where you challenge, encourage, and serve each other. These relationships are hard, but they're also incredible!

Take the lead in developing these deep, meaningful relationships. Do the hard work for others. Hold people accountable. Serve them. Show them that you want to be their Christian friend; show them that you want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with them.

As your Group gets more comfortable with each other, start to dive deeper during Bible study time, conversations, and icebreakers. Have your Group members answer questions about their spiritual backgrounds. This will help your Group to take things from a surface social level to a deeper, spiritual level. Ask things like: When did you come to know Christ? When were you baptized? What has the Bible meant for you in your life?

As your members become more acquainted and when the moment is right, go even deeper. Ask people to share their fears and their failures. Have them give their testimonies. Encourage them to ask the difficult questions surrounding Christianity and talk about it together. Open up about yourself first to break the tension and let the others follow. Truly, as your conversation goes deeper, so will your relationships.

One author said, "The key to getting beyond the surface is the leader's willingness to be open and honest. This is when the group begins to become a spiritual family."

Encouraging your Group members to intentionally care for each other will also serve to build deep, meaningful relationships. This is also something you'll have to lead, demonstrate, and facilitate.

Building Deep, Meaningful Relationships

Below are some practical tips for building deep, meaningful relationships within your Group:

- Encourage your Group to share things that they are thankful for.
- Have each person share things about the Group that they appreciate.
- If one member is living in sin, take the lead in gently confronting them and holding them accountable.
- If another member is in the hospital, contact your members and get a group together to go and visit them.
- Give each of your members the name of another member and tell them to write a kind letter to them explaining what you appreciate about them and have them give it to them the following week.

Taking time to gather as a Group outside of your regular meeting time to simply hang out and serve will also go a long way towards building deep, meaningful relationships. Additionally, taking prayer requests and praying for each other will also help to develop those relationships. These suggestions are discussed in more detail in the following two sections.

C. Small Groups get together outside of their regular meeting time. Of course, as a Small Group, the main time you'll get together will be for Bible Study. However, this should not be the only time that you gather. Occasionally you should meet as a Group simply to hang out or to serve. **It's important to get together outside of regular Bible study time because doing other things helps to build the deep, Christian relationships that Small Groups should foster.** These occasions also provide an easier avenue through which new people can be invited into your Group. Additionally, gathering outside of your regular time breaks up your routine and injects excitement, interest, and involvement into your Small Group.

What to Do Together

Here are a few ideas for fun things that your Group can do together:

- Have an ethnic meal
- Try a new restaurant together
- Go to a local athletic event (especially if children of your members are playing)
- Go shopping
- Go for a hike
- Have a movie night
- Play board/card/yard games
- Do something competitive (athletics, trivia, scavenger hunt, etc)
- Spend a day at the beach
- Celebrate major events in the lives of your members.
- Have a bake-off and taste testing event
- Do a BBQ

There is no hard and fast rule on how often your Group should get together, but **once a month is a good goal to shoot for.** If at all possible, these informal get-togethers should be done in addition to your regular meeting time. This is something to discuss with your Group. **While you should try to hang-out and serve regularly, be wary of trying to do too much.** Encourage the Group to be involved and to be committed, but rarely, if ever, demand that they attend something. If you ever do plan something that requires full participation, make sure you let your Group know far in advance.

When you get together for these informal meetings, there are unlimited possibilities – the important thing is that you're spending time together. **Ask your Group what they would like to do.** What interests do they have? What sounds like fun? Are they willing to spend a little money or should you find something free to do? Do a variety of things and mix it up; having a tradition can be good, but don't always do the same things. Whenever you plan something, keep 'the power of food' in mind – people bond better together over food; if possible, find a way to have food available.

How to Serve Together

Below are some suggestions for how your Group can serve together:

- Cook & serve a meal to the homeless
- Volunteer with Habitat for Humanity or Rebuilding Together
- Ask Love INC where you can serve
- Help at a Food Bank
- Visit Shut-ins
- Help out Stepping Stones
- Go Christmas caroling
- Help at FMSC, Night to Shine, and Trash 'N' Treasure
- Do a project at the church

Additionally, you should schedule time to serve together. Again, talk to your Group, ask what they're passionate about. Really, you are only limited by your imagination; there are so many organizations looking for your Group's help! As you work and serve together, not only will you be doing God's will and furthering His Kingdom, you'll also be building relationships and strengthening the fellowship of your Group.

Whatever you do, you don't have to do all the work yourself. **As a member of your Group to be the activity planner. Ask another to be the volunteer coordinator.** Assign different members to plan and lead events that they're particularly interested in. As your members help you out by taking on these roles, they'll take some ownership and deepen their connection to the Group.

Whenever possible, plan your activities at least a few weeks in advance so that your members can put them on their calendars and make any necessary preparations. Additionally, being prepared enables your members to invite others to join. **When those outside your Group are included in your Group activities you have the chance to build relationships with them and invite them to join for your regular meetings where they'll be able to dig into God's Word with you.**

There are a few more ideas you should consider when it comes to getting your Group together outside of your regular meeting time. Most of your get-togethers will be on a smaller scale, but once or twice a year consider doing something bigger. Have a retreat weekend, go on a mini vacation together, or spend a day or two together in a different town. Next, **if people in your Group are extra busy and can't seem to get people together outside of your regular meeting time, occasionally use your regular meeting time to just do something fun – play a game, go for a walk, or have a themed party.** Finally, invite your Group to attend church together.

Small Groups are about studying the Bible and growing closer to the Lord, but they are also about fun and fellowship.

Serving together, hanging out together, and doing life together will deepen relationship and commitment to the Group. When that happens, your Bible study and members' relationship to the Lord will also improve and increase. Spend time together with your Group outside of your regular meeting time.

D. Small Groups pray. Prayer is a simple but powerful attribute of Small Groups. Prayer brings God into the situation and ministers to people, gives them the right perspective, builds relationships, and cultivates hope, praise, and positivity. As you pray as a Group, you'll all also be learning to cultivate a deeper personal prayer life.

Prayer is one of the greatest gifts that God has given us, and your Small Group should use it often.

Small Groups should pray before eating, before Bible study, and after Bible study. Pray in thanksgiving, pray for God's help, and pray that the Spirit would continually teach and guide you in God's truth. Before you hang out or before you serve – pray. Put it in God's hands. **Ultimately, we all need God in our lives constantly and continually – there is no bad time to pray.**

Encourage your members to share things they are struggling with, circumstances they are facing, and also blessings that they are thankful for.

At each meeting, you should also take prayer requests. Write them down and take a few minutes at the end of your meeting time to pray for everyone there and for their requests. Give everyone a chance to pray. **After the meeting, type up the prayer requests and send them out to your members and encourage them to pray for each other throughout the week.** In this way, you'll bring the power of prayer to bear upon the lives of your Group members. Additionally, praying together this way for each other will foster fellowship in your Group. Prayer must be a constant and consistent part of your Group. No Small Group is complete without it!

E. Small Groups apply the Bible to life. In church, we tend to teach from the Bible more than we apply it directly to a person's life; with so many people in attendance, it's impossible to look each person in the eye and explain how it applies to him or her. However, Small Groups provide the perfect setting for doing this! **Often, it's difficult to see how God's Word applies to life today, but God has so much truth and wisdom for us to learn – so it's important that Small Groups be doing this very thing.**

A focus of every Small Group Bible study will be on application.

Application means looking at and discussing what it means for you today and how you can live it out. God has so much to teach and guide you with in His Word as you live day-to-day. **As the Small Group leader, you'll facilitate discussion on God's Word by developing open-ended questions that will lead your Group in exploring the application of the message.** Questions can really be as simple as: "How does this apply to our lives today?" or "How can we live out this verse in our modern context?" or "We should all be living God's Word; how would following this specific command of Christ look in your life?" or "What can you actually change today to start living out this Word from God?"

As the leader of your Small Group, you should also make sure that your members know that you're always available to give advice or guidance with God's wisdom. Over time, your members should feel comfortable bringing their struggles and fears to not only you, but the Group; together you can bring God's wisdom into their lives.

Not only does the Bible have great advice for how we should live, it also brings God's law to bear on our lives and leads us to repentance. This law of God needs to be directly applied to the lives of your members also. If someone is living in sin, you need to directly apply God's Word to their life by confronting them in gentleness and love and showing them how they are erring. Encourage them to repent. Pertinent examples of when gentle confrontation is necessary includes: chronic gossiping, frequent use of God's name in vain, or bragging about sinful things in their personal life.

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus prescribes the way that we should confront others about their sins:

- 1. Bring it up with your brother or sister privately.**
- 2. If they refuse to repent, bring a couple of your fellow Group members and talk to him/her together.**
- 3. If they still refuse, bring the matter to the church.**

Practicing Group discipline like this isn't always easy, but it is commanded by Christ and is important for the soul of your brother or sister.

However, it is not only God's law that should be applied when necessary, but also His Gospel. If someone is feeling ashamed or guilty, and they are repentant, share with them God's forgiveness. If someone is feeling lonely, remind them that God is always with them. If someone is afraid, remind them that Jesus promised He will not forsake them. If someone lacks peace, share with them the hope we have in Jesus.

In any and every situation that someone is in need, Jesus and His cross will provide comfort.

In the spirit of applying God's Word to the lives of your members, you should know that **no topic is out-of-bounds or too taboo or risqué.** The Bible itself hardly shies away from difficult or 'disgusting' topics. In our sin-ruined world, evil is truly all around, including in the lives of your members. Our holy God Himself came into this appalling and awful world and never shied away from spending time with sinners, prostitutes, and lepers. Likewise, you should not shy away from topics that may be considered offensive, gross, or horrific. **Of course, if someone strongly objects or has a great aversion to a particular topic (especially if due to related trauma in their past) then you should either not discuss the topic at all or, if the topic is particularly important to others, ask the offended person to step out for the discussion.** It is

important to bring God’s truth and His promise of deliverance from the offensive, gross, and horrifying aspects of our world. Let your members know that no topic is out of bounds and encourage them to suggest studying topics that they are curious about or that affect them directly.

F. Small Groups practice evangelism. I’ll put it bluntly – everyday thousands and thousands of people go to hell for eternity. God has given us as Christians the awesome, serious privilege of showing and telling people about Him, inviting them in to learn more about Him, and walking alongside them as the Holy Spirit works in them to bring them to faith so that they receive salvation. Jesus says, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38). You and your Group can be an answer to those prayers; you have the difficult but great task of being a laborer in the harvest field of this world.

It is an important and essential job, and God so often uses Small Groups to gather in His harvest.

In the heading for this section, the word ‘practice’ has two different meanings; both express what Small Groups should be doing regarding evangelism and why Small Groups are such powerful places for evangelism. **First, Small Groups are a great place to practice for evangelism;** in other words, Small Groups provide an environment in which members can prepare to do the work of evangelizing. It’s a task that’s often scary and difficult, but with encouragement from the Group, everyone there will be built up, know that they’re not in it alone, and gain the confidence and boldness to really evangelize. **Second, Small Groups provide a great environment for actually putting into practice what you’ve been practicing.** Small Groups are an avenue through which your members can more effectively do evangelism.

Practicing/Doing Evangelism
<p>Do evangelism together.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the Bible, evangelism is often done in pairs or groups. Utilize the Small Group relationships you’ve formed and evangelize together. <p>Use your Small Group to form relationships with others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evangelism is best done by forming relationships. Invite unbelievers to your Small Group events, service projects, and Bible studies. There, you’ll have an opportunity to form relationships with them and evangelize to them effectively over a period of time. <p>Utilize the community that your Group offers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many people in our individualistic society are starved and ready for relationships. Small Groups offer a chance to get out of the house and form real friendships. Advertise that to those you’re evangelizing to.

Practicing for Evangelism
<p>Discuss ways to evangelize.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are some good places? Techniques? - What is the message you tell? <p>Talk about past experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What went right? Wrong? <p>Go over scenarios.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice on each other. - Act out different situations. - Actually share the Gospel message. <p>Practice sharing your testimonies.</p> <p>Practice apologetics (defending the faith).</p> <p>Encourage each other to evangelize.</p>

When Small Groups do evangelism, they do it together. Rather than one person being solely responsible for spiritually walking alongside a person, you get to do it as a Group. Once a person agrees to join your Small Group, you all have the opportunity to welcome them, show them love and kindness, serve them, care for them, and share God’s Word with them as you discuss the Bible in your study time. **Small Groups work together in this way to evangelize to people.**

Finally, you might be wondering who you and your Group members should evangelize to? Well, of course, the answer is anyone and everyone, but ultimately it comes down to those people who God has put into your life. **Start with those you already have solid relationships with such as your family and friends. Then work on building relationships with more people already around you such as your neighbors and fellow coworkers or students. Third, seek out people who have needs, serve them, and invite them in.** Be a listening ear, give a handout, etc. There is need all around you and serving people by helping to meet those needs is a great way to share the Gospel and gain yourself an opportunity to invite them into your Small Group.

Evangelism is the most important thing you can do, and your Small Group provides a great environment in which to do that evangelism!

We hope that you and your Group are excited about evangelism. We are convinced that Small Groups provide a great avenue to bring lost people in our community into an eternal-life saving relationship with Jesus Christ! You and your Group get to be used by God to do His work. As you go, always look to God and remember that you cannot bring someone to faith, but God wants to work through you to do that amazing work!

After reading through this section, you should now have a better understanding of the Look of Group Life.

So often, we tend to sell Small Groups short. Don't do that with your Group, and don't let your Group do that to themselves. We truly believe that Small Groups are an essential component of a Christian's life.

Small Groups provide an excellent opportunity for people to encounter and grow in so many important aspects of the Christian faith such as fellowship with other Christians, gaining Bible knowledge and applying it to life, and evangelizing by reaching out to others with God's Word and His love. Small Groups do amazing things! For that reason, we would encourage you to **frequently remind your Group to make your time together a top priority in their lives.** Commitment to a Small Group will undoubtedly strengthen faith and help a person to grow deeper in their eternal life saving relationship with Jesus.

While Small Groups are amazing, remember that they are not a substitute for going to church, and likewise, going to church is not a substitute for attending a Small Group. Both are essential aspects to the Christian life and both strengthen and grow a person's faith in different ways. As your Small Group's leader, set the standard of attending church on a very regular basis. It's also a good idea to regularly invite your members to come to church with you. This includes members who might not be Lutherans or even Christians. Your Small Group is a great place for them to start, but it shouldn't be where they stop. Continually encourage your members to not only be regular attendees at your Small Group, but regular attendees at church as well.

We look forward to seeing how your Small Group develops, and what it is that you become passionate about and involved in. **Always keep in mind the core tenets of Group life that we learned about in this section and continually work to put them into practice.** We hope that you can see from this description of Small Groups how powerful and incredible they can be. Finally, we hope that you see how God will use you and your Group to grow his Kingdom here on earth!

- Things to Think About -

- 1). What aspect of Small Group life are you excited about?

- 2). What aspect of Small Group life are you hesitant or nervous about?

- 3). Do you have any initial thoughts on how your Group can serve and spend time together outside of your regular meeting time?

- 4). How can you lead in forming deep, meaningful relationships? In living out a biblical life? In inviting people into your Group?

- 6) The Small Group Meeting -

The most regular aspect of Group Life will, of course, be the **Small Group Meeting**. This is the regularly scheduled time that you will get together with your Group to fellowship, study the Bible, and pray. There are aspects of this meeting that will be required; however, many of the details and other aspects will be left up to you and your Group to decide on. **These regular meetings cannot be dispensed with; they are the most fundamental thing that Small Groups do.**

This time that you'll have together is the heart and soul of your Small Group, and it will be when you'll best connect to your Group. The focus that you'll put on God during this time will also connect you closely to Him.

It's these regular meetings that are the real 'meat' of your Small Group. It's here that the Small Group Vision Statement and the Purposes and Goals of Small Groups will most regularly be carried out. It's important that you be intentional at these meetings about putting them into practice. **Here you have a consistent and regular opportunity to build Christian fellowship with your fellow Small Group members as you converse, share food, engage with icebreakers, pray, and discuss Christian living together. At these meetings, you'll have time for Bible study where you'll learn God's Word and discuss how you should apply it to your lives. It's during this time that you'll be able to take the next important step of evangelism and go beyond inviting a person in, to sharing with them the good news of Jesus Christ.**

We hope that you've grasped the importance of these regular meetings with your Group. **Most often, it's here that God's Kingdom is advanced, and that people are connected to Christ. While they are important, we also hope that you enjoy these meetings!** We hope that you'll love hanging out with your fellow Small Group members and that you'll feel the great joy that comes from doing God's work.

Before we get into the details, here is a narrative description of what your Small Group meeting might look like:

It's 5:57 pm, and the doorbell rings at the Taylor residence. Claudia and Tom have been praying and preparing for this moment for the last hour. The house was cleaned, snacks were set out, a Bible lesson was prepared, and soft music is playing. Now it's time for their favorite part of the week: gathering with their Small Group.

They've been hosting this Group for twelve weeks now and each week the Group has grown. Some weeks it's numerically – they often invite friends and neighbors and encourage the other members to do so as well. Some weeks it's in togetherness – they've really gotten close to each other as they've spent time pouring into each other's lives and in fellowship together. And other weeks it's in faith – they often go deep into God's Word and have learned much about how it applies to their lives. Some weeks it's been all three; those are the best weeks! Now it's time for Group again; time to connect with each other and with God's word; and time to connect others to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.

Claudia quickly answers the door, "Hey Steve! It's so good to have you back again!" Tom shows Steve to the snacks and begins talking with him about the football game. In the next few minutes, Claudia warmly welcomes eight more guests into their home. Each is offered food and drink and is engaged by

the hosts. Conversations are buzzing around the room, but Claudia notices that Rachel is standing quietly by herself. This is only her second time with the Group, and she still doesn't know many people. Claudia goes over and invites her to join the conversation she's having with Tiffany and Bella.

Tom seeks out Matt; he's noticed that Matt seems to be a natural leader, and that he's very dedicated to the Small Group. Tom begins talking to Matt about his faith and his spiritual journey. Soon, Tom levels with Matt, "Matt, I think you'd make a really great Small Group leader. Would you like to apprentice under me for a while?" Tom encourages Matt to pray about it, and Matt says that he will.

After 20 minutes, Tom starts gathering everyone on the couches and chairs, which are arranged in a semi-circle around the TV. The Group all joins hands, and Tom prays asking the Holy Spirit to be present that evening and to teach and grow everyone there. After the prayer, Claudia asks an icebreaker question to help the Group continue to get to know each other: "What was your favorite toy as a child?" Rachel raises her hand, "Anything my sister wanted to play with" she said. The whole group laughs! In order, each person shares their favorite childhood toy and often excited responses are elicited from the Group: "Me too!" "What color was yours?" "You liked to play with that?!" Tom smiles at Claudia; he enjoys seeing the fellowship that is being created in the Group.

When each person has replied, Claudia directs their attention to Tom for the Bible study portion of the evening. Since everyone in the Group works, they've been spending the last few weeks discussing how their Christian faith should influence their work lives. Tom shares the theme verses for the night from Colossians 3:23-24: "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Tom then asks one of the many open-ended questions he has prepared for their discussion: "According to these verses, how should we work?" First Jason offers an answer, then Sharon. Soon a discussion is on. After a few minutes, Tom redirects them with a new question: "Do you always work with all of your heart?" Each individual thinks about their own experience and a few offer repentance – they know they do not. Tom expounds on both the Law and the Gospel – he explains that God commands working hard, but also reminds them of God's forgiveness – after all he knows that no one there has done this perfectly, himself included. After some more questions and discussion, Tom closes the Bible study by asking, "What motivation does this verse give us for working with all of our hearts? How will that influence you this week?" Tom goes around the room and encourages each person to share how God's promised "inheritance" will change their work life this week.

Things got personal in Bible study today – in a good way. Group members had admitted their faults and encouraged each other to work harder. Advice was given. Forgiveness was spoken. Deeper connections were made. And God's Word was brought to bear on people's lives. To close, Tom takes everything that was discussed today and uses it to say a heartfelt prayer for the Group; he asks God to help them remember His Gospel and work harder this week.

Before the evening is over, the Group always takes 15 minutes to discuss evangelism and to pray for each other. They go around the room encouraging each person to share how God worked in their life that past week, how he answered prayer, and who they talked with about God. Matt shares that God had answered his prayer for his niece to get well, and that their last meeting had encouraged him to start talking about Jesus with a friend he has at work. Gina shares that God had helped her find her lost car keys and explained that she had a really tough day on Wednesday that God helped her through. Other members share their experiences as well. Everyone is uplifted as they see how God is working in each other's lives, and each is encouraged to further His kingdom by showing and telling others about Jesus.

After everyone has a chance to speak, Tom asks for prayer requests and thanksgivings. Claudia writes them down and they all join hands one last time as Tom prays each petition and thanksgiving to God; he caps off the prayer by asking God to give them courage and wisdom in witnessing that week.

A few members leave right away. Others linger and chat some more. Tom and Claudia both encourage each one as they head out the door and thank them for attending. After the last person leaves, Claudia quips, "It's 8:30 already?! Time sure flies when you're having fun!" Together they recap the evening, decide who they will call to encourage this week, and make a plan to invite everyone to their house in two weeks for burgers and yard games. As they go to bed, each silently thanks God for his help in leading their Group and prays that He continue to equip them to be effective leaders.

Now let's talk more specifically about your Small Group Meeting.

A. Small Groups will have regular meetings. You're probably thinking by now that Small Groups include quite a lot of things! **Most fundamentally, however, Small Groups have regular meetings where the Group comes together to fellowship and study God's Word.** By 'regular' we mean that there is a set time each week or month that your Small Group comes together to do these things. Your Small Group may meet every week, bimonthly (every other week), or monthly. For instance, a Group might meet every Monday evening at 6:00 or perhaps every other Saturday morning at 9:00. As the leader, you'll initially set the schedule, but we encourage you to be flexible if, down the road, something else works better for the majority of your Group. It's important to not switch too often, however.

Our hope and prayer is that with this consistency, your Group members will block off each meeting night on their calendars; when someone asks them to do something, their answer will be, "Sorry, that's our Small Group night."

B. Small Group meetings will include time for conversation, an icebreaker, Bible Study, and prayer. Food is also strongly encouraged. There are four essential elements to each Small Group meeting: informal time for conversation, an icebreaker, a time to study the Bible and discuss it, and a time for prayer. Your meetings should not contain less than these four elements. Though that doesn't mean that there are only four elements – **we hope your meetings include more!** Let's go through these essential elements one-by-one:

Informal Conversation Time

Usually, informal time for conversation takes place at the beginning of the Small Group meeting. It not only gives people a chance to get comfortable but also allows them some leeway if they are running late. As people show up for the meeting, you'll take the lead on welcoming them and starting up the conversation. Help them to get comfortable, direct them to the food (if you have it), and encourage them to make themselves at home. As others join, introduce them to those already present. **When all your guests have arrived, you'll want to turn your attention from welcoming to joining in the conversation. Try not to focus on one individual group, rather try to interact with everyone and make them feel welcome.** As the Small Group leader, be aware of those who are sitting by themselves, and who are not part of a conversation; direct your attention to them when possible and help them to feel comfortable. Often, informal conversation time will also naturally come up after the formal part of the meeting is over. Before they leave, your Group members may want to catch up more with their friends and hang out longer. Allow them to stay for as long as you are comfortable with.

Icebreaker

Your Small Group meeting will also always include an icebreaker. An icebreaker is a question or prompt answered by each member of the Group that will break tension, fuel conversation, and bring your Group closer together. Some examples include: “What’s your favorite food?” “What’s the craziest thing you’ve ever eaten?” “Would you rather eat a pizza topped with worms or with cockroaches? Why?” or “Have you ever had a cooking disaster? If so, share it with the Group.”

An icebreaker is a social tool that Small Groups use to increase comfortability and familiarity and to build fellowship.

Icebreakers are important for Small Groups because they are an intentional attempt to build the Christian fellowship that Groups should foster. **When your Group first starts meeting or when you have new members, keep your icebreakers low-key, general, and something that all people can answer. As your Group grows closer together, consider occasionally using faith-based icebreakers that will deepen the Christian relationships in your Group.** For example, you could ask: “What’s a question you’ll ask God when you get to heaven?” or “Share with the Group a time when you knew God was using you for something special.” **Icebreaker ideas can be found online, or you can make them up yourself.** Always be prepared and choose an icebreaker before the meeting begins. Remember to keep your icebreakers appropriate, non-offensive, non-political, and not too embarrassing. Encourage everyone to participate, but if someone is uncomfortable answering your prompt, allow them to pass.

Bible Study

The focal point of each regular Small Group Meeting is the Bible Study. **This is really the main reason that your Small Group exists. It’s the time when you focus on that thing that we all need most: God’s Word. At a minimum, set aside a half-hour for Bible study. Prepare for it ahead of time.** For the study, you should do some teaching, but the bulk of the study really should be discussion among the whole Group. Therefore, come to the study well-armed with open-ended questions to fuel discussion.

St. Paul will put out several Bible study lessons a year that each Group should participate in. Other than that, what you study is up to you and your Group.

Choosing a Bible Study

Below are some questions for you to consider when choosing a Bible Study for your Group. Discuss these questions together with your Group:

- What are you interested in?
- What would you like to know more about?
- What are you confused/unsure about?
- What’s happening in your life right now that you would like God to speak into?
- What’s happening in our society that you’d like to understand in a godly way?

At the church, we have a dedicated Small Group Library with hundreds of studies and resources. If you aren’t sure about where to go next as a Group, take a look at the list (we’ll send you a copy) and pick something out that sounds interesting. **We are also here to help you find Bible studies that are both pertinent to what you want to study and theologically sound.** If you feel uncomfortable at all about choosing a study or don’t know where to look, please ask, and we’ll help you find something to suit your Group.

No matter what you study, let God’s Wisdom shine through and not your opinions.

Prayer

Finally, every Small Group meeting includes time for prayer. **You should pray before the lesson. You should pray after the lesson. And you should take prayer requests from your members and pray together for each other.** At first, you should lead the prayers. But, as your Group gets more comfortable, encourage others to pray. **You should also send out the prayer requests to your members after each meeting and encourage them to continue to pray for each other.**

Prayer is an essential part of your Group time for several reasons. First, a good relationship requires communication; in seeking to strengthen their relationship with God, you should communicate with Him regularly. Additionally, prayer will draw you nearer to one another as you learn about each other's lives and care for one another. Finally, prayer is powerful – it brings God into all your life situations.

Food/Beverages

Food and drink have an amazing power to fuel conversation and create and strengthen relationships.

While it's not required or essential, it's encouraged that you have food/beverages as part of your Small Group meetings. This could mean either a full meal or simply snacks or beverages. If you do have food at your regular Small Group meetings, try to be sensitive to allergies and intolerances. If someone has a debilitating peanut allergy, keep peanuts out of the equation. If someone has a gluten intolerance, have some snacks that are gluten free, and perhaps ask them to bring their own meal if yours has gluten in it. Additionally, try to always have something basic available such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in case a person doesn't like the food provided.

Other Possibilities

We've discussed all the essential aspects of a Small Group meeting, however, consider adding more to your gatherings. The sky is the limit, but here are a few suggestions:

- A dedicated time for games or other fun activities.
- A time to practice evangelism.
- A time to say how God answered prayer in your life last week.
- A time to sing/worship God.
- A time to serve (i.e. write a card to a shut-in or an invitation to hand out for your Group, assemble hygiene products for the homeless, or sew pillowcase dresses).

C. Small Group meetings will be warm, welcoming, and comfortable. Since regular Small Group meetings are of such importance, it's imperative that the environment in which they take place is as warm, welcoming, and comfortable as possible. **At least at first, we recommend holding your Small Group meetings at a consistent location. If possible, we recommend that your house be the location used. If your home is ill-suited to host a Small Group gathering of up to fifteen people, then some other location will have to be determined that is comfortable and easily accessible.**

With this in mind, here are a few suggestions: You could meet at St. Paul; if you would like to do that, please contact the church office to reserve a room. Getting together at a restaurant is an option provided your members don't mind buying a meal, appetizers, or drinks while you're there. Meeting in a public place such as a library is a possibility. You could also meet at an office or workplace if it's afterhours and management is alright with that. If you have other ideas that suit your Group, that is certainly fine as well!

Please know that it's alright to have certain 'house rules' as long as they are reasonable and are well known to your guests. However, if a member accidentally takes their drink onto the sofa or walks in with their shoes on, be forgiving and politely ask them to correct their mistake.

D. Small Group meetings will end on time. Don't forget that often your members are very busy. For this reason, **make sure that you end the formal part of your Small Group meeting at or before the scheduled time.** That time will be determined as part of your Small Group Planner & Covenant. This may mean that good points go unsaid – that's okay. Those who want to hear them will stick around a little later, or you can always cover them at the next meeting. **Your members may begin to resent you if your lessons continually go over the allotted time.**

On the flip side, don't force anyone out unless you're uncomfortable with how late they are staying. The more time you're able to spend together hanging out informally like this, the more your Group's fellowship and relationships will benefit. However, your time is important, too – if there is something you need to do, somewhere you need to be, or sleep that you need to get, don't be afraid to politely put a limit on that post-meeting conversation.

Making Your Meeting Place Comfortable & Functional

Wherever you decide to meet, there are some things that you can do to make it warm, welcoming, and inviting. Some important things are listed below:

- **Make sure that it's clean. This doesn't mean that you have to clean your whole house before every meeting, but you should make sure that the kitchen, meeting space, and nearest bathroom are in good order.**
- **Have the thermostat set to a temperature at which most people will be comfortable.**
- **Make sure there is adequate seating and table space available; this may involve setting up some folding chairs and a card table.**
- **Keep any pets away from the gathering until you can ask all your members about their comfortability with having them around.**
- **Be sure that the rooms are well-lit.**
- **If possible, have some soft music playing in the background. Make sure to keep the music appropriate, and always turn the music off when it's time to pray and study the Bible.**
- **While not necessary, it can be nice to have a TV available on which to display a PowerPoint or video-based Bible lesson.**
- **If there will be a room for children, make sure that is safe, clean, and accessible for parents.**
- **Have enough of the necessary resources on hand such as plates, cups, and silverware if there will be eating and extra Bibles handy in case someone doesn't have one.**

E. Small Group meetings will be focused on God and His Word.

Remember that, first and foremost, your Group is to be centered on God and His Word. While they are a time to develop community, Small Groups are especially there to foster Christian community. While they do exist to educate, Small Groups most essentially educate about Jesus. While your Group should be inviting people in, the ultimate purpose of having newcomers is to share with them the

Always remember that every action you take and word you say should be guided by God's Word and directed towards furthering His Kingdom. You and your Group exist solely for Him and His glory.

Gospel. Not only your Group, but also your whole life should really be orientated around and directed by Him. **It's all about God!**

Why is it "all about God?" Because He is 'all about you!' Even though we are all terrible sinners who have done many evil things against Him, God still came to earth as Jesus, lived a perfect life in our place, and then died on the cross as our substitute. **He gave His own life so that all believers would have eternal life!** Trusting that you have received this from God inspires you to live for Him. As the one who has won for you eternal life, certainly, He can be trusted with your life! So, **everything that you do should be guided by these two questions: "What would Jesus do?" and "How is this for God's glory?"** When you're wondering how to handle a difficult group member, choosing a new study, unsure of how to better reach your Group, or handling any number of things always turn to God's Word for wisdom. Everything that you do should be done under God's guidance and for Him. Keep your Small Group ever focused on God and His Word.

It's our hope that you now have a better understanding of the most important aspect of Small Group life: your regular Small Group Meeting. As your Group grows and changes, so will your Small Group meeting time. We hope that you and your Group make your time together something that is sincerely and uniquely yours. But always, at the center of it all, should be the things laid out in this section; they are important elements in making your Small Group all that it can be. We hope that your Small Group meeting time is more than these things, but it shouldn't be less. Most importantly of all, may God be with you at every single meeting, and may His Spirit lead and teach you!

- Things to Think About -

- 1). How do the required four aspects of the Small Group Meeting help to achieve the Small Group Vision Statement and the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups?

- 2). Is your house a suitable location for a Small Group meeting? If not, what are some other options?

- 3). Why is it important that your Small Group meet on a regular, consistent basis?

- 4). Who should you always keep at the center of everything your Small Group does? Why?

- 7) The Multiplication Strategy for Small Groups -

One of the Purposes & Goals of Small Groups is: “*Small Groups will multiply into other groups.*” As the Holy Spirit works in you and your Group members to evangelize by inviting others into your Small Group, it will grow! Since Small Groups are most effective when they’re, well, ‘small’ (less than 15 people), you should expect and prepare to multiply.

Multiplication is turning your one no-longer-small Group into two Small Groups.

Because multiplication will happen and because it’s important that it does, this section has been included in the handbook to help you and your Group prepare to multiply. If you or your Small Group are not prepared properly to multiply, the experience can be a difficult one. Often, Groups will grow close to each other, and multiplication can seem like an unpleasant split or separation. Therefore, it’s important that you begin following these steps with your Small Group as soon as possible. If you and your group are well prepared to multiply, the process will go much more smoothly and effectively. Below are steps to help you multiply successfully.

The Good Reasons for Multiplication

Multiplication is necessary; below are some reasons why that you should share with your Group:

- When Small Groups get too large, they lose some of their effectiveness:
 - The community won’t be as intimate nor fellowship as deep
 - Members can get lost in the cracks & won’t be held as accountable
 - Newcomers won’t be as welcomed.
 - Groups can become cliquey.
 - Evangelism and reaching out will likely slow.
 - Bible study will become less discussion-based and more of a teaching.
 - Members won’t feel as involved – there will be less and less time for individual sharing & praying.
- There is a greater strain on the leader because there are more people to stay in touch with, pray for, minister to, and shepherd.
- Space and resources are limited; the meetings will get crowded.

A. Occasionally explain the ideas behind multiplication.

Multiplication of your one Group into two Groups will be better accepted if your members understand the reasons for it. Explain that your Group will grow and that as it does, multiplication will need to happen. By explaining all of this to your Group, you’ll help them to understand that multiplication is not a detriment but actually a boon to the health of the Group. If you do this, they’ll be better prepared when multiplication must eventually happen.

B. Frequently talk about multiplication in positive terms. After explaining the purpose of multiplication, it will be important that you frequently talk about it. Your Group will need to know that the goal of the Group is to multiply. Talking about it often will not only prepare them to eventually multiply but will also encourage them to continually evangelize and invite others in. Talk about the need in the surrounding community for multiplication:

There are 50,000 people in Sheboygan County who don’t know Jesus and who are thus lost to hell forever.

As you talk frequently about multiplication, always do so using positive language. Stay away from phrases like 'breaking up,' 'splitting,' or 'dividing' the Group. Rather talk about 'birthing,' 'launching,' 'multiplying,' and 'raising up' new Groups. Keep it positive because it is positive! As you multiply and launch new Groups, new Christian leaders are going out to 'Connect People to Christ.'

C. Pray, plan, and prepare to multiply. Pray that your Group would grow. Pray that God would provide you with another leader whom you can train up. Pray that God would enable your Group to multiply under good circumstances. **Prayer – putting it in God's hands – is the key to everything, including multiplying your Group.**

As God grows your Group, start planning and preparing to multiply. **Anticipate multiplication and don't hesitate beginning to mentor a new leader** (see "*Small Group leaders raise up other leaders*" in the section: [Leading a Small Group](#)). When your Group is at thirteen members, contact us. We'll set up a meeting with you to talk about multiplying your Group. Together, we'll discuss the future leader of the new Group, how their training is going, and how we can assist in that training. We'll talk about the current membership of the Group and how it would be best to allocate them between the two Groups that will result. Finally, we'll set a date for multiplication. You should then take that date back to your Group and continue working towards it in faithfulness.

D. Launch the new Group. Finally, the time will come to actually launch the new Group. We'll work out the details of the new Group such as where and when they'll meet with the new Group and their leader. **Know also that both Groups can and should get together occasionally to spend fun time together.**

As your Group is multiplied, rejoice that God has worked through you and your Group to grow His Kingdom.

E. Restart the process. Your Group can never multiply too many times. **After your Group multiplies, you have the privilege of continuing to add people to your Group, growing, sharing God's Word, praying, raising up new leaders, and multiplying again.** It's a process that never ends because the process of 'Connecting People to Christ' never ends.

- Things to Think About -

- 1). Why is multiplication often so difficult for a Group?
- 2). Though it's difficult, why is multiplication so important for a Group?
- 3). How can you prepare your Group to multiply?
- 4). Are you on-board with our philosophy of multiplication? Why or why not?

- Closing Thoughts on Small Groups -

We want you to understand why Small Groups are so important, and why we're expecting so much of them. We didn't want to leave you in the dark about anything, so we put it all in this book.

First, we want to thank you for taking the time to read through this Handbook! We realize that it includes a lot of information and that, right now, leading a Small Group probably appears daunting and intimidating. But don't worry. First, **you have God on your side** – He is the real leader and with Him, you'll be amazing at leading a Small Group. Second, **we'll be here with you every step of the way** to support you, encourage you, help you, continue to train you, and supply you. Third, perfection isn't expected. We understand that there's a lot of information in this book. We know that you haven't memorized it all. We know that you'll forget to do some things. We put all of this information in this handbook because we didn't want to short-change you. We wanted you to have the full view, to know everything that your Small Group can, and with the help of the Lord, eventually will be. We want you to see all that Small Groups can accomplish, and how you'll go about doing that. We want you to know all the things that you as a leader can and should be doing.

Moving forward, we'll regularly remind you of what Small Groups should look like and be doing. We'll continue to provide you with training on various aspects of being a Small Group leader. We also hope that this handbook will continue to be a resource for you, and that you'll continue to read through it and learn from it. Additionally, **we want you to know that we'll listen to you and hear your feedback.** In fact, once a year, we hope that you and your Group will sit down together and evaluate your Small Group – we'll provide you with a form for doing so. We'd like to know how we can improve Small Groups. How can we better support you? What ideas do you have to better Small Groups? What is working and what isn't working? Just as we've asked you to listen to us and rethink what you previously considered Small Groups to be; we want to listen to you and the suggestions and critiques that you'll have.

While a lot of information has come your way in this Handbook; **ultimately, remember to always focus on faith.** When it comes down to it, it's all about faith in Jesus – your faith, the faith of your Group members, and the faith that you'll work to bring to those around you. That's the meaning and purpose of life.

It's faith, and only faith that receives the gift of eternal life that Jesus has won for you! We ask that you keep this as the ever-present beacon in front of your Small Group.

You're leading a Small Group because you want to participate in the eternally important mission Jesus has given us: strengthening and spreading faith. You're doing the most important thing you could be doing! Don't forget that.

While being a Small Group leader carries with it a weighty mission, that doesn't mean there are no fun and games. **Being leader will have its difficult, challenging moments, but it will also have its fun, rewarding, and special moments.** It's our belief that, as your Group develops,

grows closer together, deepens in their faith, and works together to serve and evangelize, your time together will become an indispensable part of your routine. You'll come to love your Small Group and wonder what you did without it! **Sometimes, leading a Small Group will feel like something you *have* to do; but most of the time, we believe it will feel like something you *get* to do.** It will become that night that you *get* to hang out with your friends. That moment that you *get* to experience the work of Jesus. That time that you *get* to grow.

Being a Small Group leader is an amazing thing, and we thank you for undertaking the challenge. **We firmly believe that God will use you and your Small Group to do great things – Kingdom things.** We hope that you believe that, too! God works through Small Groups. Our church needs Small Groups. Our members need Small Groups. Our community needs Small Groups. Thank you for taking up the challenge and the joy of leading one!

A Small Group Leader's Prayer

Before we go, let's close with a prayer that you as a Small Group Leader can and should pray regularly:

Heavenly Father, please bless the Small Groups at St. Paul. Please help me to submit to Your will and to receiving Your strength and help. Please forgive me for my sins and sanctify me through Your mercy. Please work through me to lead a Small Group. Endow me with wisdom, strength, courage, kindness, patience, and most importantly, Your Holy Spirit. Be present in our Group. Bring us near to each other in Christian fellowship; help us to love one another, hold each other accountable, and encourage and support each other. Please teach us from Your Word, bring us to understand You and Your way for our lives, strengthen our faith, and enable us to live out that which we learn. Please empower us to serve and evangelize to those around us. Give us the courage, strength, abilities, and opportunities to share Your Gospel and work through us to bestow faith and grow our Group. Lord, let your will be done among us, and use us each and every day to do Your work, further Your Kingdom, and 'Connect People to Christ.' Amen.

- Appendix – Planner & Covenant -

St. Paul's vision for Small Groups:

Small Groups 'Connect People to Christ' in a culture lacking in community, truth, and direction by fostering supportive relationships focused around the discussion of God's Word, prayer, and outreach where we live, work, and play.

Your Group won't be less than that. But it should be unique, it should be distinct, and it should be more! Go through the below questions together with your Small Group to put together a Planner & Covenant that defines your Group and binds you together.

This Planner & Covenant applies for one year, beginning: _____ and ending: _____.
At that time, we will review and revise if necessary. (Please mark your calendars to do this next year if possible.)

How often will you meet? (Circle one)

Weekly Bimonthly Monthly Other: _____

When will you meet?

Day of the Week: _____ - or - Time of the Month: _____

Time of the Day: _____

Where will you meet?

How long should people expect to be at each regular meeting?

How will the breakdown of our time together look? (Feel free to change the order. Remember that the only four essentials are: Conversation, Icebreaker, Bible Study, and Prayer. Other aspects are encouraged but not necessary.)

Welcome/Conversation: _____

Food/Conversation: _____

Icebreaker: _____

Bible Study/Discussion: _____

Prayer: _____

Worship/Evangelism/Support, etc: _____

Other: _____

Will you normally share a full meal? _____

Will you have snacks? _____

If there's going to be food, who will provide it?

Are there any dietary restrictions to be aware of?

If you have parents of young children in your Group, how will children be watched? (Circle one)

The Group will hire a sitter

Rotate watching them each meeting

Parents are responsible

Kids are welcome at the meeting

How will your Group primarily communicate? (Be sure to get everyone's info)

Phone Call

Text

Email

Snapchat

GroupMe

Other: _____

How does your Group want to serve? Consider the following questions to help you figure this out:

What is your Group passionate about?

What are strengths & talents of your Group?

What are interests of your Group?

How often will you serve?

How often will you meet outside of your regular meetings for fun and fellowship?

Please, read aloud the below statements. These are all essential aspects of Small Groups. By signing the covenant below, your Group is agreeing to uphold and practice these principles.

- Decisions affecting the Group will be made by Group consensus.
- We'll hold to God's Word as the truth.
- We'll do outreach by inviting all types of people in.
- We'll be kind and inviting to all who join our Group.
- We'll multiply as a Group when it gets too large.
- We'll keep this Group 'safe' by not cutting others down, by not insisting on our opinions, and by not talking derogatorily about other people, ideas, etc. in an unbiblical fashion. In other words, we'll fulfill the Biblical mandate of speaking the truth in love.
- We'll hold each other accountable and be held accountable out of love and the desire to follow God.
- We'll support, affirm, and pray for each other.
- We'll further God's kingdom with his guidance and power.

Have your members sign below. (As new people join your Group, review the Planner & Covenant with them and have them sign it if they are willing)