

Small Group Orientation Guide

Teacher Edition

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Small Group Leader Application

Honor Code

Request Form

Connection Card

Small Group FAQ

Small Group Ideas

A Note to the Teacher

Underlined words in the Teacher’s Edition indicate the blanks in the Small Group Orientation Guide.

Meeting Preparation

- Have people sign-in as they arrive with name and group ideas.
- Pass out the Orientation Guides and pens as people sign-in.
- Have copies of the Group Leader Application, Honor Code, and Request Form available.
- Have a sign-up sheet for Growth Track Courses available.
- Prepare refreshments

Session 1 *(50 minutes)*

Teach Part I

Break *(15 minutes)*

Let people take a break to get some refreshments and to discuss information

Session 2 *(50 minutes)*

Teach Part II and Part III

Close the meeting

- Ask interested leaders to submit the Application and Honor Code with their signature before they leave.
- Give them a due date to write at the top of their Request Forms.
- Announce the date for the next Rally Day

A letter from the Lead Pastor

Photo

We believe that life is a journey that no one should have to go through alone. God wants us to connect with Him and with others so we can experience life together with genuine love, heartfelt worship, relevant ministry, and effective outreach.

One way we are doing life together is through our small group ministry. Small Groups get together on a regular basis to build meaningful and lasting relationships. Some groups meet because of a shared interest, others come together for spiritual growth, and others meet to serve in ministry.

Small Groups give you the opportunity to express what God has placed in your heart and to develop the gifts that are uniquely yours. We believe you have something to offer that will bless other people and perhaps reach someone that no one else could.

We welcome you to the Small Group Orientation. We pray that the Holy Spirit will inspire you as you listen to the vision for Small Groups. May you be blessed as you pursue the plan God has for your life.

Living the dream,

Lead Pastor

PART 1: The Purpose of Small Groups

Small Groups are one way that we do life together. We do Small Groups to connect with God, with each other, and with the community through relationships.

1. CONNECTING WITH GOD

Small Groups can provide opportunities to minister

Whatever the type of Small Group, we encourage the leaders to look for opportunities to connect people with God. Ways to connect with God include prayer, worship, teaching, reading scripture, and sharing testimonies. You don’t have to be eloquent to minister, just be yourself. Even if the group is getting together for something recreational, the leader should be ready to share their faith with another person in a very real way.

Small Groups can make the way to speak life

Through relationships, people will give you permission to speak into their lives. When people feel that they are genuinely accepted and loved, they will begin to trust you and open their hearts to you. Through relationships we can lead people in salvation as well as mentor them in discipleship.

Small Groups can help people to serve

We want to help people find an area that they can serve God in. We want to encourage them to follow their passion for ministry. We don’t want to pressure them to volunteer in any area because of feelings of guilt or manipulation. The creativity and diversity in our Small Groups give people the freedom and innovation to follow their heart in ministry. There should be joy and passion in serving God.

2. CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER

Small Groups can provide opportunities to meet people

We want to be led by God to form relationships with the people He wants us to connect with. Sometimes He will connect us with people that have the same ministry or shared interests. Sometimes we connect with people because they complement us through their differences. Small Groups offer opportunities to get to know people we can connect with.

Small Groups can enhance meaningful relationships

When we talk with people we want to get beyond shallow discussion and have conversations about things that people are passionate about. Learn to ask questions that pull at the dreams and desires that people have for God. Ask questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer. Ask specific questions about their faith, their family, their joys, their sorrows. If you feel them backing away from you, don’t push them to communicate with you. Let them open up as much as they want to. Share something about yourself with them as well. Heartfelt relationships require communication from both sides.

Small Groups can strengthen relationships

The bond between our relationships in church can get stronger through Small Groups. Even Bible studies, training classes, and ministry and outreach groups should include some kind of social get-together. Fellowship can help to bring down perceived or actual barriers between relationships. God wants us to relax and have fun so that our hearts will be open to one another.

Small Groups help the church to care for people

The church can be more effective in ministering to people by doing it through small groups. It is impossible for church leaders to have connections with every person in the church. People can pray for one another, care for the needs of one another, encourage each other, visit people who are sick or in the hospital, and check on each other when they are missing. The Holy Spirit is here to help each one of us, not just the church leadership.

If needed, Small Groups can help point people to counseling

If there is a problem that requires counseling or additional help, the Small Group Leader should notify the Small Group Director. We never give our opinion as advice, only direction from Scripture. We never tell someone what to do, only to encourage them to follow their heart. In any situation, the Small Group Leaders should have an assistant or another member of the group with him/her at all times to protect their reputation and the reputation of the church. We are accountable to each other and to God.

Small Groups encourages a team atmosphere

The church can accomplish more when people have a team mentality rather than looking to church leadership to do all the work. The Bible shows us that every Christian has a ministry (Ephesians 4:12,16; I Corinthians 12:12-31). Small Groups help to equip and empower the Christian in ministry.

Small Groups stimulate participation

We want people to want to be involved in Small Groups. Participation should come from the heart, not because of manipulation through guilt, fear, or shame. Our relationship with God is based on a loving surrender, not on rules and control. People have a free will, and we want them to enjoy the liberty found in making choices in Small Groups.

3. CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

Building relationships is the best way to reach people. People do not respond to our techniques or knowledge, they respond to the way we accept and care for them.

In a survey done by The Institute for American Church Growth, over 10,000 people were asked their reason for coming to church.¹ These are the results:

_____ .5 _____ %	Evangelistic crusade
_____ 1 _____ %	Church visitation
_____ 2 _____ %	A special need was met
_____ 3 _____ %	They randomly walked in
_____ 3 _____ %	A church program
_____ 5 _____ %	Interest in Christian education
_____ 6 _____ %	The Pastor’s influence
_____ 79 _____ %	The influence of a friend or relative

Small Groups go to where the people are

We want to reach people who would normally not come to a church, so we meet in places that are outside the church building. Church leaders can use their home or the home of a friend. Be creative for locations to meet. Remember to choose locations that are large enough to handle expected growth. Other ideas for locations are: coffee houses, restaurants, workplace, community buildings, clubhouses, conference rooms, recreation centers, parks, and more!

Small Groups can locate someone’s spiritual condition

Through relationships, you can know a person, locate where they are at spiritually, and bring them up one step higher toward God. You don’t want to overwhelm them with spiritual things that their natural mind cannot understand.

Small Groups are sensitive to the unchurched

If your group is an outreach, be sensitive to how much time is spent on spiritual matters. The emphasis should be on patiently leading people to God as they’re ready. If someone doesn’t feel comfortable with spiritual things yet, be careful how much time is spent in prayer and worship. Be sensitive to unbelievers when the Holy Spirit is moving. Consider what they are thinking when you are praying in the spirit. We don’t want to scare them so that they’ll never come back. We are not saying that you should hinder the Holy Spirit. We are saying that we should

¹ *What People Ask About Church*, by Dale A. Robbins; www.victorious.org
www.GrowChurches.com

have our focus on the spiritual comprehension of someone else instead of only thinking of ourselves. Take a moment to explain things to people who might not understand. If the Holy Spirit is moving, He knows what He is doing, and it will bless everyone.

Small Group Leaders can guide the direction of their group

- **Small Group Leaders can guide group participation.** Steer the discussion in a direction where everyone can participate. Be sensitive not to leave someone out. Try to talk about things that they are interested in.
- **Don’t embarrass unbelievers** or the spiritually immature. Don’t draw attention to people in a group that are new or shy. Don’t put them on the spot if it makes them uncomfortable; they may not come back.
- **Be careful not to use the “Christianese” language.** Phrases that are common to Christians are not common to outsiders. For example, “spiritual warfare,” “keeping the flesh under,” “washed in the blood,” or even “born again.” Refrain from using these terms around people that would not understand them.
- **Don’t ask newcomers to volunteer their talents or skills.** If we approach talented or skilled people to give of their time; they could think you have an ulterior motive rather than just loving them. Just be a friend to them. Don’t try to pressure them in any way.
- **Don’t use your meetings to promote your sales or personal business.** Our relationships are valuable. We don’t want people to feel like we’re using them for personal gain. People can sometimes be on guard for possible improper motives.
- **Do not take up offerings.** If someone wants to give to the church, encourage them to bring their offerings to the service, mail it to the church office, or give online.
- **Support the vision and the heart of the church.** Always encourage people to support the vision and the heart of the church and the pastor.

Use wisdom in drawing people to come again.

Be prepared to change the direction of any group if unbelievers are visiting. In church services, if someone comes once, there is only a 10% chance that they will come again. If they come twice, there is a 20% chance that they will return. If they come three times, there is a 50% chance that they will come back. If they come four times, there is a 80% chance that they will return. Our goal is to adapt ourselves so that people will be drawn to return. This requires that we focus on the way unbelievers, young Christians, or wounded Christians are feeling. The Holy Spirit doesn’t push, He draws. We should do the same.

Proverbs 11:30 “...He who wins souls is wise.”

PART 2: Characteristics of Small Groups

WHAT ARE SMALL GROUPS?

- Small Groups are small groups of people that meet together on a regular basis to build relationships with one another.
- We have a large variety of groups to choose from. Small Groups come under one of three categories:

Growth Groups – *Where you can learn*

Interest Groups – *Where you can relate*

Touch Groups – *Where you can serve*

- Small Groups are a smaller expression of our church. All Small Groups have been approved by church leadership.
- Small Groups have a topic, activity, or project that they complete by the end of the term.

WHY DO WE HAVE SMALL GROUPS?

- Relationships are built in Small Groups.

This is one way that we connect with one another in our church. We want people to have a sense of belonging, knowing that we value and accept them in the same way that God does.

- People can find ministry in Small Groups.

People can find a safe place where their gifts can be developed and expressed.

- Outreach takes place in Small Groups.

There are people who would come to a Small Group that would never set foot inside a church building. One purpose of Small Groups is to go to where people are instead of expecting them to come to us.

Unless otherwise specified, Small Groups welcome new people into their meetings. For example, some Bible studies, training classes, or activities are progressive and would require full attendance.

- People care for one another in Small Groups.

We encourage people to pray for one another, care for one another, and call to check on one another if they are missing.

WHEN AND WHERE DO SMALL GROUPS MEET?

- Small Groups run in three terms – Spring, Summer and Fall (Winter months are dedicated to holiday celebrations and setting goals for the new year). If someone wants to change Small Groups, we ask that they wait until the entry point of the next term.

Spring – March, April, May

Summer – June, July, August

Fall – September, October, November

- Most Small Groups meet weekly but there can be exceptions. Small Groups can last anywhere from 4 to 12 weeks, but they all have starting and stopping dates. This way people know what to expect before they choose to get involved.
- Times and locations will change from group to group. The variety of times and locations help to fit the lifestyles and schedules of different people. Most groups are about 1 ½ hours in length, depending on the group. If we give set times, we do our best to keep our word and promptly start and finish at the promised times.

WHO CAN GO TO A SMALL GROUP?

- Small Groups have three or more people attending, including the leader. There is no limit to the size a Small Group can grow to.
- Anyone can join a Small Group. People do not have to be members of our church to participate in our Small Groups, but coming to our services is the best way to experience what we’re all about.
- Some people choose to go to more than one Small Group, but we believe that people will get the most out of the groups by limiting themselves to one or two groups a term.
- At the end of a term, people can choose to go to a different Small Group, or if their Small Group is running for another term, they can choose to rejoin their same group. If someone’s schedule is demanding, they can choose to skip a term and start up again the next season.
- Childcare is available in some Small Groups. For the care and safety of the children, all childcare givers must go through the same screening and training process as our children’s ministry workers. If a Small Group Leader wants childcare, they need to contact the Children’s Ministry.

HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A SMALL GROUP?

- Approved Small Groups are promoted on the website and at the church Welcome Center. To join a group, a person fills out a Small Group Connection Card and turns it in to the Welcome Center or church office.
- One or two weeks before the next term, the church will have a Small Group Rally Day where Small Group Leaders can set up a display table for people to visit after church services.
- We encourage people to start their own Small Groups. We want people to have opportunities to do something for God in a way that fits their own style and gifting. We also want to reach people that haven’t been reached yet, and maybe one group will touch their life that another one won’t. We are open to new ideas!

PART 3: Group Leader Responsibilities

GETTING STARTED

1. Go through the Growth Track so that we know we agree on the fundamentals of church doctrine.
2. Attend the Small Group Leadership Orientation.
3. Fill out a Small Group Leadership Application and agree to keep the Honor Code.
4. Once your application has been approved, work on the details of your group and fill out a Small Group Request Form. Return the form to the church office.
5. You may be asked to meet with the Small Group Director to work out any details for your Small Group. Once your Small Group has been approved, your group will be advertised on the website.
6. If you are doing a Bible study, a copy of your curriculum must also be approved.
7. You will be asked to participate in the Small Group Rally Day by setting up a display for people to visit after service. The church will provide table space, a table top sign, and a sign-up sheet for you. We ask that you be creative with your presentations. Some serve food or pass out candy, some set up a TV and play a DVD, some use clowns and balloons...use your imagination!
8. Leaders should contact interested people after the Rally Day.
9. Continue to recruit people to your group both inside and outside of the church. Don't rely on church advertisement alone.
10. Identify an assistant leader. This person will help you with your group and accompany you in ministry. Assistant Leaders are encouraged to consider starting their own Small Groups in the future.

STAYING CONNECTED

1. Email a short Small Group report to the Small Group Director after each meeting. Include totals for attendance, visitors, salvations, and any communication that you would like to make with the Small Group Director.
2. Attend the Post Small Group Meeting at the end of the term.
3. Each week ask if there is anyone who has not filled out a Small Group Connection Card for this term. When a visitor comes to your Small Group, have them fill out a Small Group Connection Card. The Leader turns the card into the church office.
4. If anyone receives salvation or has a testimony to share, fill out a Small Group Connection Card and turn it in to the church office.
5. If someone requests counseling or needs pastoral care, fill out a Small Group Connection Card, stating the need in the comment section, and turn it in to the church office.

