

Small Groups

Leader Training Guide

*Leading people into a
passionate relationship
with Jesus Christ.*

Small Groups

Welcome

Dear Awesome, Amazing, Wonderful, Self-less Leader,

TrueNorth Church is so excited about the opportunity to do life together and serve alongside you in the days to come! We serve a loving God, and it's only because of His love that we're able to do this thing we call Small Groups. We're humbled and honored to stand shoulder to shoulder with you to *Lead People into a Passionate Relationship with Jesus!*

We couldn't be more sure about the fact...No One was meant to do the journey alone. And because of that, our role as Small Group leaders is absolutely critical for getting others connected.

Our goal is for everyone to become a fully devoted disciple of Jesus. This largely happens when they first see Him in us. From many tried and true tips from churches all over the states, this Leader's guide you are holding right now was written specifically to help you become the best relational leader possible. It's an overview of our ministry, helpful tips and the basic information you'll need to lead your group.

All that said, we are genuinely excited about having you on this team!! It really is a second family, a community of believers, striving after the same thing. And that's to make a true impact in the lives of others all over the CSRA.

Better Together,



Courtney Radtke
Groups Director

Small GrOups

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WHY SMALL GROUPS?

*Making your way in the world today takes everything
you've got. Taking a break from all your worries sure
would help a lot. Wouldn't it be nice to get away?
Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows
your name...and they're always glad you came.*

*You want to be where you can see,
the troubles are all the same..
you want to go where everybody knows your name.*

"Cheers" Theme song

Why Small Groups?

Small Groups are an integral asset in ***TrueNorth Church's mission to lead people into a passionate relationship with Jesus Christ***, and therefore, it is essential that we build a thriving Small Group Ministry. Strong Small Groups will feed all other ministries with passionate leaders and volunteers, seeking to serve our church community and our community outside the church.

The ultimate goal is to grow our Small Group Ministry into a thriving, healthy, and growing pathway that leads people through a series of Next Steps that will take them toward a defined future...Becoming a passionate follower of Jesus. The problem is that most people need to feel connected and have a sense of belonging before taking their Next Step.

A first time guest walks into a TrueNorth Church service on Sunday...*What are they thinking? What are they feeling? Do they have hidden prayer requests? What are their expectations?*

We may never know the answers to these questions, but what we do know is that there is a desire and expectation built into each one of us...the desire to belong. This God-given desire is what fuels our Groups Ministry, to provide an environment for community, life-altering relationships, fellowship, sharing and someone to catch you when life kicks you down. In other words, Small Groups are a place for people to belong. They are a "home" because they know others and are known themselves, displaying to them that they are supported and loved by others.

Acts 2:42-47 gives us a great look at the fellowship of the early church. It was an ever-growing gathering of believers. There were thousands of them, but they met with each other on smaller scales, usually in homes. New believers integrated and began to belong. *They became family.*

***Belonging isn't the ultimate goal of Small Groups,
but it is an important starting point that we must all remember.
We need to ensure our group is a friendly, warm place to belong.***

Why Small Groups?

*Jesus came and told his disciples,
“I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth.
Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name
of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you.
And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
Matthew 28:18, 19*

MAKE DISCIPLES

At TrueNorth Church, we want to see everyone:

1) Become passionately devoted to God.

To be people who strive for a rich and thriving relationship with God - one that never slows down but rather, surges forward. A relationship that is characterized by self-ownership and a desire for continual growth.

2) Become deeply committed to one another.

To be people who portray an authentic and genuine care, love and affection for each other. We exist to serve with our gifts and encourage one another to move forward in our faith. We challenge one another and hold each other accountable out of love.

3) Become relentlessly focused on the One.

To be people who look outside of ourselves and outside our own sphere of community in order to reach out in service and conversation with those who do not know Jesus. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in our neighborhoods and communities.

Small Groups exist for spiritual growth and a shift toward Discipleship.

AND

**Spiritual growth/discipleship happens best through
authentic relationships centered on Biblical truths.**



DISCIPLESHIP 101

“Those who aren’t following Jesus, aren’t His followers. It’s that simple. Followers follow, and those who don’t follow, aren’t followers. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus into a society where justice rules, where love shapes everything. To follow Jesus means to take up His dream and work for it.”

~ Scot McKnight

Discipleship 101

WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

The Free Dictionary defines a Disciple as one who embraces and assists in spreading the teachings of another.

Our teacher is Jesus and our desire is to drop what we are doing, give up the life we are leading, and follow Him. Discipleship is simple. It's not easy, it's not instant, but it is simple. It is literally all about knowing and following Jesus more every day, and doing so with others.

Chip Ingram says *"A Disciple is: the life of Christ reproduced in a believer by the power of the Holy Spirit as he or she obeys God's word in the context of authentic community."*

So being a Disciple and Following Jesus means:

- 1). We want to see Jesus' life, character, perspective, actions, compassion, etc. - reproduced in us.
- 2). We don't make this happen by our own power or effort, but by submitting to the Holy Spirit and allowing God to change us.
- 3). All we do, believe and think is founded in God's Word. God's Word informs every aspect of our lives and we follow what it says.
- 4). We don't try to become a disciple alone, but engage with others and allow others access to our lives in love, humility and mutual respect. We understand that "iron sharpens iron" and we are in the journey of Discipleship *together* for a reason.

***God grows people by His Spirit...He does the work.
We merely pursue Him together. If you cast this vision, you will have
an excited group who can enjoy
the journey of following their Great Teacher together!***

Discipleship 101

HOW CAN SMALL GROUPS FACILITATE DISCIPLESHIP?

You live life and gather together, loving God, giving glory to Jesus, surrendering to the Holy Spirit and listening to His voice...All with love for one another. You are building friendships, serving others and getting into scripture. Then, something happens...

Someone in your group brings up a “life moment.” A moment, good or bad, that has impacted them in some way.

- They are expecting their first child
- They are switching jobs
- They tell you they are depressed
- Their marriage is failing
- Someone passed away in their family
- They say they feel far from God
- They are getting married

These are moments of Discipleship. These are the moments Jesus leveraged to teach the Disciples about life in the Kingdom of God. These are the moments in life that have the potential to bring new understanding and growth.

We can watch a DVD on dealing with stress and learn Biblical principles, but it is not until you experience stress in your life that you have an opportunity to actually grow in practical Discipleship; not just increase your knowledge.

The Method of Discipleship

If Discipleship is following Jesus, then Discipleship in our Small Groups really is simple. It is all about learning from Jesus, leaning on Jesus, and living like Jesus.

When a “life moment” is brought to your group, there is a method of working through it together. We call it the *Method of Discipleship*, which follows below:

- Intentionally focus on Jesus
- Start with Love
- Seek Godly Discernment
- Identify Biblical Solutions
- Act
- Pray

Discipleship 101

Let's look at a "life moment" example below:

"My brother just found out he has cancer. He isn't a believer. What do I do?"

Love

Stop any study or DVD or whatever you're doing. Let that person share completely. Listen and reinforce your desire to support them through it all.

"We love you, you know that. Tell us how you're really taking this. Tell us about your brother. Just so you know, no matter what happens, we are here for you, and will walk with you through this."

Focus

Don't jump to providing answers. Instead focus your group towards Jesus.

"John 3:16 says God desires all to be saved, and in Acts 1 it says that He gives us the power through His spirit to deal with any situation - even this one!"

Discern

Pray and ask God what to do. Just be silent in prayer. Maybe God gives you a word, picture, verse, or thought.

"Lord, what would you like to say to us? To this person? What do we do? What is the right step?"

Identify

After praying, talk as a group about what God said. What is He saying? What is the next step?

"I think God would want you to pray constantly for your brother. This may be the crisis moment in his life that softens his heart towards God. And it sounds like God is saying to visit him often, love on him like crazy and preach boldly about the Gospel, but only when you sense the Spirit that it is right."

Act

In this example, it is not the time to teach or rebuke, but it seems right to encourage, practice patience and comfort. As a group, act in accordance with what God has said.

Pray

"We need you Lord. Holy Spirit comfort this person and their brother right now. Soften his heart to the Gospel, and speak to this person clearly when it's time to speak of You. Give them the words to say and the courage to follow through. We trust you with the results."



THE ROLE OF THE SMALL GROUP LEADER

“But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into His wonderful light.”

2nd Peter 2:9-10

The Role of the Small Group Leader

SMALL GROUP LEADER'S ROLE

Throughout the history of our church, many people just like you have stepped up to the plate to lead a Small Group. Over time, common characteristics that define successful Small Group leaders have become very clear. So here's some advice to you on how to succeed.

1) Own the vision and direction for your Small Group by asking yourself these questions:

- What kind of Small Group do you want to lead?
- What do you want your group to be centered around? What discussion/learning content will you use? What activities will you do?

2) Jump right into your role, and be willing to learn "in the game."

3) "Be there" for your group.

- Support your group when they experience a personal crisis.

"People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care."

4) Take ownership of your own development as a leader.

- Maintain your own spiritual life.
- Utilize tools and resources designed to fuel growth.
- Be willing to receive feedback and become more self-aware.

5) Build connection.

Through friendships, support, care, celebrating, encouragement, and fun... Live life together in Biblical community.

6) Focus on God.

Through love for one another, seeking Jesus, praying together, engaging with scripture...Grow to be more like Jesus and helping others do the same.

7) Reach out.

Through serving, being involved in your community, praying for those who don't know Christ, encouraging spiritually meaningful conversations, bring Jesus outside the walls of TrueNorth Church and your small group...Live missionally.

The Role of the Small Group Leader

AM I A SUCCESSFUL LEADER?

You are a Disciple of Jesus, who has a thriving, growing relationship with Christ; and genuinely wants to help others know Him. It means you follow Jesus, learn from Him, seek His voice and intentionally make decisions based on what He says.

You can't Disciple others if you're not a Disciple. But thankfully, as Disciples all we need to do is model a life of discipleship. Live a life that is obviously attached to Jesus and it will serve as an encouragement and goal for others to follow.

You are a shepherd. You are to watch over your small group, feed them, protect them, lead them and lovingly correct them.

- **Feed them.**

Jesus commanded Peter to "Feed my sheep." The people in your group and under our care need spiritual assistance. Some need milk...Some need solid food. It is largely dependent on their spiritual journey. We must be discerning of what will nourish our group and lead them there. Practically this means leading them toward truth, toward Jesus, and use the scriptures as our source.

- **Protect them.**

There are false teachers. In Matthew 7:15, Jesus warns us about this. We must protect our group from anything that wants to pull them away from God. This means we must be bold in speaking out against false teaching if need be. This can be a scary task, but through much prayer, discernment and love for your people, Jesus will prompt you at the right time and give you the right words to *lovingly* guide them correctly.

- **Lead them.**

Sheep follow...It's just what they do. Shepherds lead. Our task is interesting because we are both sheep (followers of Jesus Christ) and the shepherd (leading those who follow us). Simply put, if we are following our Shepherd, Jesus, we will be leading our people well. Those in your group will follow what you model, the life they see you live.

The Role of the Small Group Leader

- **Discipline.**

Shepherds search out the lost sheep. They search for the sheep that erred in their judgment, got themselves lost and out of bounds, and brings them back (James 5:19-20, Luke 15:3-7). The Bible says we ought to be disciplining because in our love and concern for our people, we desire they know and follow Jesus. We don't want to just stand passively as someone walks away and believe that is love.

CARING FOR YOURSELF AS A LEADER

The last thing you want, your group wants, or that God wants, is you feeling burned out and exhausted. This can happen if we do not follow some principles of care in our lives. These may already be well established in your life, or maybe they will be a surprise to you.

Keys to taking care of yourself as a leader:

- **You need a strong relationship with Jesus.** John 14-17 relates to us that life, real life, comes through connection with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. If we lack this, we can lose our passion and ability to lead others. We need the Holy Spirit to empower us for this role.
- **You need to be fed.** We need spiritual sustenance too. You need connection with someone else who can speak into your life and leadership and who can challenge and encourage you.
- **You need rest.** Taking a break is ok, in fact, it is healthy. Delegate leadership to someone else for a season, remove yourself for a few weeks for personal solitude, or discuss appointing someone in your group to lead if you feel you need a longer break.
- **You need support, and don't be afraid to ask for it.** Sometimes you need help. Maybe its a practical leadership issue or maybe it's a spiritual question or concern. Get in touch with the Group Director or a Pastor at TrueNorth Church, or a trusted spiritual advisor. Don't view it as weakness but as wisdom to reach out for support.

The Role of the Small Group Leader

- **You need to delegate.** You can't do it all. In fact, based on everyone's different personalities and skill set, you probably shouldn't even try to do it all! Identify areas where you need help, and ask your group to step up and take some responsibility.
- **You need to be open and honest with your group.** Don't hide stuff. Being honest, truthful and vulnerable doesn't negatively impact your leadership. Authenticity about your worries, concerns and perceived weaknesses will help open your group up, and your group will respect and honor you for it.
- **You need to monitor yourself.** Spend time asking God about how you are doing. Examine your life truthfully, and often. It may be that you save yourself future trouble by doing this.



THE LIFE CYCLE OF A SMALL GROUP

*Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:
If one falls down, his friend can help him up.*

Ecclesiastes 4:9

The Life Cycle of a Small Group

HOW LONG ARE WE A SMALL GROUP FOR?

Small Groups are not designed to last forever. Not that they couldn't last forever, but realistically, most end at some point. The plain fact is that there just isn't a mandated or expected life cycle to a Small Group.

Some groups may come together for a short term (3-6 months, a year) to tackle a project or a certain study, while others have no determined "end" date. For these groups, it is likely they will continue on for 2-5 years depending on the connection that is built and the spiritual growth that is experienced. However, we have had groups that have met for 10+ years!

We don't force a life cycle or groups to multiply. Rather, we want the group to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading, and prayerfully discern for themselves what the best decision is for the Discipleship of the group and the growth of God's Kingdom.

Obviously, if Jesus has commanded us to make disciples, then...

If we made Disciples who then made Disciples who then made Disciples...It would be a wonderful chaotic mess of people growing towards Christ and taking on leadership themselves to help others grow!

The point is really to talk frankly with your group about this. After a year, or a certain amount of time has passed, engage your group in an honest discussion.

- *Are we growing?*
- *Are we connecting well?*
- *What is our next step as a group?*
- *Should we multiply?*
- *Is it time for a change?*
- *What is God saying to us?*
- *What do we hear from the Holy Spirit?*

The Life Cycle of a Small Group

WHEN A GROUP ENDS

Our goal is that leaders would stay connected in their group member's lives for as long as possible. But we understand that life happens. There is a chance you might change jobs, have to move, or feel that your time as a group leader is coming to an end. Here is what we ask of leaders who find themselves in any situation like this.

Remember this is your “family”

Your Small Group will be here after you leave, but it's up to you how healthy it will be. As you prepare to step down as a leader, we ask you do these four things:

1). Let the Small Group staff know.

Talk to the Groups Director when you first feel there is a possibility you might need to step away.

2). Recruit who you trust.

You became their leader. You were there for them. Cried with them. Laughed with them. You are the most capable person of knowing who their next leader should be. Your goal is to recruit, train and develop the person who will continue leading the group after you.

3). Do it when the timing is right...If possible.

No group member will feel good about losing a group leader, but there are times that can be better than others. The Groups Director can help you create the best plan to reduce the confusion/hurt some of your members might feel.

4). Don't forget the friendships you've made.

Just because you might not be leading their Small Group, doesn't mean you have to, or should, stop being friends. Please continue to be in the lives of your group members who you know still need you.



THE PRACTICAL STUFF

Having companions on your journey is a must.

Involving others in our lives brings us:

support,

encouragement,

understanding,

belonging,

challenge,

and different perspectives.

The Practical Stuff

DEFINING YOUR PURPOSE AS A GROUP

Every group will have the same core, which is always important to review with the group. But, do you have a focus that extends your groups purpose or direction? Ensure you define who you are as a group - clarity is everything! You want your group members to drive home every week knowing why they are part of the group, and knowing there is purpose and direction.

Example: We meet every week to get into God's word, share our lives, pray together, reach out to others in service and mission, and have fun! In doing this, we will be walking with Jesus as His disciples, and becoming more like Him every day.

ENVIRONMENT

For a successful and comfortable group meeting, it is important to have a good meeting space. Clean, ample seating, limited distractions, etc. If there are 8 parrots in the living room, and 2 rooms are rented to others who are constantly walking in and out, cell phones continue to ring and it smells...Well...No one will be comfortable, conversation and prayer may be difficult, and it will be a negative experience.

SETTING GROUND RULES

It may seem obvious and unimportant to bring up...But every group will benefit from an overview of basic ground rules. These are just a few of the ground rules that may apply to your group. Making sure these are known and visited often is a good thing. People forget, so we need to remind them. It's all about respecting each other.

As a group, we will:

- *Respect each other's views and opinions.*
- *Value confidentiality extremely highly. What is shared, stays in the group.*
- *Always have our kids babysat so it is not a disturbance to the group.*
- *Attend faithfully and consistently.*
- *Call before hand if we can't make it to group, or even if we will be late.*
- *Start and end on time, respecting everyone's time.*

The Practical Stuff

GROUP STUDY PREPARATION

To effectively lead your Small Group Bible study, it is important that you be prepared to lead. If you are using a study guide, be sure to familiarize yourself with the study in advance to allow yourself time to know where the study is headed and what questions you want to ask and/or omit. What do you want the group to learn from the study? What do you want to make sure they “get”? If you know where you are going in advance, you have a much better chance of getting there!

- Read over your curriculum guide or Bible study notes.
- Make sure to email the guide to members if needed beforehand.
- Look up key scriptures and then cross-reference.
- Look up key words.
- Look over the sermon study guide questions if your group is discussing them (think of personal illustrations, stories, etc. to share).
- Re-listen to the sermon online if needed.
- Spend time in prayer.

FIRST FEW MEETINGS

The first few times you and your group meet, there may be excitement, anxiety and feelings of uncertainty. The best ways to stifle these feelings would be starting the group off relationally with no formal agenda or curriculum to study. Maybe eat dinner together, either at the home site or out, and make sure you are listening more than speaking...This builds trust. Enjoy getting to know your group, and enjoy getting to be known. Everything should always be led relationally. People want to belong and want to be known, but many times this feels scary. Putting them first before anything else is a way for them to develop trust with you as their leader and friend.

The Practical Stuff

ICE BREAKERS

Start each week with 15 to 20 minutes of connecting and refreshments before moving into your Bible study content. This will allow the group to connect/reconnect relationally each week before diving into the more structured elements of your time together. We want the group to be an enjoyable and encouraging experience. Make sure you're helping create an atmosphere where laughter is part of the meeting each week.

Ice breakers can be as simple as sharing answers to questions like:

- My most positive memorable vacation...
- My most embarrassing moment was...
- My favorite hobby and why...
- The craziest thing I ever did as a kid/adult...
- Describe your dream vacation...
- My most favorite movie ever...
- What is your favorite cereal and why?

Ice breakers can also be a quick activity you do together:

- **Speed Networking.**

Using a random team generator, pair your group into groups of two. Then give each pair icebreaker questions and 2 minutes to make their way through as many questions as possible. After the time is up, switch pairs. This is a great tool to get to know each other.

- **The M&M's game.**

Grab a bag of M&M's and make some fun personal questions. Have everyone grab 3-4 different colored M&M's from the pack. Each color will have a question associated with it, like: Blue-share something you like to do for fun; Green-share your favorite food; Yellow-tell us something you are good at; Red-tell 3 adjectives that best describe you; Brown-if you could have lunch with anyone, who would it be? Once you answer your question, you can eat that M&M.

- **What happened in the last 7 days?**

Have each person share about 1 good thing and 1 challenging thing that has happened to them in the last week.

The Practical Stuff

GUIDING A GROUP DISCUSSION

- **Setting others at ease** should be a main focus during the discussion part of your meeting. Many people have never attended an at-home Bible study and can feel intimidated and out of place. *Studies show that the first 7 seconds a person spends in a room can make or break the remainder of their experience in that room.*
- **Communicate to the group** that you will NEVER force anyone to pray, say, read or do, anything they don't feel comfortable doing. This is an extremely important point. You want the atmosphere to radiate love, acceptance and safety to each of your guests. Let people know up front, that although participation is very encouraged, you want them to share at their own pace and level of desire. Also, encourage people that there are no "stupid" questions/answers and that no one will be ridiculed for what they share.
- You also want to **communicate that the Bible is the source of absolute truth**, and the final authority in the small group discussion. Small Groups is not about the airing of personal opinions about life: "I think this" or "Well, I have always believed such and such." God and His word are the teachers.
- **Creating an atmosphere that is relaxed and informal** is easy with "conversation" about God's word as a group of friends. What you don't want is for the study time to feel like a "classroom" where people feel like they are taking a test! The key is to get the discussion to "flow" conversationally between everyone, not just you! By studying the group guide beforehand you will be much more apt to ask them conversationally instead of like a teacher/student.
- **Ask thought provoking questions** to introduce the topic. For example: "Do any of you guys, besides me, sometimes struggle with praying? I know I do! I am very interested about our Bible study and discussion tonight about what Jesus taught about how to talk to God."
- **Begin the discussion with a guided prayer** to prepare the group for the topic. You could pray something like this: "Lord, we are so excited tonight to learn from you about how to overcome worry in our lives. Help us learn from you. Help us to trust you. Help us to share our experiences together."

The Practical Stuff

GUIDING A GROUP DISCUSSION (- CONT-)

- **Answer your own questions when you first ask them, AND, avoid answering the questions when you first ask them!** It sounds like a contradiction, but sometimes the group will need you to step out and go first, and other times you need to wait for the group to respond first! And don't be afraid of silence. If the group knows that you are always going to answer the questions for them, they will tend to hold back or become overly dependent on you as their source for growth.
- **“Prime the Pump” for group discussion.** Again, a goal is group participation and sharing. By getting the whole group involved in the discussion, you will add so much depth and richness to the Bible study time. In order to do this, we need to “prime the pump” for group discussion and involvement. One way to do this is encouraging multiple answers to open-ended questions. Say things like, “Great answer! What do the rest of you think?” or “That’s good stuff, did anyone see anything else in this passage?” or, “Bill, I know you can really speak to this topic, would you mind sharing your experience?”
- **Celebrate and validate participation!** This is SO important and valuable! Affirm people when they add to the conversation! Encourage people when they share, especially those who are usually shy and hesitant. Say things like; “Good answer!” or “I didn’t even think about that! See guys, that is why we have small group Bible study! I would have never seen that on my own!” or “That is a great point!” Affirm people’s input in front of the group. Send an encouraging email or note to a person who really added to the group discussion, or to someone who normally doesn’t share, but did. This builds confidence and makes people feel their input is meaningful.
- **Limit the number of questions.** You have a limited amount of time to help the group to grasp, discuss, and apply a topic of scripture into their lives. Too many questions overwhelm the group. Go through the questions and find 3-4 that really speak to the topic and to the group needs. A good rule of thumb when studying the Bible is...what does it say? What does it mean? How does it apply to our lives? Questions are there to be a guide and to generate conversation. Once this happens, let the conversation flow, guiding it along as you go.

The Practical Stuff

GUIDING A GROUP DISCUSSION (- CONT-)

- **Study relevant topics.** One of the best ways to encourage group participation and involvement is to study topics that are relevant to where the people are in their lives. If the material is boring and irrelevant, find something else.
- **Shoot “rabbits,” don’t chase them.** Try to keep the discussion on track unless the Holy Spirit is directing you otherwise. When the group discussion gets off on a meaningless tangent, it can be frustrating to the group, and to you as a leader.
- **Maintain a consistent schedule.** Begin on time, Stay on God’s course, and End on time. Failure to do any of these can hurt your group.
- **Share leading the Bible study discussion time.** As your Small Group grows, identify people in the group who have the potential and gifts to lead the study discussion time. This has many benefits! As most anyone knows, we learn so much more ourselves when we are preparing to teach others. Also, this is a great way to identify and develop future Small Group leaders. It also communicates to the group that we all can share God’s word, and not just trained Small Group leaders.
- **Pray!** Only God can change people’s lives. Only God can create an environment where the Holy Spirit can move. Only God can open people’s hearts to His word. Only God can inspire people to grow. We are totally reliant on God! So Pray!
- **Enjoy it!** Leading a Small Group will be one of the most rewarding ministry opportunities of your life. It also has its own set of challenges. Focus on the good part. Relax. God is in control. You are just along for the ride. God is the one ultimately responsible for the growth of His people. You won’t have all the answers, and that’s ok. The Holy Spirit and the word of God are the teachers. Just do your best and enjoy the journey --growing closer to God together.

Many of these points will come naturally to you. The ones that don’t, you will develop in time. It is kind of like riding a bike. It may seem awkward at first, but after a while you will become so comfortable and enjoy it so much, that it will be like riding a bike with no hands! Most importantly, rely on God and be yourself! God is the one who has called you, and the one who is with you!

The Practical Stuff

GROWTH

Normally when talking about growth in Small Groups, we're talking about spiritual growth, but there's also a few other areas of growth we don't want to miss.

4 Types of Growth in Small Groups

- Spiritual
- Relational
- Leadership
- Numerical

Spiritual Growth: Group

For the group to grow spiritually together:

- Leading your group through intentional and practical discipleship studies.
- Pray together as a group.

Spiritual Growth: Individually

Encouraging consistent and regular spiritual growth for each person in your group on an individual basis. To help individuals grow spiritually in your group you can encourage:

- Daily Scriptural/Devotional Readings. There are great online resources for this (ex. Youversion.com, biblegateway.com).
- Encourage prayer on a regular basis. A good website to help a person learn to pray is Prayingscriptures.com.
- Challenge each person to memorize their favorite scripture and others as they like.

Relational Growth

- Providing opportunities for rich fellowship weekly at Small Group.
- Planning regular social events for your group.
- Modeling good communication skills (especially listening).

Leadership Growth

- Encouraging attendance to future Small Group leadership trainings.
- Delegate weekly responsibilities to the group.
- Recommend good books on leadership to your group. Ask others to share books they're reading and finding helpful also.

The Practical Stuff

Numerical Growth

- Encourage your group to invite friends to the group if there's room.
- Pray weekly for those each member is believing to come to Jesus.
- Model care and concern for members and guests.

LEADER/MEMBER ACCOUNTABILITY

We talked about Discipleship. When someone discerns what God has to say about their current situation or how they need to act, accountability can be an effective tool to help them overcome fear, apathy, lethargy or temptation. But there are a few things that should be in place before accountability really becomes an effective tool:

Established relationships

This doesn't mean that you have to be close, intimate friends. It just means that there has to be a level of mutual trust and respect before accountability will be taken seriously and actually mean something. So if you are a new group, accountability isn't something you want to be pushing too hard week one! Give relationships, trust and respect, time to grow.

Commitment

Accountability only works when it is well followed up with and when it isn't forgotten. If you say you will keep someone accountable, you have to follow through, or accountability will become a powerless and ignored concept in your group.

Courage

Keeping someone accountable, or asking for accountability takes courage. It isn't easy opening up your life to the input of others, nor giving input into others lives. It takes courage to meet with someone and ask tough, direct questions.

Going the extra mile

Just asking someone "how it's going" at Small Group is not enough. Accountability depends on some extra phone calls, texts, emails, messages and coffees!

The Practical Stuff

CHILDCARE

As a church we want to do everything we can to get you completely connected in community. We recognize that one limitation for parents participating in Small Groups can be childcare. To help with this challenge, TrueNorth has created a system to supplement group participants for childcare costs for weekly Small Group meetings, leadership Huddles and training events.

Childcare supplements are processed in the following ways:

- 1) We will supplement each Small Group leader at a set rate (see guide below) for the cost of the sitter, up to 2 hours per meeting.
- 2) Childcare forms may be filled out at the end of each month, and must be submitted within 30 days.
- 3) Completed forms may be submitted via...
 - Mail: 1297 W. Martintown Rd, N. Augusta, SC 29841, Attn: Dianne Hammond
 - Email: dianneh@truenorthchurch.com
 - Sunday: place in a “give box” in atrium
- 4) Checks will be issued to the leader and mailed within 2 weeks.
- 5) Checks will NOT be directly issued to babysitters. The Small Group LEADER must submit all supplement requests.

Supplement Guide

| <u>Number of Children</u> | <u>Event Time (1 hr)</u> | <u>Event Time (2 hrs)</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | \$10.50 | \$21.00 |
| 2 | \$11.00 | \$22.00 |
| 3 | \$11.50 | \$23.00 |
| 4 | \$12.00 | \$24.00 |
| 5+ | \$12.50 | \$25.00 |

The Practical Stuff

PRAYER

You may wonder why “prayer” is in a list of “practical stuff”! The reason is that many have different traditions, methods or thoughts about prayer. So as a group, you need to talk about it so everyone is clear on how we will pray with and for each other. Having a discussion about prayer also helps those who are nervous or uncomfortable praying out loud to understand how prayer will be handled.

Obviously, you do not want to over-structure prayer so much that you can’t adapt when the Holy Spirit moves. The point is that it is ok to overview when and how you will pray at each meeting. And like stated before, NEVER call on anyone to pray out loud if you haven’t asked for permission earlier.

- Take time to pray weekly in your group.
- Be very conscious of time during this step. Don’t rush things through.
- Take time to pray for unsaved family members, friends, neighbors, etc...
- Pray for needs such as: marriages, parenting, jobs, sickness, finances, etc....
- Give opportunity for someone needing extended prayer to see you afterward.
- Prayer is crucial for every leader. In addition to your daily quiet time, set a time regularly to pray specifically for each group member.
- Prayer gives needed insight. Suddenly we can have a new understanding of our members’ needs, strengths, struggles and potentials.
- Share positive praise reports of answered prayer or something special Jesus is doing in your life.
- Praise reports and testimonies of answered prayer are encouraging and faith building to the group.

The Practical Stuff

THE “OPEN DOOR” POLICY

Not every group is for every person and as leaders, we need to be okay when someone decides to join another group (trust me, it will happen). Because of this though, don't be afraid to ask for commitment! Whether it is for an eight week study, a season or for the entire year...ask your group members to commit to the group and to each other for that time period. If you have a group who is only half-committed, then attendance will be spotty and it will damage every area of group life. Your group members need to show up! Of course there will be moments when people can't, but your group needs commitment to be successful.

At the end of the commitment period, make sure you bring up the open door policy with your group...It is ok if this is not working for someone! If someone feels they would grow better somewhere else, or that it just isn't working out for any reason... Let them know it is ok to leave the group! Bring this up with each person (or couple) individually, and ask them to respond individually.

The last thing you want in your group are sporadic attendees who show up out of guilt! They don't want to be involved...but they don't know how to leave without feeling judged or feeling like a bad person! Relieve your group members of this burden with a simple pro-active conversation.

ALCOHOL/DRUGS POLICY

It is the policy of TrueNorth Church that alcohol and recreational drug use is prohibited at ALL Small Group gatherings and events.



SHARING, OUTREACH & FUN

*“Have fun, even if it’s not the same kind
of fun everyone else is having.”*

~C. S. Lewis

Sharing, Outreach & Fun

DELEGATE

To help take better care of you as a leader and to give group ownership to your members, it's a great idea to delegate some weekly and ongoing needs to your group. Delegation will help your weekly attendance and even develop leaders within your group. You can assign these weekly for the next meeting, or for a longer period of time. When someone knows they are being relied upon in a specific area, it helps them attend regularly and faithfully, and it makes them feel valued and needed.

Some things you can delegate are:

- Paper products
- Drinks/Coffee
- Dessert
- Food
- Opening prayer/Blessing of food
- Ice Breaker game/fun-off topic questions
- Bible study discussion
- Ending Prayer
- Emailing/texting prayer requests out to the group weekly
- Someone as the "outreach" person when someone is sick, surgery, death, etc.
- Record weekly attendance via automated email

CARE

What does shepherding care look like? These 6 checkpoints will help every leader with at least the minimum checkpoints of care.

- **Calls:**

Calling those in your Small Group on a regular basis, maybe to just say hello, to check on them, pray for them, etc...Maybe not every week, but definitely as the Lord puts a member on your heart.

- **Cards:**

Knowing those important dates in member's lives and sending a card to them. Also, an encouraging note here and there or a note card with a simple prayer is fun to receive. Always personalize and write them yourself.

Sharing, Outreach & Fun

- **Emails/Text:**

Emails are good for communicating information/dates/etc. A good rule of thumb is to think about if what you're needing to communicate needs a personal, verbal touch on it, or not. Also, ask yourself if the message could be misinterpreted before hitting the send button. If so, always call. Text messages are mainly for quick, short things. Be sure your members are ok with texting though, due to some expenses.

- **Time:**

Being available for those in your Small Group. Having 1 on 1 meetings as needed (coffee, lunch, etc.)

- **Intentionality:**

Asking yourself regularly, "Who do I need to get to know better in my group?" Then make a plan accordingly.

- **Prayer:**

Knowing each of your group member's needs/requests and praying regularly for them.

MISSIONS

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19 and in Acts 1:8 are both very clear as to what should be at the heart of our lives individually and as a Small Group. We are called to go and make Disciples of all nations, as well as be witnesses to those around us and across the world.

Each Small Group should try to plan a few local outreach projects. The list below provides some ideas you could try:

- Look around the community and seek out needs
- Take part in adopting a Compassion International child together
- Building Operation Christmas Child shoe boxes together in October
- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Soup Kitchens
- Make Homeless kits together (ziploc bags with food, scripture, chap stick, sunscreen, gloves, water, rain jacket, cinch sack, etc.)

Sharing, Outreach & Fun

- Volunteer at Gentry in the homework center
- Volunteer as a group to serve food at Discover TrueNorth
- Adopt one of TNC's missionaries and send cards, care packages, etc.

TURN UP THE FUN

Small Group life is meant to be fun! There always needs to be an element of fun when your group meets. Laughter is very important and the Bible says it's actually like medicine to laugh. And interesting enough, growth can happen during "fun" times. People are more apt to let their hair down and you see a different side of them that isn't "presented" in the normal weekly Bible study.

Ideas to have fun:

- Always allow for time to fellowship (at least 15 minutes) before the study
- Let one group meeting a month be for just food and fellowship
- Go to a movie (the Big Mo), dinner, or a Green Jackets game as a group
- Play Putt-Putt together
- Experience an Escape Room together
- Have a picnic down on the Savannah river
- Play outdoor yard games (corn hole, horseshoes, etc.)
- Meet in a different location for a group night (Chickfila, Starbucks, new amphitheater in NA, etc.)
- Attend an AR Workshop together
- Hit the courts...play tennis or basketball together
- Take a stab at frisbee golf in North Augusta
- Plan a trip to pick apples in the fall in North Carolina
- Take a trip out to Sarah's peach stand for yummy ice cream
- Visit a local museum
- Go bowling
- Plan a BBQ
- Everyone go on a camping trip to the lake
- Have a "games" night
- Have a guys/girls night...guys play beach volleyball, girls get dessert



ONGOING SUPPORT

“A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you, will remember you when forget-me-nots have withered.

Carve your name on hearts, not on marble.”

~Charles Spurgeon

Ongoing Support

PRAYER

The staff at TrueNorth, are all praying over you and your group! Prayers for success, which we define by real, hungry relationships after Jesus. Being a leader is like being a shepherd. You are attending your “flock” and keeping them nourished (with His word), loving on them, helping them make safe decisions, and ultimately, staying on task with tunnel vision for the goal...A deeper relationship with Him. Being a shepherd, although rewarding, isn’t always easy and can be demanding.

If at any time you are overwhelmed or feeling uncertain, please don’t hesitate to call the church to speak to the Groups Director, or any of the Pastors. We want to help you with all we can, especially helping make your load lighter.

HUDDLE

We gather every other month as Group Leaders at a dinner meeting in order to talk about Small Groups, share ideas, and pray for one another. Our Huddle meetings usually run for about 1.5 hours and include dinner, announcements, troubleshooting, a little training, and childcare if needed. It isn’t required, but obviously it is worth your time!

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Our Groups Director at TrueNorth will send out monthly newsletters to each of our Small Group leaders. It will include calendar dates, ChurchTeams information (if needed), a leader(s) spotlight to help create community within our ministry, as well as any articles that may be of interest or help you as a leader. Please take the time to read through this. We are more effective if we are all on the same page. And if you have something you’d like to be shown in the newsletter, please email the Groups Director by the 3rd week of the month.

PRIVATE FACEBOOK GROUP

We have established a private Facebook group for our Small Group leaders. We post announcements, needs within the church, and tips on leading your group. If you aren’t a member of the group yet, please friend the Groups Director on Facebook so you can be added.



RESOURCES

For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you.

2 Corinthians 9:10

Resources

TRUENORTH CHURCH SERMON GUIDE

Each week before the sermon on Sunday, we upload a guide to **www.truenorthchurch.com/Smallgroups** to go along with the message. As a leader, we encourage you to download it and email it out to your group members, or just prepare yourself for the group discussion the following week. There will be a few times a year when we do a sermon series that is asked for everyone to follow along.

RIGHTNOW MEDIA

TrueNorth Church purchases a membership to RightNow Media (the Netflix of Bible Studies) so you and your group members can each have a free subscription. You can find it by going through our website, www.truenorthchurch.com and then Resources, then RightNow Media. Sign up and create an account and then you can download the app to your phone or smart tv, or roku device. You then can decide collectively as a group what study you might like to participate in. Most all studies have a video that accompanies them, and some have a discussion guide as well.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

There may be times when our sermon guide nor RightNow Media give you the study you are looking for. If that happens, we do have a library of studies for you to choose from. If we don't have the study you desire, we will purchase a leader copy and 1 member copy of the study for your group. Of course, your members will have the option to purchase a book themselves.



MULTIPLYING

*God of Mercy, sweet love of mine,
I have surrendered to your design.
May this offering stretch across the skies,
and these hallelujahs be multiplied.*

Multiplied, NeedToBreathe

Multiplying

IDENTIFYING LEADERS WITHIN YOUR GROUP

In your group, begin to empower others with group roles (see delegating responsibilities) and encourage them to take a next step with leadership. Those who are maturing in their walk with Jesus, are regular attenders, and very involved in the group, could potentially help you co-lead or begin a group on their own.

How do I spot a rising leader?

- 1) Look for members who take the group seriously.
- 2) Consider those people who challenge your leadership. These may be potential leaders who are frustrated because they have no opportunity to lead.
- 3) Look for gifted people who you can recognize and affirm.
- 5) Look for people who embrace the small group vision.
- 6) Observe people in your ministry as they perform tasks or work well with people. Give them additional ministry opportunities and responsibilities to see if they have some leadership potential.

Look for those who have the following spiritual, emotional, and social qualifications:

Spiritual:

- Do they see God working in their life?
- Are they self-feeders?

Do they consistently spend time nurturing their own spiritual growth through time in God's word and prayer?

- Are they eager to learn?

Do they actively participate in spiritual discussions?

- Do they share the vision of Small Groups?

Emotional:

- Are they secure enough to be vulnerable and honest with the group?
- Are they emotionally stable?

Are they aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and not subject to mood swings that affect the group dynamic?

- How do they respond to confrontation and character development?

Social:

- Do they openly participate without dominating?
- Are they able to listen to others in a caring way?
- Are they able to facilitate discussion?



TROUBLESHOOTING

“As we go through life, we’re piling on deeper and deeper layers of consciousness, which leads to a greater capacity to take multiple perspectives.

It’s a little like the many layers of dessert piled on Miss Piggy’s plate at an all-you-can-eat buffet. Only with this, it’s less carbs and more nutrition.”

Kermit The Frog

Troubleshooting

Human beings are broken, so everywhere there are people, there can be problems. Below are some tips that address some of the challenges that might arise in your group.

HANDLING CONFLICT

Conflict is the natural result of people spending time together. In Small Groups, conflict should be embraced rather than avoided. Conflict may occur between group members. And group members may experience conflict outside the walls of your group. When properly handled, conflict can spur groups to a deeper level of intimacy and community.

Preventing Conflict:

- 1) Address issues quickly. If you or a member in your group has an issue with someone, go quickly and talk with them rather than allowing the issue to grow.
- 2) Use “I” statements when talking about what you are feeling and experiencing. Say, “I get angry when...” rather than saying, “you make me mad.”
- 3) Listen closely for underlying messages. Remember tone and body language communicates as much, if not more than the words.
- 4) Try to communicate in person. Try to avoid the use of email, text or even phone calls when conflicts occur. If this isn’t possible, at least call so voices can be heard.

Managing Conflict:

Use the following questions to gain perspective when working through conflict in your Small Group:

- Who is involved?
- What is the issue or concern?
- What are the needs of the individuals involved?
- What are the needs of the whole group?
- How can this be an opportunity for growth in the following areas:
 - Relationship with God
 - Relationship with one another
 - Relationship with self
 - Relationship with community

Troubleshooting

- What scriptures are relevant to this situation?
- How can I pray for this situation?

Resolving Conflict:

Matthew 18 serves as our guide for conflict resolution within our Small Groups.

1) One-on-one meeting to seek reconciliation (Matthew 18:15)

If you have conflict with someone, go to him/her one-on-one to seek reconciliation. If someone in your group comes to you to talk about a conflict they have with someone else in the group, your first questions should be “Have you talked to them about this?” If they say no, don’t encourage them telling you the issue before they go and attempt to make it right.

If they have talked to them, then you can move to step two.

2) Mediator is included (Matthew 18:16)

Someone should be included if the problem is not resolved in a one-on-one meeting (or several one-on-one meetings). You, the leader, should serve as mediator for unresolved conflict for your group members. If you, the leader(s) is involved in the conflict, then the mediator should be a qualified staff member at TrueNorth Church.

THE CONSTANT TALKER

There will be members in your group that enjoy being heard...Often. To help direct conversation with others in the group, you might say, “What does someone else think?”, or direct questions to others in the group, or use your body language to address someone else.

SOME NEVER TALK

Try asking easier questions, or maybe even directing easier questions to those who never speak will help someone participate. You can privately enlist help from other members to help draw them out and always follow up with appreciation when they do engage. Following it up with expressing appreciation (both publicly and privately) for the contributions they make will make them feel appreciated and valued and hopefully want to speak up more often.

Troubleshooting

HANDLING THE TANGENTS

Tangents are a part of discussions, so do your best to handle them. Listen to what people are saying, watch the time, and try to keep people on task. Someone may need encouragement to finish their story. React to tangents positively.

A GROUP MEMBER REACHES A WRONG CONCLUSION

- Ask, “What does someone else think?”
- Redirect their attention to scripture which leads to a correct conclusion.
- Speak with them one-on-one if the wrong conclusion is still held.

DIFFICULT AND CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS RAISED

- Set ground rules before the discussion begins.
- Acknowledge that Christians hold different views on a variety of topics.
- Scripture must substantiate all viewpoints.
- We are not going to settle this question for all Christians for all time in this one discussion.
- Focus on what the divergent opinions have in common.



NOTES

“Promise me you’ll always remember you’re braver than you believe, you are stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”

Winnie the Pooh

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