



New Covenant Christian Ministries

Small Group Facilitator Handbook



Table of Contents

Why Small Groups?	3
The Biblical Basis for Small Groups	3
The Historical Background for Small Groups: Jerusalem – AD 30.....	4
Small Group Values	4
Purpose of Small Group Leaders	5
Characteristics of a Small Group Facilitator	5
Qualifications for being a Small Group Facilitator	6
Responsibilities of a Small Group Facilitator	6
How to Be an Effective Spirit-led SMG Facilitator	7
SMG Support Team: The Small Group Structure	8
Recognizing and Training Rising Apprentice Leaders	9
Guidelines for Hosting & Facilitating a Small Group.....	11
Small Group Communication Model.....	15

Small Group Facilitator Handbook

Welcome to the team! We are so excited that you have chosen to serve as a Small Group Facilitator. Our mission of “transforming all people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ” starts with you and your commitment to connect, fellowship, and grow. We believe that you will be blessed as you give of yourself as a blessing to those who desire transformation.

God bless you and your efforts!

Why Small Groups?

- Small groups help to develop a Christian community, being Christ-like to one another and sharing the fullness of His life with others, which is where transformation happens routinely
- By modeling the life of Jesus Christ, small groups help the pastors and elders shepherd (disciple and care for) the members of the congregation
- God’s nature is communal – He exists in community as the Trinity (plurality in oneness) – Genesis 6:4, 1:26
- When two or three come together in the name of the Lord, they have the ability to act as one for the good of themselves and others (cf. Matt. 18:15-20)
- To gain strength for life storms
- To provide nurturing relationships
- To receive wisdom for making important decisions
- To experience accountability, vital to spiritual growth
- To find acceptance that helps repair our wounds
- To invite others to Christ
- To reproduce new leaders to become disciple-makers for Christ
- Jesus’ prayer to the Father was “that they might be one as we are one” (John 17).
- By human nature, we are dependent on God; interdependent with other human beings to reproduce spiritual life in others.

The Biblical Basis for Small Groups

Scripture provides a basis for small groups in five key areas:

“Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” (Acts 5:42)

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” (Acts 2:46)

“You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.” (Acts 20:20)

“Greet also the church that meets at their house.” (Romans 16:5)

“Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their home.” (1 Corinthians 16:19)

The Historical Background for Small Groups: Jerusalem – AD 30

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

The early church provides a picture or glimpse of small groups in Jerusalem:

- Characterized by devotion to both the proclaimed word and to the fellowship of the believers
- Deep relationships were being built in the context of a common zeal for God
- Atmosphere thick with faith as miracles were taking place on a regular basis
- People were getting together for prayer and fellowship both at the temple and in each other's homes
- People were demonstrating their love and commitment to one another by sharing their possessions
- Aroused the attention of people who were impacted by the things that God was doing in the church and through His people.

The picture the Bible paints clearly shows people who met together outside the walls of the temple where they were able to “be the church.” The early church was a community of people who were intricately involved in each other's lives as an extended family. They were heeding the words of Jesus to love one another like a family. Meeting in each other's homes was the natural result of what God was doing and what God was telling them to do.

Small Group Values

- **Affirmation** – encourage and love one another as Christ loves you; help each other grow and mature spiritually; build each other up in the faith.
- **Availability and Accountability** – be available to your group members; be willing to commit your time and resources, appropriately, as evidence of your commitment to serve one another. (Proverbs 11:14) Leaders must serve others, (Matthew 20:26-28) Leaders should sacrifice for others, and (Hebrews 13:17) Leaders give an account to God for their actions.
- **Prayer** – a strong, powerful value in small groups. It encourages each one to be humble, feel valued knowing that God wants to and will move to answer the prayer concerns of your group.
- **Be joyful** - in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (Romans 12:12).

- Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God (Philippians 4:6).
- God hears you - The Lord is far from the wicked but he hears the prayers of the righteous (Proverbs 15:29).
- Openness – authentic relationships begin with being honest and transparent with each other and by having an open mind that expects others to join the group (the empty chair in the room).
- Honesty – speaking the truth in love, so that “we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ” (Ephesians 4:15)
- Safety and Confidentiality – guard your honest, open relationships (express the expectations of the group in your covenant). What is discussed in your group should remain confidential in your group. Remember confidentiality promotes openness.
- Evangelism – expands the community of believers. Share your faith and invite others into the group or other areas of the church.

You may find it helpful to develop a covenant to support and reaffirm the above values and your group goals and purpose. The covenant must be generated by the group not the facilitator.

Purpose of Small Group Leaders

- To make disciples
- Help grow the church
- Develop believers to maturity to lead others

Characteristics of a Small Group Facilitator

The Small Group (SMG) Facilitator serves as the catalyst to lead the group towards spiritual transformation and maturity in Christ. He/she displays the following characteristics:

- Demonstrates a life of transformation and spiritual maturity
- Guides, models, encourages, and supports the group in a godly lifestyle
- Is flexible, patient, friendly, and enthusiastic
- Can be silent without distress
- Makes short interventions
- Able to give and receive feedback
- Focused on the goal
- Accountable to leadership
- Truthful and trustworthy
- Surrendered follower of Jesus Christ
- Interested in the spiritual health and growth of people

Qualifications for being a Small Group Facilitator

The SMG Facilitator is considered vital and strategic to the discipleship process of the church. Therefore, careful consideration is given to anyone who desires to serve in this volunteer position. Some basic qualifications must be met.

- Must have a personal and growing relationship with Jesus Christ
- Must regard the Bible as the authoritative guide for their faith and life
- Must be a Biblical example of a godly lifestyle and stewardship of time and finances
- Must have completed the NCCM New Member Orientation
- Must be a member of and accountable to the leadership of NCCM for guidance, encouragement and discipline
- Must agree to attend quarterly small group leadership workshops, training, or conference calls
- Pursues personal development, relational and shepherding abilities
- Demonstrates commitment to ministry, fully devoted to Christ; leads effectively and cares for people
- Communicates the message of reconciliation
- Must be open to reporting and receiving responses regarding their group
- Must understand servanthood, submission, Bible study and discussion in small groups

Responsibilities of a Small Group Facilitator

The SMG Facilitator is responsible to the SMG Facilitator Coordinator and essentially has five core responsibilities:

1. **FACILITATE MEETINGS** - Small Group Facilitators are asked to commit to prayer and to adequately prepare for group meetings. Facilitating meetings encompasses the following:
 - a. Providing or ensuring administrative support is accomplished to include maintaining attendance, updating information on the small group profile, printing directories of group, emailing members and maintaining regular contact with the group, adding, removing, or dropping people from small group, viewing lists of people that have been assigned to the group, contacting them and recording the responses to that contact. Facilitator is encouraged to assign a group member to help with the administrative responsibilities.
 - b. Planning the year's activities with his/her group. The group is expected to meet once a week, unless otherwise agreed upon.
 - c. Keeping group abreast of opportunities to fellowship, serve, and participate in evangelism, mission, and outreach activities. Information regarding opportunities will be provided to the SMG Facilitator.
2. **CARE FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP** - SMG Facilitators will seek to cultivate a safe place where true feelings can be shared and encourage members to take the next step toward involvement in the life of the church. Facilitators will encourage members to move toward spiritual maturity in giving of time and finances. Facilitators also agree to notify the SMG Facilitator Coordinator of any acute conditions in the group requiring

specialized member care. All member care needs will be referred to the appropriate elder and/or Member C.A.R.E. Team Leader.

3. **BE RESPONSIBLE FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH** - the SMG Facilitator will take advantage of skill development training when offered by the church leadership. He/she will be diligent in their personal spiritual growth and development.
4. **BUILD LEADERS** - SMG Facilitators are expected to recruit and provide on-the job training for an apprentice, preparing them for eventual small group leadership of their own. The SMG Facilitator Coordinator should be advised of potential SMG Facilitators.
5. **EXPAND THE MINISTRY** – Facilitators are asked to develop relationships with unchurched and unconnected people. Facilitators are also expected to support the church financially with tithes and offerings and maintain a positive attitude toward the church and its leadership.

How to Be an Effective Spirit-led SMG Facilitator

- Lead with your heart (connect); show that you care.
- Lead with compassion (fellowship); concern for the people/ the lost.
- Lead with motivation (growth); the care of others has been entrusted to us.
- Learn skills and biblical processes
- Involve yourselves in the life of other people like Christ did and allow group members to be involved in your life as you help each other grow.
- Connect with church, ministry leadership and be a person who can be coached
- Understand how respect for authority strengthens your faith (Matthew 8:5-13).
- Recruit your replacement (an apprentice) and have a willing spirit to coach and mentor your replacement. Identify this person at the beginning of your group preferably before your group meets so they can work with you from beginning to end. According to Carl George, *Nine Keys to Small Group Leadership* pg39, regular, quality supervision can compensate for lack of extensive training.
- Accept leadership responsibility for your group. When a spiritual minded leader facilitates a small group of people in Jesus name, the Lord Jesus will manifest himself in their midst. The “fullness of Christ” will occur (Ephesians 4:13).
- Set a goal or goals for your group. What are the expected outcomes, commitments or expectations for your group?
- Faith and obedience are prerequisites for spiritual leadership
- Effective small groups are powerful, life changing, and result in spiritual growth.

SMG Support Team: The Small Group Structure

Besides the SMG Facilitator, a complete SMG team is comprised of an apprentice, a host, and group members.

APPRENTICES - an apprentice is a servant-leader who assists the SMG Facilitator to learn how to facilitate their own group. An apprentice is to take an active role in loving and caring for the members of the small group. They are to be actively learning what the leader does and does not do. The apprentice should be actively dialoguing with the group facilitator both before and after the group meetings. Apprentices should also be participating in every facilitator training offered. They should be available to help the SMG Facilitator in any way that is needed to serve the small group.

Apprentices should always be praying, planning and preparing to start their own small group. SMG Facilitators should constantly keep their eyes open for an apprentice to develop.

HOSTS - a host or a hostess is a hospitable person who makes their home available for the small group meetings, should the home of the SMG Facilitator not be used. They help make the meetings as warm and welcome as possible. This involves making sure there is adequate seating, comfortable temperature, proper lighting, refreshments are organized, etc. They also greet people when they arrive, helping them feel welcome and at home. The SMG Host has the important ministry of hospitality. They accomplish this ministry by thinking about the needs of the guests. It is the host's responsibility to eliminate distractions that could hinder a person from being able to focus on spiritual matters because of an uncomfortable atmosphere. The host's job is to make sure people feel completely welcomed and wanted. Hosts are likely to be the first people with whom newcomers come in contact, so they have a tremendous opportunity to initiate an atmosphere of love and acceptance to all who walk through their doors.

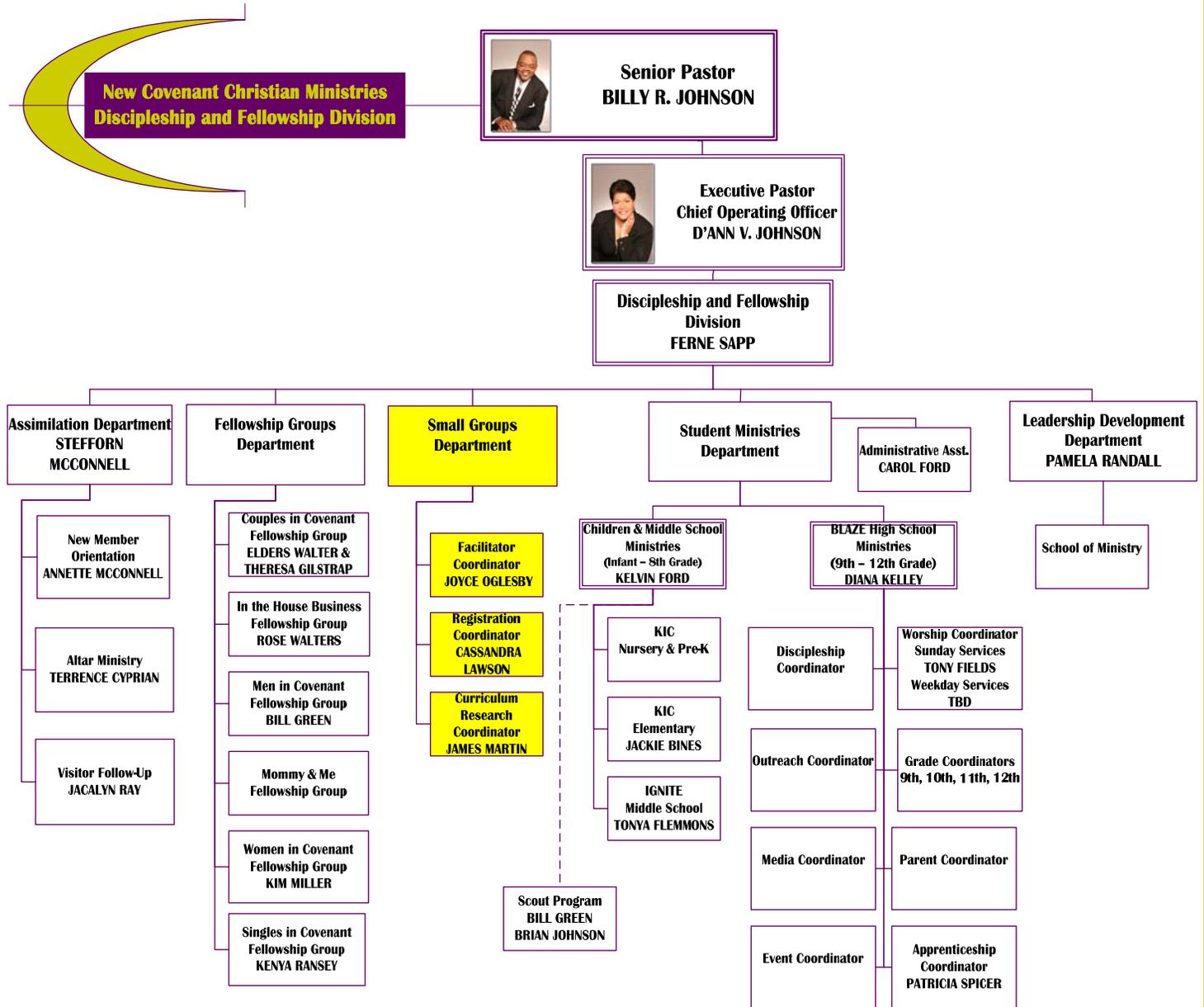
GROUP MEMBERS - everyone in the small group should be actively involved in serving the group in some way. Group members should be willing to learn, have a servant's heart and have a deep commitment to Jesus Christ.

Be sure to review the Small Group Member Fact Sheet at the start of the first small group session. Ensure new members added to the group receive a copy. Encourage members to read the sheet again in their private time

Recognizing and Training Rising Apprentice Leaders

1. Commit yourself to being a leader who produces other group leaders. As the church in the book of Acts grew, the apostles were not able to make frequent visits to the widows which led to many complaints and tension among the people. To resolve the problem, the apostles had to identify additional leaders to help meet the needs of the widows and added seven new leaders.
2. Recruit apprentices who are willing to serve as leaders in training. The apostles were recruited and trained by Jesus, Joshua was tutored by Moses, Timothy was mentored by Paul, and Barnabas disciple Paul. In II Timothy 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy: "The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."
3. Train your apprentice by modeling and feedback. Model what you want to see in your apprentice, a God-honoring, Christ-centered life. When modeling is working effectively, the student will mirror the mentor. Sometimes, the apprentice may exceed the mentor (i.e., Paul and Barnabas). Paul told Timothy, "Do not neglect your gift..." (I Timothy 4:14). Your gift will make room for you. He also encouraged Timothy and Titus to follow his lead and model the Christian life for those in their care (I Timothy 4:12).
Facilitators/coaches/mentors faith must be grounded in the Word of God, life must demonstrate solid character and evidence of the Holy Spirit abiding within and wisdom (Acts 6:1-7).
4. Encourage your apprentice to practice the disciplines of prayer, daily, solitude (creates space to hear God speak), and worship (giving God glory and honor).
5. Make sure your apprentice has access to training beyond what you can provide. Have apprentice attend all facilitator classes, huddles and quarterly meetings. Apprentices will become leaders because of the opportunity to have been mentored by you. Plan to embrace at least two in your group.
6. Use a gift inventory survey to help identify and affirm apprentices' spiritual gifts for leadership training roles. Get to know potential leaders personally, in small group settings.
7. Include your apprentice in every meeting to greet the members or in charge of prayer time or to lead a Bible study and between meetings to pray, make phone calls, etc. Apprentices must be constant learners.

Organizational Structure of the Discipleship & Fellowship Division



Guidelines for Hosting & Facilitating a Small Group

Facilitating a small group is an honor, and must be done with a commitment to excellence. With the proceeding in mind, consider the following guidelines for hosting a small group. It is important for facilitators to be sensitive to the following issues and able to create an environment that is conducive for a good meeting. People we can relate to we will win.

Pray.

Before your group meets spend plenty of time in prayer. Meditate, review and study your materials carefully.

Pray weekly for group members. Each week spend time in prayer for each member by name. You may choose to obtain prayer requests each week in the group or by telephone contact with group members.

Pray before each class. Here are some prayer points: Holy Spirit to breath on each session; God's wisdom and discernment for you as a facilitator; good attendance; increased participation; lively discussions; completed assignments each week; good bonding in group. If your group is focused on married couples or has a large number of married couples, pray that marriages are healed, restored, strengthened, and renewed.

Remember God is in charge. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding but in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your path (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Be prepared.

Preparation is a key to success. An excellent facilitator will be ready well in advance of the starting time to greet people as they arrive. Make sure that the meeting room is tidy and pleasant. Also, make sure that the bathroom is clean and supplied.

Review and prepare your assignments each week. This way you will glean something from the lessons and be familiar with the lesson when it is discussed in class.

Select the questions that will be discussed in advance of the session. The goal is to generate as much discussion as possible and for the group members to benefit from the discussion. Be sure to not hurry through the discussion as this will limit the group receiving maximum benefit from the topic. You should however move without pauses. Keep watch over your time and *follow the leading of the Holy Spirit*. Sometimes failure to cover the designated questions can lead group members to become frustrated because their question of interest was not discussed; to complain and not come to future classes; or to ignore the last questions on future lessons. Try to finish as much as you can.

Pay attention to the details.

The following may seem a bit trivial, but careful attention to them will display an extra concern for your group members.

Check the lighting. Be sure the room where the small group is held is well lit. Also, meet in a circle where everyone can see each other's faces to facilitate equal participation and sharing. If your_

group is using a TV/VCR, the host should have equipment that works well, has been set up in advance, and can clearly be seen by all group members.

Adjust the temperature. A room that is too cold can make it very difficult for people to get comfortable. They will be less likely to fellowship. A room that is too hot can cause people to fall asleep. Rooms warm up when warm bodies show up. One expert suggests 67 degrees as an ideal room temperature for groups. Offer to take people's coats when they come in.

Eliminate distractions. Put your pets (especially dogs and cats) in a separate room for the evening. Let the answering machine pick up your calls (turn off the ringer), and make sure the children are taken care of. Make sure that the room smells good. We can get so accustomed to the smells in our home that we don't notice them anymore: Pet odors, last night's dinner, heavy perfumes, even some room deodorants. Compensate for what might smell good to you, but is obnoxious to others: Set up a fan to pull air out of your meeting room, providing good ventilation. Also, playing soft music as people arrive is a nice touch but turn it off before you begin. Eliminate other potentially disruptive sounds.

Be sure you are well supplied. Check to be sure you have plenty of pencils, paper, Bibles, study guides, so forth. Always have an extra chair or two. Have cups available for drinks and plates if you will be serving food.

Greet everyone warmly.

People come to a small group with any number of things on their mind. Some come from work. Others rushed out of the house while trying to finish a quick meal. A warm greeting can help people shift into the small group setting. An encouraging word can set the tone for an enjoyable evening.

Introduce yourself to the group. You may decide to use this as an ice breaker (also refer to *250 Big Ideas for Purpose Driven Small Groups for other helpful icebreakers*) at the inception of your group. You may have to do this each time new members are added to your group.

Strike up a conversation. This is especially important for new people. Ask a few questions: "Where do you live?" "How did you hear about the small group?" "How is your week going?"

Hand out name tags at the beginning of each week for at least the first two sessions. Explain the need to get to know each other better and the purpose of small groups – connect and grow.

Enlist enjoyable discussion.

Your primary responsibility during the small group time is to facilitate an interesting and enjoyable discussion of the assigned questions in the lesson. Stay aware of your time, you may wish to assign a timekeeper to stay on track.

It is important to **begin** and **end** promptly. Do not wait for latecomers.

While an objective of using curriculum is to get the group to share their answers, an even greater objective is to facilitate the making of disciples, yielding to the Holy Spirit.

You must listen carefully to each answer. Respond at the end of each answer offered with a brief response. For example, "Thank you for that well thought out response" or some general response that is natural, genuine and appreciative. Be mindful of your responses. If you begin using such

responses as “Great answer”, or “That’s right” you must continue using those responses for all participants. If you do not respond consistently one may feel as though their answer is not good enough, which may stifle your group discussion. You should not do most of the talking or get into sharing your answers, personal experiences, etc.

Keeps the group discussion going. Some responses may be vague and require a follow up question to get more details and clarification. Once an answer has been shared, ask for another answer. Good questions include, “Does anyone have another perspective on this question?” “Can someone else bless us with their answer?” or “Who else is courageous enough to share their answer?”

Resist the temptation to resolve any perceived problems during your group time. Please follow-up with the Small Group Department Head or Discipleship & Fellowship Division Director to report any concerns or conflicts requiring attention. All concerns will be forwarded to both an elder or Pastoral Care and Counseling Division Director.

Graciously and immediately stop any discussion that is embarrassing or reveals too much information for a group setting. Through discernment you will know if what is being said is inappropriate for a group setting. Graciously and firmly advise group members to limit their discussion in an appropriate and protected way. *The Small Group Member Fact Sheet* should be reviewed at the start of the group and also shared with newcomers.

Do not be discouraged or alarmed if the group is presented with unexpected challenges. Remain prayerful and submitted to the Holy Spirit. He will provide you with wisdom to handle the challenge. Also, be sure to share any challenges with the department head or division leader, there is safety in a multitude of counselors.

If the group has few written answers, talk about the importance of doing the lesson in their time alone with the Lord. Tell them how to make time to do a little each day. Ask the group a couple of questions and see if you can generate a discussion from them. Don’t come down hard on the group as this may scare them away from participating in the group sessions.

If people are hesitant to share their answers after you have encouraged them, you may want to call on someone you know who won’t be embarrassed or someone who you can clearly see has a written answer. Don’t allow the same person to answer all of the questions. Be aware of a member that may be dominating the group, politely encourage others to become involved to avoid others from being hindered to share or from becoming shy in answering.

Some questions may solicit a personal opinion or response. There may not be a right or wrong answer. Be sure to not condemn the respondent with comments (i.e., “No, that’s not right.”) or expressions that indicate your disapproval of their answer. *If an answer or response involves the misinterpretation or misquoting of a biblical principle or scripture, then there should be clarification.* Open up the Bible and go directly to the Word to bring clarification.

Your discussion group should be relaxed, not tense; friendly, not hostile; not overly formal; informal but not lax; free, not inhibited; opposing views can be expressed without condemnation or correction (unless biblically erroneous); balanced participation; and members should do most of the talking while the facilitator listens.

Is anyone hungry? Food is a great catalyst for community building; however food should never become the focus of the gathering. Decide as a group if you would like to serve light snacks and how the group will contribute to preparation and supply. Remember, food is optional.

Keys to Successful Sharing

- ⇨ Set an example of appropriate openness
- ⇨ Stress sharing that is personally relevant; Avoid gossip
- ⇨ Be patient
- ⇨ A husband and wife facilitator team should allow each person to alternate on leading the group discussion. One spouse should not do all or most of the talking. This also holds true for groups with two facilitators if both facilitators will serve during each session.
- ⇨ Practice acceptance and affirmation
- ⇨ Avoid having people try to problem solve other people's problems (i.e., advice giving)
- ⇨ Keep confidentiality
- ⇨ Do not do all the talking
- ⇨ Be comfortable with silence
- ⇨ Be a good listener
- ⇨ Do not answer your own questions
- ⇨ Ask open-ended questions
- ⇨ Be sure everyone understands the purpose
- ⇨ Make sure all cell phones are turned off or put on vibrate before the meeting starts

Small Group Communication Model

Communication is very essential in all aspects of our lives and also in small groups. Without proper, effective communication with God and others, our relationships become void and nonproductive.

1. God to Group

- a. Reading of Scripture
- b. The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God to bring conviction and challenges
- c. Listen to the voice of God (time of silence and solitude) to understand His purpose for your group.

2. Group to God – our response to God

- a. Prayer – praying the Word
- b. Praise and worship
- c. A song or quiet devotion to God

3. Group member to group member - *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32) – *freedom in Christ.*

- a. Authentic communication (truthful, vulnerable) - a powerful vehicle that changes lives
- b. Words of encouragement
- c. Expressing ones feelings or hurts to one another

4. Group to world

- a. It is our responsibility to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the world
- b. We are challenged to reach the unchurched
- c. What will your group do to reach others and make disciples in your community and the world? Refer to Matt. 28:19, 20.
- d. NCCM Mission – “Transforming all people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.”

Final Check Points

Before the Group Meets

1. Connect with those who have signed up.
2. Be sure they have directions to the location.
3. Let them know how excited you are about them coming.
4. Send a card to new members welcoming them to the group.

After the Meeting

1. Show appreciation
2. Ask for recommendations, changes and/or additions
3. Remind of any assignments, snacks and/or special projects

Allow God to use your S-H-A-P-E in your Small Group

As a believer, God has gifted each of us through the Holy Spirit for a special work or ministry that should cause the body of Christ to be strengthened and to multiply.

S=Spiritual gifts – given by God for the equipping of the saints to preach the gospel, minister/serve to one another in love, and teach the Word of God and make disciples

H= Heart - passion

A=Abilities – jobs or skills

P=Personality – how we relate to others, structure our lives, make decisions

E=Experience – special qualifications

What S.H.A.P.E. are you?

Glossary

Small Group - a face-to-face meeting that is a sub-unit of the overall church fellowship

Small group facilitator - a lay minister that is subject to leadership, the pastors and his or her designee

Apprentice – trainee, inexperienced person

Facilitator – one who makes something easy or easier?

Solitude – defined by Kenneth Boa simply as “time deliberately spent away from interaction with other people to nurture depth, perspective, purpose and resolve.”

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