



Life Group

Leadership Guide

v4.0

January 2022

Introduction & Overview

Connecting people in a Life Group is not an optional support ministry of our church - it IS the church in its smallest, most necessary unit. Without the Life Group connection, people can at best only "audit" Christianity, but they aren't truly participating in or experiencing the biblical community God has designed for them in church.

A Life Group of believers loving God, one another, & their neighbors experiences the full life that Christ promised (John 10:10) at the deepest level possible this side of heaven. This love radically transforms them & makes God known to those around them. It is in these Life Groups that believers bond together to see the mission of the Gospel of Christ accomplished in their lives and to have a meaningful impact on those around them.

The Theological/Biblical Foundation for Community

Genesis 1-3 tells us:

- God has existed in plurality since before creation
- God created Adam in his image
- God's image involves community, ie: living meaningfully and in completion with others
- Man's purposes in this world are completed in community

The New Testament tells us:

- Christ ordained a new community, ie: the Church
- The Christian life can be lived to its fullest only in community
- Christian community provides a context for discipleship, service, missions, and encouragement

“Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

“Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.” Romans 12:9-10

Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good." Romans 12:9-21, The Message

Read Acts 2:42-47. What are the key marks of the First Church that enabled them to put their faith into practice?

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

The Purpose of Life Groups at The Sanctuary Fellowship

One of the things that can cause small groups to fail is a lack of purpose. Groups can't meet just to meet; meetings and programs won't be sufficient to sustain a group, over time. People want a larger-than-life purpose to live for.

Church and Christian community are the best place for people to find a purpose larger than anything else in the world:

Glorifying God in everything and enjoying God with everyone.

In order to live in this kind of biblical community, we want our Life Groups to focus on:

1. Discipleship- learning to become like Christ with others (Growth Goals)
2. Community- develop meaningful, Christ-based relationships
3. Service- taking the benefits of community into the culture around us by helping others

We no longer know in our society how to love our neighbors as ourselves—and rarely do we even see any attempt made. This is, unfortunately, also true of our “neighbors” with whom we go to church – Dallas Willard, author of The Divine Conspiracy

Americans are the loneliest people on the face of the earth- George Gallup

Leadership in Life Groups

For a life group to operate effectively, there are only 2 positions of leadership that are needed: Group Leader and Host.

Who is a Life Group Leader?

A Group Leader is a person who exhibits characteristics like these:

1. Cares for God's people
2. Focuses on the abundant life of God's people
3. Leads others

What does a Group Leader do?

1. Ministers to the needs of group members
2. Leads regular group meetings
3. Plans for direction and overall coordination of group meetings (ie.: plan quarterly calendar, works with host to make sure meetings are scheduled, helps direct service/outreach projects, etc.)
4. Works with Pastoral Leadership for discipleship events, curriculum, etc.
5. Directs weekly meeting times or coordinates with others to facilitate this

Who is a Group Host?

A Group Host exhibits characteristics like this:

1. Enjoys opening their home to others
2. Has a warm, inviting, welcoming personality
3. Wants everyone to be hugged and to feel comfortable

What does a Group Host do?

1. Provides the group with a place to meet for regular meetings
2. Coordinates food and fellowship needs for the group
3. Enlists others to assist with these needs
4. Insures that every attendee is welcomed to the meeting and feels a part of the event

Organize people around relationships & allow all the functions of the church to flow from those relationships instead of vice versa.

Life Group Formation

There will be two broad types of groups facilitated by The Sanctuary Fellowship:

Geographical and Affinity-based.

What does this mean?

GEOGRAPHICAL groups will be formed based on where people live. For instance: New Territory, Greatwood, Sienna, First Colony, Richmond/Rosenberg, North of Hwy. 90, etc. These groups will give members a great opportunity to get to know people that live close to them and to build relationships that can last a lifetime. These groups can be easier to get together because of proximity and that can lend itself to more spontaneity in and more natural service projects.

AFFINITY-BASED groups will be focused on things group members have in common with others. Things like: parents of teens, parents of toddlers, etc., motorcycle riders, marathon runners, quilt makers, empty nesters, etc. This affords group members the chance to do activities together that they already enjoy or to be with people who are in your life stage. Relationships will be built allowing members to pursue Christ's life together.

A third possibility would be a mixture of the two: New Territory parents of teens; River Park young marrieds/no kids; etc.

Group Formation

Life Group Leaders and Hosts agree to lead groups and prepare to facilitate groups, allowing for the recruitment of members.

The Sanctuary will solicit people to sign up for Life Groups. As they do, we will ascertain what groups might fit them best, then start the process of getting their info to the Group Leaders for follow up.

We encourage our Group Leaders, Hosts, and Members to recruit new members who are not currently involved in a group, and to invite friends and neighbors to be a part of the group.

Every group chooses what night and time you will meet. Once that has been established, you need to let Joe Sanders know those details.

Life Group Meetings

Frequency and Spontaneity

For groups of people to get comfortable with each other and to learn how to love one another, there must be good, steady frequency to your meetings. There must also be a recognition that we are in a busy culture and we don't want to add just another activity to people's already busy schedule.

So, we are asking groups to meet **two times per month** in regular meetings.

There will (and should be) other, more spontaneous meetings, but 2 times per month will afford groups the chance to get to know one another, to pursue discipleship together, and to participate in service with each other.

Planning Time In Life Groups

Planning how we are going to use our time in Life Group meetings will maximize the growth of each group member. The following is a sample time format for leading your Life Group:

A Two-Hour Meeting Example:

6:00 PM – 7:00 PM	Arrive, Eat & Socialize
7:00 PM – 7:30 PM	Discussion of Sermon or Curriculum
7:30 PM – 8:00 PM	Prayer, Group Plans, and Dismiss

Keep Your Meetings Lively and Refreshed

Its not only what gets said during a group meeting that helps keep it fresh, its what you do with your time. A meeting schedule that never changes can lead to boredom, so we suggest adding some variety to your time together. Following is a sample of what that kind of change might look like:

- Pick a night/day to do a service/outreach project as a group
- Do something as a group just to hang out: a picnic; go get ice cream and go to a park with your families; family movie night with all of your group's families; group swim party; etc.
- Have a night that is dedicated to some light fellowship and prayer together

We recommend that you actually get into a rotational schedule where you work in regular meetings that look different. You might have 2 weeks of discussion/curriculum, then a week of service, then 2 weeks of discussion/curriculum, then prayer night, etc. *Just keep things fresh and lively!*

Quarterly/Annual Group Calendar

In order to promote organization, freshness, and purpose for your group, we strongly encourage you to devise a calendar for your group. Because our schedules are already so full, we believe this will help everyone keep dates and be able to plan accordingly.

There are times of the year when we are all busier than normal (if that's possible!): the holidays and summer. So, we encourage you to NOT hold regular meetings during these times of the year: December 1 to January 15, and June 1 to July 15. Please have individual parties or informal get-togethers during that time, but don't plan regular meetings. It will give you and your members a much-needed break, and will help reduce the stress of already busy times.

Growth Goals

As The Sanctuary seeks to assist her members to experience a life where everyone glorifies God in everything and enjoys God with everyone, we want Life Groups to concentrate on these Growth Goals:

Convert	Growing	Missionary	Giving	
Prayer	Commitment	Loving	Discipling	Worshipping

We will ask for feedback from Group Leaders several times a year, both to assess your group's health and to assist you with any needs you might have. Look for a sample 'report' at the back of this packet (p. 18).

Though we don't want your group time to be a teaching venue, we are open to discussing curricula with you that might help you address one of these Growth Goals as your group decides to concentrate on it.

There will also be times of the year where our entire church family will explore a given issue/one of the Growth Goals at the same time. When this occurs, we'll give you advance notice and get any leadership material to you that you might need.

Other Elements of a Dynamic Life Group Meeting

Sharing a Meal

Groups sometimes decide to cut out the meal because it is too much trouble to organize. Meals shared together can be crucial to the life of Biblical Community. There is something about a meal that brings relationships together. It communicates that we care, providing time that promotes conversation & interaction.

Eating a meal together can be as spiritual as studying the Bible or praying together. Life Group members often get to know each other & each other's children not from doing activities together, but from the sharing of a meal.

Meal Ideas

Everyone should be encouraged to participate in whatever food preparation the group has agreed on, including bringing beverages (soda or iced tea), paper goods, desserts, salads, main dishes, etc. The host/hostess should coordinate the meals and enlist the help of everyone in the group. Reminder phone calls or emails will be needed if people are agreeing to bring various items to share together. Some groups choose to have people bring food for their own family & simply eat their own food while conversing with each other. Below are some simple meal ideas for your Life Group (PS: don't forget the drinks!):

Taco Soup (or any kind of soup) - The hostess will make the soup & everyone else fills in with salad, cornbread, chips & salsa, crackers, desserts, etc.

Italian Night - One or two families provide the main course (spaghetti, lasagna, Italian casserole, etc) & everyone else brings salad, desserts & bread.

Sandwich Night - The hostess provides condiments. Everyone else chicken salad & tuna salad & different kinds of bread to make sandwiches, relish plate (i.e., tomatoes, onions, pickles, etc.), lettuce & cheese, & desserts.

Salad Night - Everyone brings a salad (or individual ingredient for group salad (i.e. taco salad), dessert or rolls/bread.

Finger food night - Everyone brings their favorite finger food or hors d'oeuvres. Make sure you have some sweet ones for dessert.

Mexican Night - Mexican casserole, enchiladas, etc. Have people bring main dish, cornbread, bread, salad, vegetables, & chips & salsa or guacamole.

KFC Night - Have everyone bring their favorite kind of chicken from a fast food chicken place & get at least two large sides to share.

Pizza Night - Have everyone bring \$5.00 if family is between 3-4 members (\$10.00 if larger), then everyone brings salad or dessert. OR everyone brings their favorite kind of pizza (DiGiorno/homemade) & they bring a salad or dessert.

Fajitas - Two families bring chicken or beef & everyone else brings toppings for the fajitas & chips & salsa, guacamole, & desserts.

Chili Night - This is great for winter nights. Everyone with a favorite chili dish brings chili. Everyone else brings salad, bread, topping for chili (onions, sour cream, Fritos, etc.).

Stew Night - Someone makes stew, puts it into a crock-pot & everyone else brings salad, bread & dessert. (Paper bowls instead of paper plates.)

Brisket Night - Someone fixes a huge brisket & has everyone bring a side to go with it. (Potato Salad, Bread, Relish tray, Coleslaw, Salad, Vegetable, etc.) Don't forget desserts!

Hamburgers & Hot Dogs - The kids really love this one! Someone provides the meat & another provides the hot dogs. Everyone else brings sides to go with it.

Pot Luck - Everyone brings one dish. It doesn't matter if you have too many of one thing. It can be really fun! If you are too organized for that, then have everyone sign up for what to bring.

Baked Potato Bar - Bring pre-baked potatoes (unless hostess is baking), fixings & dessert. Could also include baked sweet potatoes.

Brown Bag - Pack a creative family brown bag, decorate & exchange with other families. Or keep your own.

Holiday & International Themes - Plan a menu based on the special season or culture. Add appropriate music, costume ideas, & even a recipe exchange or cookie swap.

Pancake night - Everyone can bring a variation of his or her favorite pancake mix.

Omelet night - Everyone can bring a variation of his or her favorite omelet mix.

Quesadilla night - Each person brings one of the following: flour tortillas, large bag of grated cheese, cooked chicken meat, sour cream, picante sauce & chips. Have one or two hot pans on the stove & grill the quesadillas as people arrive. Place a buttered tortilla, butter side down, in a hot pan. Cover with cheese & add some chicken, then place a buttered tortilla on top, butter side up. Flip when brown on one side, cook until golden brown on both sides.

Chinese take-out night - Each person brings a different variety of Chinese take out or pool your money & have it delivered.

Cereal Night - Everybody brings their favorite cereal. Hostess can provide the milk.

Conversational Prayer

Prayer can be a meaningful time of communication with each other as you all in one voice, mind & spirit approach the Father through Jesus Christ, who loves us & desires us to come to him in all situations. Here are a few suggestions in developing good communication in your prayer life.

A Guide to Developing Conversational Prayer in your Community Group

Designed as group prayer, this is informal where the objective is to speak conversationally with God from our hearts. Don't worry about impressing others in the group with your form or specific words; simply communicate with God.

1. **Start praying rather than sharing requests.** Much of valuable prayer time can be taken up with sharing requests. The one with the burden for someone or something will be the one to initiate prayer about that person. From time to time it is also good to spend time-sharing with each other. Balance the two approaches.
2. **Pray about one topic at a time.** We tend to give God our grocery list of what we need. For conversational prayer to be effective, pray one topic at a time. Think about it in terms of speaking to someone you know. If everyone had to speak about whatever was on his or her mind & in random order, the listener would not only be offended, but also confused. If someone prayed exactly what you were going to pray, don't feel put out or feel you have to think about something else to pray about. While others are praying, try not to think about what you are going to say next, but rather listen to what is being prayed for. It will keep everyone focused on that particular subject. The Holy Spirit will prompt you when to pray.
3. **Pray Briefly.** Especially for new Christians or those not accustomed to praying aloud, group prayer can be intimidating. To help overcome this, have the group limit their prayers to 1 or 2 sentences at a time while keeping within the topic. This is more difficult for experienced prayers than for beginners. However, you will experience another level of prayer that everyone will participate in.
4. **Pray spontaneously, not in sequence.** Try not to elect people to pray or to go around the room from person to person, rather allow the Holy Spirit to lead & motivate people randomly. Somehow everyone will know when the prayer time is finished; there will be a sense of completeness.

Sharing & Discussion Guidelines

These guidelines should be read to the group members so that a safe place for sharing can be established. Intimacy is not likely to be established in the beginning months of the Community Group.

For intimacy to happen, there needs to be guidelines that the group adheres to that will provide confidence & safety for sharing. At various stages & at different times it will be a good idea to remind everyone by reading these following guidelines out loud.

Participation & Respect: Anything said inside the meeting is never repeated outside of it. This would also include prayer requests unless permission has been given by the individual or given by the Life Group leader.

Honesty: Being open & honest will help us discover the truth that sets us free

Acceptance: We do not pass judgment or advice, rather we support or validate feelings based on our own experiences. Advice is only given when requested by the individual.

Self-responsibility: We assume responsibility for our own struggles & never confess another person's struggles or shortcomings.

Troubleshooting

Confronting a Brother or Sister that has sinned

If you are leading a Life Group or any group involving people, be assured there will be problems & issues that you will have to face. Here is a Biblical method that Jesus gave to solving problems found in Matthew 18:15-17

1. Go to your brother, just you & him, & show him his fault. If he listens you have won your brother over. (V.15)
2. If he will not listen, take one or two brothers with you. (V.16)
3. If he still will not listen, tell it to the church. (V.17)
4. If he still does not listen even to the church, then treat him like an unbeliever or tax collector. (V.17)

There are many intricacies to this process, and it can often take a lot of time. You are not in this alone! Your church leadership, Elders and Pastors stand ready to assist you.

Handling talkative & silent members

Excessively talkative or silent members can both be dealt with through an understanding of seating arrangements, nonverbal communication & group dynamics.

When someone consistently talks too much, consider changing the seating arrangements so that he or she sits next to the leader. Put the silent member opposite the leader where eye contact can be maintained easily.

If the talker continues to dominate, stop using open questions & put all questions to particular people, using their names first. For example: "Jim, what do you think is meant in verse 2? Sue, do you have anything to add to what Jim has said? Mark, how about you?"

If all else fails, talk to the person outside the group. Share your concern that all members of the group have a good opportunity to talk & ask for the person's help in achieving this goal. Do not allow an over-talkative member to take over a group. It is not fair to the other group members. Act in love, but act!

The Answer Person

"Answer People" can all too quickly dismantle safe places. Other members should not have to experience the pain of non-attention, judgment, or an argumentative spirit.

Here are some helpful ways to provide what the answer man needs & keep the group process on track:

- Backtrack to the original idea, question, or thought shared.
- Refocus on the passage of material being used & collect more information from everyone; then summarize.
- Lovingly redirect the sharing to the other group members: "What do the rest of you think of this passage?" or "How do the rest of you feel?"
- Affirm what is right about the "always right" person's answers, but look for other points of view.

- Be a model of true empathy so the "answer person" can see a better way to help others.
- Remind the group of the importance of silence.
- Avoid arguing about who is right or wrong.
- Before the meeting, share how "pat answers" or oversimplified responses make others feel. Ask the group to monitor themselves. Do not feel afraid to call members on this after you have set the ground rules.
- Direct the group to prayer.

If it's a continuing problem, talk with the person outside the group. Describe to them what their sharing in this manner does to the group. Tell the truth in love.

- Affirm the person for what they do know, but also let them know how their knowledge may not be what is needed or appropriate.
- Let the person know they need to let the communication of others stand on its own without judgment or immediate correction.
- Ask the insensitive member to share more feelings rather than thoughts.
- Ask the "answer person" to summarize or rephrase points of the discussion.
- Attempt to find out from the person privately what drives him or her to always appear "in the know."

Guidelines Regarding Children

Include children in the events of the regular meeting time as much as possible/desirable. De-fragment families by making your group a safe and inclusive place for families. Worship nights, prayer times, meal nights, service nights, etc, can include kids. Enjoy and influence each other's kids!

1. Childcare arrangements are made by group members and associated costs are divided among members.
2. Each member is responsible for their own childcare.
3. Be creative!!!
4. We intend for you to live life as a Christian community within your geographical community.
5. There are a lot of teenagers at The Sanctuary. Hire some of them to help with your kids during your Life Groups.

Children are important for our Life Groups. We want the influence of other believers in the lives of our children. Life Groups help teach our children true community. We have the opportunity to break this mold of isolation and individualism and teach our children to practice community as a natural lifestyle.

For the proper environment, here are some guidelines that your group can use if a child gets out of control in the Life Group or in childcare.

Parent's Guidelines Concerning Children:

Children may actively participate in any way their family wishes. However, when they disrupt the impact of the group, the parents are responsible to kindly & lovingly remove them from the group until control is restored.

Respect: We are guests in our host's home & we will not abuse the furniture or toys. For example: No jumping on furniture or shoes on furniture. You can only go into another room for toys or play with toys if you are given permission.

Response: We will respond & obey our parents or supervisors as they direct us. Today a sitter will be looking after you & you are to listen & obey her.

Participation: We are encouraged to play or study so as not to disrupt others. If someone is playing or reading a book, do not take it away without asking. Also, everyone is to share.

Prayer: During our parent's prayer time, we will give them time to pray without interruption. If your parents are praying & unless it's an emergency, please don't disturb us. You can pray with us. Otherwise, children are dismissed.

Younger children can be a challenge, especially if you are trying to create an atmosphere of intimacy. Here are a few hints that may make your time with children successful.

Toddlers and Elementary School

Toddlers need to be watched, they also cannot sit for long periods of time. This means someone needs to be scheduled each week you decide to take the group to an intimate sharing level.

During worship or general sharing, toddlers can get out of control; therefore, from time to time read out the instructions so that the parents know what is expected of them. Furthermore, if you anticipate things are going to get out of control before the meeting, just as everyone is about to get seated, instruct everyone to sit in family groups. By doing this, toddlers are right next to their parents & are also in arm's reach. If the toddler is adamant on sitting with big "sister/brother" then ask big "sister/brother" to come over & sit with the toddler's family. Remember to thank big "sister/brother" for accommodating. It will make them feel more part of the team.

If you have teenagers in your group, this may be a great way for them to earn some extra cash & at the same time build relationships with those children. The sitter, especially if he/she is in the Life Group, then becomes the big brother or sister. A good practice is for everyone, whether they have children or not, is to contribute financially to the sitter. This helps the parents not to be financially drained & it also becomes a group effort & responsibility. Remember it takes a Life Group to raise a child.

Another way to take care of children during intimate sharing would be for one week to have just the women meet together while the men take the kids out to the park & then the next week the rolls could be reversed.

Teenagers

Teenagers are the easiest kids to have at a Life Group meeting if you can get them there. We should not use them as our babysitters for toddlers unless it has been arranged & are preferably benefiting from it financially. Teenagers can be a vital participant in your group.

On some occasions they may decide to sit in the adult sharing time. If this happens, make sure to include them in the discussion even if it means sacrificing your agenda. Try not to put them on the spot, but ask for & value their opinions. Parents should try not to give their opinion on what the teenager has just commented on. Sometimes the same principles are learned better when they hear it from other adults as well.

Third Spaces

We've co-opted this phrase for our use. Third Spaces are places that aren't home, and they aren't work, and they aren't party places- they're somewhere in between. We want you to have 3rd spaces in your group life. Places that aren't specifically ministry or evangelism or planning, and they definitely aren't organized.

Be spontaneous. What do you like to do that you could invite others to do with you? Though every member of your group or community may not choose to participate, if just two or three do, it is an expression of your group!

Here are some examples of Third Spaces for Your Group:

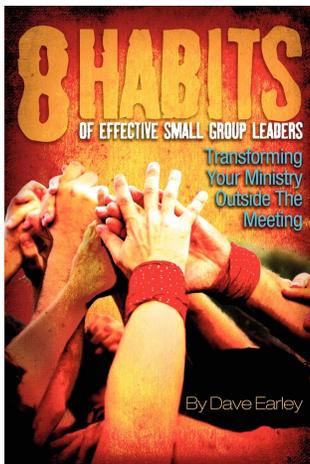
- you like baseball, your kid plays ball. Invite some who don't have kids or kids playing ball to come to your game, then hang out afterwards getting a Coke or a burger or a coffee, etc.
- you like to shop. Invite some to go with you, enjoying more window shopping than actually purchasing anything.
- you like to golf. Organize a golf day.
- go to a high school football or basketball game. Because you all live near each other, odds are good that your kids will be going to this school one day!
- watch a movie at your house.
- go see a movie.
- go to an Astros, Rockets, or Texans game.
- day trip to the beach.
- make your own list!

You get the idea. Be creative. Think about this in these terms- you are just hanging out with some friends so go and have fun! You get to build relational bridges for the Gospel and for ministry, and you gain some great friends!

Also, don't worry if everyone can't come. Just because you miss a lunch at your in-laws, a birthday party, or some other event doesn't mean your not part of the family! Those that can't come to this one will make it a point to be at the next one. There will soon be more than enough opportunities to hang out with your friends as others jump on board with their own ideas of things to do together.

We intend for you to live life as a Christian community within your geographical community. Be salt and light, have a good time, make some life-long friends, and love and lead all people to life change in Christ!

On Going Life Group Resources



Of the 100s of resources available for small groups, we have settled on one simple and effective tool that gives our Leaders quick reminders about the essentials of leading an effective, healthy Life Group. If you do not have a copy of it, contact us and let us know and we'll get one to you!

Email info@tsf-church.com to get a copy and to be encouraged in your leadership!



Life Group Leader Update Form 9.08

Today's Date: _____

Leader Name: _____

Which of the Growth Goals is your group working on?

How are you doing that?

What kind of help does your group need?

Please tell us of some successes that your group has had since your last report:

Miscellaneous: