**Life Groups Leader Update**

**July 2018**

## Goal: Draw People In to the Community of Faith and Encounter Jesus Christ

### Life groups are the means by which people become connected to the Generations Community Church community of faith.

### Life groups are safe opportunities for people to be introduced to the body of believers, get connected to the church, and ultimately have an encounter with Jesus Christ. Therefore, our goal is to intentionally create an environment where people draw others in and create connections.

## Life Group Focus Areas

Generations Community Church life groups center on four key areas:

* **Study and Prayer:** The emphasis of these groups is on studying the Bible. It could be done through a regular Sunday School class, a sermon-notes study group, or other studies. It includes prayer groups, such as our Tuesday morning prayer gathering.
* **Activity:** Such groups connect through activity, such as outdoor excursions, prayer groups or being on a worship team, and may be larger than other life groups.
* **Fellowship:** The approach of fellowship groups is to have people connect around life, such as a dinner gathering, planned outings, or family days. These include our Joyful Saints and Jetsetter groups.
* **Service:** These groups are built around volunteerism in the community, such as feeding the homeless at Reset Church or The Salvation Army. *Note: While there are specific service groups, each life group also should be involved in some type of service element during the trimester. The intent is to look beyond the immediate needs of the group and encourage an outward-focused mindset.*

Different types of groups will entice nonbelievers and seekers who are attending our church to sign up for life groups, as well as opportunities to invite the unchurched to join a group of believers. Some groups that could be established include: men and women’s groups, couples’ groups, artists group, professionals group, college and young adult groups, fitness groups, moms groups, skills-based groups, and new believer groups, among others.

Groups ideally are made up of 8-12 people, but depending on the specific type of group can have more people. The type of group determines the reasonable number of people to build relationships with the others in the group. Groups can be mixed gender and mixed age. If we focus on the goal of telling the next generation, it is highly appropriate to ensure all groups are not siloed by age.

## How Do We Draw People In?

We draw people into our community of faith by creating opportunities for people to find their place. Further, we succeed at connecting newcomers to others when we offer opportunities to join a life group throughout the year. This is done by working together on a life group schedule.

Life groups operate best when they flow with the natural seasons of life. Therefore, groups will be offered on a trimester schedule and will last 10-12 weeks:

* October - December
* February – April
* June – August

No new groups will be started *during* the trimesters. However, it is the intent to have groups that are open a bit longer than the normal recruitment period to allow newcomers to plug in during the first month or so of the group. After that window, we can build excitement for the next promotional period. The key is to maintain structure once it is developed.

The “off” months will be a time to promote life group offerings, encourage people (especially newcomers) to sign up, and give life group participants a break – a sabbath – in the schedule. These month-long periods are:

* September
* January
* May

During this month, it is critical that no other church projects compete with life group sign up. The goal is to be intentional about pursuing long-term, life-changing opportunities instead of momentary distractions. If we want our community involved in life groups, then joining one should be the *only* decision in front of them during promotion month; we need to avoid putting drag on our own system.

## Timeline

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Aug** | **Sep** | **Oct** | **Nov** | **Dec** | **Jan** | **Feb** | **Mar** | **Apr** | **May** | **Jun** |
| Identify Groups & Curriculum | • |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Promote Groups |  | • |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Life Group Leader Training |  | • |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Start Fall Groups |  |  | • |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Identify Groups & Curriculum |  |  |  |  | • |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Promote Groups |  |  |  |  |  | • |  |  |  |  |  |
| Life Group Leader Training |  |  |  |  |  | • |  |  |  |  |  |
| Start Winter/Spring Groups |  |  |  |  |  |  | • |  |  |  |  |
| Identify Groups & Curriculum |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | • |  |  |
| Promote Groups |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | • |  |
| Life Group Leader Training |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | • |  |
| Start Summer Groups |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | • |

## The Leader’s Role

You are invited to embark on a spiritual adventure, to make a difference, to engage in what God created you to do: draw others into relationship and introduce them to Him. It is a tremendous privilege and an opportunity to be involved in something with eternal significance.

**Commit.** If you agree to lead a life group, you are committing 10-12 weeks to lead a group – a single trimester. If you want to renew your commitment for a subsequent trimester, you are welcomed to do so. But you are not obligated to spend the 10 years leading the same group.

**Covenant.** To lead a group that is officially sanctioned by Generations Community Church, leaders (even pastors) must complete an application and covenant on an annual basis. This provides an opportunity for a leader to review responsibilities and recommit to the expectations of leading a group (or opt out if a break is needed). Through the application, you will briefly discuss your call to leadership, share about your relationship with Jesus Christ, and identify three references. Further, leaders must agree to the following:

* Have a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ (preferably for 2+ years).
* Recognize the Bible as the authority for their life.
* Have small group experience (preferably).
* Be a member of Generations Community Church (or be in the process).
* Have the time, emotional capacity, and moral discernment to lead a group.

**Identify Your Group Substance.** Figure out which kind of group you will lead and details (day of the week and time you’ll meet, location, group limitations). Share your idea with the Connections Pastor. We can help with ideas if needed! Identify and purchase applicable curriculum so we can have it on hand for promotion month.

*For study groups, the group leader selects the topics to be studied with final approval from the pastors. Those groups that wish to study a particular book or curriculum are to provide it to the Connections Pastor prior to using the curriculum. The Connections Pastor will read through the materials to identify any areas that may differ from our theology. The leader will need to meet with the Connections Pastor to learn how to walk through that aspect of the curriculum prior to covering those areas in the group. If the leader feels uncomfortable sharing the theological differences, a member of the pastoral staff may be invited to the group to help cover the topic.*

**Equip Another.** Another criteria for leading a small group is the responsibility of developing others to become leaders. Therefore, you must identify and train a co-leader. The hope is that the co-leader ultimately steps up to lead a group of their own. Co-leaders also must complete a covenant application. The added benefit of a co-leader is that if the leader for any reason is unable to meet with the life group on a designated day, the co-leader can step up. When we continually provide an opportunity for others to help in leadership, our life group leadership pipeline can stay full.

**Outreach.** The group leader is responsible for checking in with participants who missed a life group gathering. As desired, you are encouraged set up a time to catch up on the study or just connect. If someone misses the group more than twice in a row, the you should inform the Connections Pastor, who will follow up with pastoral care.

**Train.** As part of your commitment to be an accountable leader, you must participate in three, two-hour training sessions per year during the promotion months. If you are unable to attend the group training, an individual training will be arranged.

## Resources to Help You

Our goal is to make life groups successful, which in turn help us achieve our goal of drawing others into the community of faith and helping them encounter Jesus Christ. To do this, resources we will provide include:

* List of pre-approved curriculum.
* A weekly email will be sent to leaders and co-leaders by the Connections Pastor with a brief devotional, announcements to share with the group, and other important details.
* The Connections Pastor will connect with leaders monthly to talk through how the groups are going, share positive outcomes, identify any potential leaders who are emerging, and identify any issues that may have surfaced.
* The Connections Pastor will work with others to identify childcare options for those life groups that need such a resource. However, the church is not ultimately responsible for securing childcare nor paying for childcare.
* The Connections Pastor is available to help leaders address life group challenges.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** Should I participate in a life group if I’m already involved in another church program?

**A:** Other church ministries should happen in the context of life groups. Therefore, life groups should include things such as a women’s fellowship group (women’s ministries), service groups (such as local or global missions), and Sunday study groups (that would traditionally be called Sunday School).

**Q:** Why not start new groups in September instead of waiting until October?

**A:** Starting our promotion month in September allows people to find out about fall offerings *after* returning from summer vacation in order to gear up in October.

**Q:** How can we have intimate groups if we’re constantly inviting new people in?

**A:** The intent of a life group is to develop new, basic friendships, not intimacy. Life groups are a place for new friendships to be formed that could, ultimately, lead to intimate relationships. However, pushing for intimacy can create awkward situations, so it’s best to operate on the premise of developing friendships through common interests. The Biblical example of this is Jesus Christ. He picked 12 disciples, and they lived life together. However, even Jesus had an inner circle of Peter, Andrew, James and John.

**Q:** We have a great small group. We want to leave it alone. Do we have to follow the plan?

**A:** It is strongly encouraged that you find a way to “shake up” your group from time to time. According to T. Scott Daniels in *Seven Deadly Spirits: The Message of Revelation’s Letters for Today’s Church*, “Discipleship practices grow stagnant in a church because certain people have always had a particular class or small group and find it too hard to move beyond their comfortable relationships.” Further, “Evidence confirms that if a small group of people is not growing, it’s often because no new elements have been introduced into the group recently. As soon as a new element is introduced, the group will begin to grow again.”