



God's Grace in Small Groups

A Guide for Leaders

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The Purpose of Small Groups

Small groups are places where spiritual friendships are built, and community is formed. Small groups are in our DNA as Methodists. The Methodist movement originated as a small group meeting at Trinity College at Oxford University in London. From there, Methodism spread through small groups called Class Meetings. When Methodism first came to America, all Methodists were required to participate in Class Meetings because of how important they are to our spiritual growth.

In today's world, no church requires members to participate in small groups, but they are still great opportunities for discipleship and faith formation. Our goal as a congregation is to have everyone who is a part of our church family participating in a small group of some kind. This model of small groups may be new to you, but it is based on the original model of a Class Meeting from early Methodism.

A successful small group is one where people are warmly welcomed, encouraged in their walk with Christ, united in their love for Christ, able to grow deeper in their faith, and inspired to share God's love with others.

Group Gathering Format



1. Fellowship

This is a time for informal conversation. Food or refreshments may be provided, or a potluck meal could be shared.



2. Share

This time marks the beginning of the structured gathering. Group members share briefly about how they are doing in their walk with Christ.



3. Discover

This part of the gathering follows a guided program in which group participants will discover more about each other and what or where God might be calling them.



4. Pray

This is the final part of the gathering. Prayer requests are collected, and a group leader or member prays to end the gathering.

Fellowship

Warmly inviting all who enter.



1. Provide food or perhaps conversation starters/icebreakers
2. Create communication channels
 - a. The church provides the Church Center app and instructions on how to join (see appendix).
 - b. Another option is to create a group text or Facebook Messenger group (avoid emails as they can become impersonal).
3. Warmly welcome folks, especially those who are new, to the group.

Share

Sharing the joys and difficulties of life.



The share portion is perhaps the most important part of the gathering. In the share portion, members of the group will get a glimpse into the lives, joys, and struggles of other group members. This is a sacred time when Christian community is formed as people grow closer to each other.

1. Begin by going around the room and ask how people are doing.

Early Methodists asked this question: "How is it with your soul?" This simple question allowed people to answer generally, yet it was framed about their spiritual health. Another great way of asking this question is, **"How is your walk with Christ?"**

Answers to this question will be simple at first, yet as the group progresses answers will become deeper.

2. Establish a simple covenant to help guide this time. This can be introduced on the second or third meeting to give time for people to get to know each other a little before diving in. The appendix includes example covenants. Consider sharing an example covenant with the group as they think about what they want to include in the group's covenant.

Crafting a covenant can be intimidating, so approach the covenant with a relaxed, yet serious, tone. It is important that the covenant be something that all the members of the group can stick to, as well as something meaningful that encourages members into deeper relationship with Christ.

If the group is new or has mostly people who are just getting to know each other, you are welcome to pick a single clause at first, such as, "We will pray for each other daily" and start there as your only commitment.

Discover

Discovering who God has called us to be.



The movement of the Discover portion is:

Story → Gifts → Service → Evangelism

1. Story

Have members of the group share their faith story.

Where did you grow up?

What was your family like growing up?

How did you come to know Christ?

How did you find our church?

Have you been a part of other denominations or religions?

Consider starting these as the leader to give an example. Schedule people to share their story in advance, so people can prepare. Understand that some people may not wish to share their story. This can be for a variety of reasons. Everything the group does should be a “challenge by choice.” Explain this upfront. It’s also a good idea to place time limits on the stories to remain respectful of everyone’s time.

2. Gifts

In this part, the group explores the spiritual gifts of the members of the group.

3. Service

The group will plan a service project to share God’s love with others.

4. Evangelism

What’s next for our group? Who can we invite to be a part of what we have experienced?

Pray

Praying for one another in love.



1. Take prayer requests
2. Have a member of the group pray for the requests and to end the time together.

Example Small Group Covenant 1

Our Covenant

Knowing that throughout history God has entered covenant relationships with his people, and because we are called by God to be and make disciples of Jesus, we form this group. Our covenant provides the framework for a balanced spiritual life, enabling us to be better disciples. With God as our guide, we promise to approach one another honestly in a spirit of Christian love, and to provide accountability and encouragement to grow in faith.

Acts of Compassion

- I will balance the time I devote to church, work, family, and friends.

Acts of Devotion

- I will include the members of my Community Group in my daily prayers.

Acts of Justice

- I will become more aware of social situations through attention to the news (newspapers, television, magazines, radio).

Acts of Worship

- I will faithfully join in corporate worship each week unless prevented.

Trusting in grace, I pledge to support each member as I leave the confines of comfort in my search to do God's will in the world. By affixing my signature to this document, the singular "I" becomes the communal "we".

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Example Small Group Covenant 2

Our Covenant

Knowing that throughout history God has entered covenant relationships with his people, and because we are called by God to be and make disciples of Jesus, we form this group. Our covenant provides the framework for a balanced spiritual life, enabling us to be better disciples. With God as our guide, we promise to approach one another honestly in a spirit of Christian love, and to provide accountability and encouragement to grow in faith.

Acts of Compassion

- I will balance the time I devote to church, work, family, and friends.
- I will practice listening to other people as a ministry of grace.
- I will express feelings of genuine appreciation to at least one person daily.

Acts of Devotion

- I will practice daily devotions, including the reading of scripture and prayer.
- I will include the members of my Community Group in my daily prayers.

Acts of Justice

- I will become more aware of social situations through attention to the news (newspapers, television, magazines, radio).
- When I am aware of injustices practiced in my community, my nation, and the world, I will speak out.
- I will get to know at least one person of a different ethnic background at my place of work.

Acts of Worship

- I will faithfully join in corporate worship each week unless prevented.
- I will offer my resources faithfully to support the work of God's kingdom, beginning with the local church with which I am affiliated, with the tithe as my guide.

Trusting in grace, I pledge to support each member as I leave the confines of comfort in my search to do God's will in the world. By affixing my signature to this document, the singular "I" becomes the communal "we".

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Find more examples of clauses at: www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/sample-covenant-clauses

Community Group Timeline

This is an example of a timeline for a cycle. As a group leader, you are free to craft your own timeline for your group.

Week 1	Extended Fellowship Time + Introductions
Week 2	Sharing Our Stories (Discovery Movement 1) & Introduction to Group Covenant
Week 3	Sharing Our Stories (Discovery Movement 1) & Group Covenant is Set
Week 4	Sharing Our Stories (Discovery Movement 1)
Week 5	Spiritual Gifts (Discovery Movement 2)
Week 6	Planning a Service Project (Discovery Movement 3)
Week 7	Evangelism (Discovery Movement 4)
Week 8	Capstone Event (ex: shared dinner or lunch)

Example Agenda: Week 1

Time	
25 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation (Collect Contact Information, if needed)
20 min.	Share Introductions
10 min.	Discovery Overview of the Group (Timeline & Purpose)
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 2

Time	
15 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation
15 min.	Share Introductions (if needed) & Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"How has the past week been?" or "How have you been since our last gathering?"</i>
25 min.	Discovery Two or Three People Share Their Faith Story
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 3

Time	
15 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation
15 min.	Share Everyone Answers the Question: " <i>What's one thing we can pray for you about?</i> " and a Group Covenant is Set
25 min.	Discovery Two or Three People Share Their Faith Story
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 4

Time	
15 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation
15 min.	Share Everyone Answers the Question: " <i>How is your walk with Christ?</i> "
25 min.	Discovery Two or Three People Share Their Faith Story
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 5

Time	
15 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation
15 min.	Share Everyone Answers the Question: " <i>How is your walk with Christ?</i> "
25 min.	Discovery Everyone Share Results of Their Spiritual Gifts Inventory
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 6

Time	
15 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation
25 min.	Share Everyone Answers the Question: " <i>How is your walk with Christ?</i> "
15 min.	Discovery Plan a Service Project
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 7

Time	
15 min.	Fellowship Food & Casual Conversation
25 min.	Share Everyone Answers the Question: " <i>How is your walk with Christ?</i> "
15 min.	Discovery Reflection on the Group: " <i>What's next for our group?</i> "
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Example Agenda: Week 8

Time	
5 min.	Fellowship Welcome & Prayer
50 min.	Share A Meal Is Shared
5 min.	Pray Closing Prayer

Further Reading

Leading Small Groups that Thrive by Ryan T. Hartwig, Courtney W. Davis, and Jason A. Sniff (Zondervan, 2020).

Disciples Making Disciples by Steven W. Manskar (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

Having Nothing, Possessing Everything by Michael Mather (Eerdmans, 2018).

The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance by Davis Lowes Watson (Discipleship Resources, 1985).

The Class Meeting by Kevin M. Watson (Seedbed, 2014).