

Life Group Leaders Handbook

Covenant Life

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What is a Small Group Ministry?

Small group ministry is not a new concept. Small groups have existed since the beginning of organized civilization. A small group is technically defined as a group of 5 to 12 individuals engaged in the same purpose, such as a committee, Bible Study group, fellowship group, service group, special interest or ministry group.

While an age-old concept, small groups are one of the primary organizational strategies of the postmodern church. The largest churches in the world use the small group forum for assimilating and developing their people. Within the last decade, several books, seminars and conferences have been developed to train church leaders in small group ministry. These groups can help a local church become much more effective in ministering to the busy people of the 21st century.

Many pastors and church leaders fail to recognize they already have small groups operating in their churches. Elders, deacons usher teams, pastor's council, Sunday School boards, visitation committees, nursing home ministry, children's church workers, youth boards and countless other committees or team groups are already functioning as small groups.

There are a million ways to win a million souls, and small group ministry can literally take on a million different looks. With the right structure and proper training, small groups ministries can propel your church into a pattern of growth that will help your church assimilate and develop the people within your congregation and community.

Ministry Director

If a church is large enough to hire a minister to serve as the director, they will serve all the groups. If the church is unable to hire a staff pastor for this position, a LG director should be appointed.

The director's responsibilities are as follows:

- To recruit and train all Life Group leaders
- To oversee and monitor the success of each Life Group
- To Oversee the selection of curriculum used in Life Groups that require lessons
- To assist in advertising for the Life Groups.
- To keep schedules and advertising materials up-to-date.
- To keep other staff member informed about Life Groups
- To assist Life Group Leaders, as the need arises.

- To continue to develop new Life Groups
- To work with the Life Group Committee to assist each Life Group.

The Life Group Committee Leaders

The Life Group Committee should consist of no less than three individuals. Each one should be in charge of a particular division of the department. Life Groups are usually organized according to demographical location. Each LGL (Life Group Leader) is responsible for representing their group and giving a report to the Ministry Director.

The Life Group Leader

The LGL leads the individual small group and is in charge of recruiting the group members, maintaining the group and scheduling group events. In addition, the leader is usually in charge of creating an atmosphere conducive to the function and needs of the group. This involves keeping record of attendance and group events to report to the division leader or staff pastor. It is very important that every LGL understands the mission and vision of the local church.

One of the dynamics of the Life Group atmosphere is closeness and familiarity. While this is the true strength of the Life Group, it can also become the weakness. In many ways, the group operates like a family. Because the groups meeting becomes a place of trust and familiarity, conversations are usually very honest. Any member of the group who begins to think outside the vision of the church could easily sway the group to begin to see the church in a negative light. However, if the leader of the groups is grounded and committed to the mission and vision of the church, they are usually able to easily bring the group back into focus.

The Leadership Meeting

Each LGL is required to attend a monthly or bi-monthly leadership meeting to learn the vision of the house, problem solving, give updates, and listen to new techniques. Attendance is mandatory. The meeting is chaired by the Life Group Ministry Director. The leaders get together and glean from the experiences and success of each member in the group. Anyone who is unable to attend should notify the chairmen. The normally simple agenda for this meeting will be.

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| I. Prayer | IV. Policy and Procedure Issues |
| II. Review the Vision | V. Motivation or Training |
| III. LGL reports | VI. Dismissal |

Most LGLs will be asked to fill out a written report on their group to be submitted on line. These reports are due at the meeting or right after the Life Group Meeting. The report is very simple and includes the following:

(Look at Report as a hand out)

A scale can be used from 1 to 10: The number 1 is poor and 10 is Great. The leader is asked to circle the number that best describes how they currently feel. If a leader circles a low number, the director can follow up from the report to check on the leader and offer the proper support.

Growth by the Division of Cells

Life Group ministry is part of the growth dynamics of the megachurch growth in the world. While many megachurches draw vast crowds by their sheer size and ability to host event, the church families are usually held together by strong departments within the church and a host of small groups. These small groups not only provide effective ways to assimilate newcomers, but they also provide a vehicle for growth.

Since a Life group is defined as a group of 8-12 individuals, groups that grow larger than 12 are encouraged to branch off and start new Life Groups. When a group grows beyond 12, it begins to lose the dynamics of intimacy and fellowship that make the group feel personal. The ownership of the group changes as the numbers increase. Therefore, groups are encouraged to divide into new cells or groups by taking two couples from the group to start a new group. This process produces growth within the church.

A Life Group atmosphere is a perfect place to bring an unsaved friend. It is small, intimate, non-threatening, personal, non-"churchy" and friendly. Most churches that grow by conversion growth do so primarily through Life Groups. Life Groups should be encouraged to leave room for at least one unchurched couple or two unchurched singles.

One Life Group evangelism principle is the empty chair principle. Each group is encouraged to set up two empty chairs each time it meets. Before the member leave, they pray together that unchurched people will occupy those chairs. This serves as a motivator for individuals to share their faith. The principle works and is very powerful in building the faith of the whole group.

The Purpose of the Life Group

The Life Group ministry model helps fulfill several needs in the church. First, it allows the pastor to put the ministry of the church into the hands of the laity. This effective plan, known as lay ministry, gives ownership and energy to the

local church. The pattern set forth in Ephesians 4 lays out a plan for a very effective New Testament church model. When the apostle Paul instructs the church about the fivefold ministry, he explains that these ministers are there to “equip the saints of the work of the ministry”.

As the equipper, each local pastor should seek to build a church filled with lay ministries. Since most laymen work a job and are not paid, Life Groups are an ideal way to keep them involved without overloading them.

Secondly, Life Group ministry allows people to get connected to the church. Life Groups are one of the quickest ways to assimilate newcomers into the church. In order to do this, Life Group ministry has to have a high visibility and must be well represented in the welcome and assimilation systems.

Life Groups will assist in connecting new people in a ministry area that best suits their interest, calling and giftedness. When you connect individuals to a ministry they feel passionate about, you connect them to your church. Relationships will form, and friendships will develop.

If your church doesn't have a Life Group formed in a particular area, create one. One of the beauties of Life Group ministry is that the groups are small and can be started with little effort in many cases. One of the appealing dynamics of Life Groups is they are always changing and adapting. This ministry has the ability to become whatever you want it to be. With the right structure and organized leadership, you can lead the troops of Life Groups easily and effectively.

Thirdly, the Life Group ministry model will help fulfill your evangelistic outreach efforts. When groups are formed, they are commissioned to actively invite new people to take part in their activities. These people are friends and families who do not attend church on a regular basis and would normally not attend a regular worship service. While the unchurched are not always eager to go to a night of fun and fellowship.

Life Groups Offer Flexibility and Give the Church Elasticity

This ministry offers a very flexible way to be involved in ministry. First of all, group leaders can arrange meetings around their schedules. They can choose the days, times, and how frequently they want to get together and where they want to meet. This is critical in a busy society where people are always “on the go.” It allows the freedom to do ministry that does not require you to hold meetings at the church. Homes, restaurants, coffee houses, parks, beaches, conference rooms and break rooms are all great places to hold a Life Group meeting.

Qualifications for a Life Group Leader

- Must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- A regular attendee in good standing with the church
- A regular financial contributor of tithes
- Must complete the training course for Life Group leaders
- Must adhere to the guidelines of the Life Group ministry department and leadership
- Must interview with the Ministry Director
- Must complete any prerequisite course required by the local church for its leaders and workers

Recruit and Train

Advertisement for a new group should begin at least six weeks prior to the first meeting. Usually, there are many means for effective advertising that already exist in the local church. Be sure to include ads in the church bulleting, newsletters, bulletin boards, powerpoints ads, brochures, and so forth. However, the most effective form of advertisement will be word of mouth. A personal invitation will bring more individuals into the groups than anything else.

The training session for new leaders should be completed prior to advertising. When an interested person contacts the new leader, that leader should be well informed and able to give precise answer to the curious candidate. The course used to train the LGLs is designed or planned by Ministry Director. There are many excellent courses available on the Internet or at the local Christian bookstore. Though each leader is required to take the initial training classes throughout the course of their service..

Confidentiality Policy

It is imperative that confidentiality is protected in order for a group to develop in trust and honesty. Members should feel the things they discuss inside the protective covering of their group will stay protected in the hearts of their friends. Anyone in the group who breaches that trust should be confronted (carefully) privately by the leader. If the violation of trust continues, the individual should be dismissed from the group. When a new group is formed, it is important that every person in the group is made aware of the need for confidentiality

Team Building

Several methods and exercises can be used to help bring the diverse members of your leadership team together. Each person on the team must feel they are a significant part of the unit. Their diversity is the strength of the group.

This allows the collective to experience many facets of the small group experience many facets of the Life Group experience. No one person can do all the work in a ministry. By asking the members to do group tasks, they will learn interdependence.

These are numerous enjoyable team-building exercises that can create positive and memorable experiences for the group. Here are a few examples.

1. use Lego building blocks to create a house.
- 2 Create a scrapbook for one of the groups.
3. Do yard work together for a needy person
4. Take a trip together
- 5 Make a Powerpoint commercial to use in advertising.

In addition to exercises, celebrating the success of each group, whether small or large, will also build momentum within the department.

The Life Group Calendar

Individual Life Group meetings –Monthly or bi-monthly

Leadership meetings– Monthly or bi-monthly

Special training– Annually

Types of Life Groups

Life groups can take on many different forms and functions. The key to an effective group is finding 8 –12 are from the same area. We will discuss various types of Life Groups, but keep in mind the list is endless, and new ideas for Life Groups are emerging daily. This is an incredible way to build relationships in the local church. From the basement to the beach, small groups can form and thrive.

Support Recovery Groups

This group is for individuals trying to recover from some type of addiction, abuse or pain, or individuals who are in need of support while dealing with it. It is very important that the leader of a support or recovery group is highly qualified to lead the group and has accountability to a certified counselor or professional.

Ideas for recovery groups:

- AA
- Divorce Recovery
- Post Abortion Recovery
- Spouse Abuse
- Child Abuse

- 12-Step
- Children of Aging Parents
- Parents of Gays and Lesbians
- Financial Recovery
- Grief Recovery

Service Groups

This group is made up of individuals wanting to offer a service to the church of community. The leader of this group is usually trained in a particular type of skill.

Ideas for service Groups:

- Auto Repair
- Lawn service
- Garden club
- Helping hands for the Handicap
- Meals on Wheels Volunteers
- Cooking Club for the elder or sick
- Child Care

Ministry Groups

These groups are made up of people interested in ministering to a particular target group. The leader of these groups should be recognized by the church as qualified to lead ministry.

Ideas for Ministry Groups:

- Deaf Ministry
- Special Needs Ministry
- Ministry to the Handicapped
- Singles Ministry
- Music ministry
- Deliverance Ministry
- Intercessory Prayer Group