

The purpose of this document is to provide concise training on three common areas of small group leadership: (1) facilitating a small group meeting, (2) dealing with poor attendance, and (3) responding to soul care needs. Please consult the “Why Small Groups” and “UL101” books for further training.

(1) How to Facilitate a Small Group Meeting

It is vital for us as leaders to ensure consistency within the small group ministry by being intentional in all that we do. The idea behind structuring a small group in this way is not to produce carbon copy conformity, but to have a consistent and biblical format within each group. As leaders facilitate small group meetings each week, the temptation to get off track or to let things slide is real and must be avoided. Thus, this section is meant to reinforce what you already know in order to maintain the integrity of the ministry and ensure that a similar format is being used in each of the small groups.

Required Elements of a Small Group Meeting:

1. Worship

Each group needs to start their evening with a clear time of worship. This is a time to refocus our hearts on Jesus Christ after a day that may have been full of distractions. It also is a clear signal to the rest of the group members that the small group meeting has begun. For this time of worship you may sing a hymn or worship song from a Sunday service. Someone can lead the song or you may use a worship video to facilitate this time. Another option would be to read a psalm or portion of Scripture together. After you worship together, ask someone to pray to begin the meeting.

2. Scripture Memory

Scripture memory is an important part of our Christian walk. David wrote in Psalm 119:11, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Each semester, the small groups will be assigned a portion of Scripture to memorize. The group should review the memory work together each week. This can be done in a variety of different ways, either in the larger group or in accountability time. Each person can recite the Scripture one by one or the group can recite it together. If someone struggles with memory, encourage them to memorize just one verse each week. Some may be able to memorize several new verses each week while others may only be able to memorize one verse. That’s okay.

3. Group Discussion

The group discussion should follow the time of worship and precede the time of accountability. It usually lasts for about 45-60 minutes. Unless the group is going through “Why Small Groups” together or another previously approved curriculum, the group will discuss the pulpit curriculum that coincides with Sunday’s sermon. The pulpit curriculum is produced with two sections:

- i. *Individual study questions* – reinforces the teaching from God’s Word on Sunday. This section needs to be completed prior to the small group meeting. Members who do not properly prepare neglect to feed their own soul and lower the quality of their contributions to group discussion.

- ii. *Group study questions* – focus on application of study. It is important to be doers of God’s Word and not hearers only (James 1:22). A good small group leader will focus members on the application of truth, particularly as our pastor has emphasized it through the preached Word on Sunday. The group discussion questions are designed to do this. Small group leaders are encouraged to use the group discussion questions but do not have to feel pressure to go through each question robotically. A small group leader should encourage each member of the group to participate and should seek to draw out quieter members during the discussion. Inviting quieter members to participate shows that you care for them and value their input.

4. Accountability & Prayer

The time of accountability and prayer should follow the group discussion and last for about 45-60 minutes. Accountability can be defined as: mutual disclosure leading to increased obedience. The goal is not self-disclosure, the goal is life transformation. This is a time where men meet with men and women meet with women in order to discuss our relationship with Christ, confess our sins to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed (James 5:16). Depending on how much the individuals in your accountability group share, it may be helpful to set a timer, so that everyone has equal opportunity to share. Helpful accountability resources can be found here: hbcwr.ca/smallgroups/accountability

In the spirit of Ephesians 4, correction should always be administered from God’s Word with the intention of building up one another in a spirit of love. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 can also be a good indicator of the type of correction that is needed, “And we urge you brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all.”

Of note – the small group leader should have a good understanding of how his wife is doing leading her accountability group and if there are any serious issues that are emerging. The small group leader needs to support his wife by first nurturing her spiritually before helping others in the small group. The small group leader’s first responsibility is to his wife and family.

Optional Elements of a Small Group Meeting:

1. Announcements

If there are any announcements that need to be made to the group, this can be done during a small group meeting. Sometimes it may be important to make certain church/individual needs known. Encourage church membership from time to time. Invite members to serve in various roles within the group – i.e. evangelism, treasurer, worship, outreach, and social coordinators.

2. Testimonies

For members to know one another intimately, we must know what the LORD has done among us. Sharing testimonies each week can dramatically increase group intimacy and gives glory to God.

3. Review of Small Group Covenant

At least once a semester, small group leaders are encouraged to review the small group covenant with the group. This reinforces the commitments that each group member has made with one another.

(2) How to Deal with Poor Attendance

Consistent small group attendance is essential for:

- *Individual Sanctification:* At small group, others speak into our lives and we are able to use our spiritual gifts to the glory of God. This cannot happen if we are absent from the group.
- *Group sanctification:* Every member of the small group is needed and is vital to the health and discipleship of the overall group. The ethos of small group is mutual ministry, where each person owns the discipleship of everyone else in the group.

Scripture teaches us that just 12 committed disciples can change the world. The health and success of a small group is the responsibility of the entire small group. Thus, the expectation of regular attendance and participation must be communicated at the outset of the group. At the beginning of each semester, small group members are required to sign a small group covenant. This affirms the expectations of small group conduct. The first commitment is that the small group member will make attendance a priority. If someone misses more times than they attend, they are not making attendance a priority and it is time to meet with them to ask whether they are able to continue with their small group commitment. Consider if an employer would keep them on as an employee with their small group attendance record? We hold people accountable for their attendance, for the love of the individual, for the love of the group, and for the love of the glory of God.

We should do everything we can to plead with the individuals to come to small group. If a group member misses a meeting without advanced notice, it is up to the leader to follow up with them and remind them of the commitment they made when they signed the covenant. There may be many reasons why someone misses small group, some reasons are legitimate and some are not. Generally speaking, if a group member misses 2 or more meetings per month on a consistent basis, they should be asked by their leader to re-evaluate whether they are able to continue participating in the small group or whether they need to take a break for a season and be removed from the small group. Sometimes group members may need to take a break due to busy or trying seasons of life. There is nothing wrong with that. It is not abnormal, nor is it a reflection of poor leadership if there are members in your group that find it difficult to fulfill their commitment to the group and need to take a break from the small group ministry.

If the couple or individual decide to take a break and/or remove themselves from small group, their leaders need to communicate this to their flock leaders and to the Director of Discipleship. This will allow those who are on a waiting list to have an opportunity to join the group.

Leaders need to encourage members to take ownership of their group and that means taking attendance seriously. They will get out of the group what they put into it. It doesn't take a highly gifted leader to build a great group. It takes members. Members must own it. Members must pray for it. Members must invest in it (1 Peter 4:10).

Every situation is different and some may require nuanced solutions. If you are uncertain about how to respond to an attendance issue in your group, please speak with your flock leader and they will help you discern how to proceed.

(3) How to Respond to Soul Care Needs

From time to time, a small group member might require additional biblical counsel and discipleship outside of the small group. All of us, armed with God's Word and the Holy Spirit are competent to counsel. When someone requests counseling or sheds light on a situation/trial/sin in their life that may require further counsel, begin by praying specifically for your brother or sister. Meet with them outside of the group time to listen to their situation and ask questions. Ask God for a full understanding of their need. Give the small group member the task of looking up and memorizing Scripture that specifically addresses walking with Christ in their situation. They should have several go to passages to help them with their situation. Be patient and persistent, sanctification will look different for everyone.

If the situation spirals or requires more extensive counsel then be sure to speak to your flock leader. Remember, the S.O.S. tool can be used to help assess the situation (see UL101). In general it is good and helpful to keep your flock leader informed of soul care needs in your group. They are here to help you! Once you speak to your flock leader, it is their responsibility to help you come up with a care plan. They may recommend a book or homework that you can go through with the small group member. They may also decide to meet directly with the small group member for counsel or they may take the situation to the Director of Discipleship who will then determine how to best care for the individual.

Crisis Counseling Protocol

In general, about 80% of the day-to-day soul care ministry in the church takes place in and through the small groups ministry. However, the other 20% of soul care situations require more intensive and long-term counsel. This counseling typically comes from flock leaders, ministry staff, and the elders. This counsel tends to be more crisis counseling and usually involves several meetings over a period of weeks or months until the situation has been resolved or reduced to a point where the small group leaders can resume discipling and caring for the individual/couple on a long term basis.

When a situation arises in your group that falls into this 20% category and requires more intensive counsel, there is a process that needs to be followed:

- 1. Speak with your flock leader.** It is the flock leader's responsibility to help determine next steps and come up with a care plan.
- 2.** If the flock leader is not able to provide care or requires help to do so, the flock leader must **speak with the Director of Discipleship.** The Director of Discipleship will help equip the flock leader/small group leader to counsel the individual/couple or, if necessary, will find someone else in the church that is qualified and available to counsel the individual/couple.
- 3.** If the Director of Discipleship requires help or feels that the situation needs to be escalated, he will **inform the Senior Pastor** who may help or give advice as necessary.
- 4.** The Senior Pastor will **bring the situation up with the elders** if necessary.

This counseling protocol is important because it ensures that the proper chain of command is being adhered to and that our small group members are able to receive the care that they need. Remember, the leadership of the church is here to support and help you as you care for and minister to the people that God has entrusted to your care in your small group.