

I. What is a Community Group?

A community group is a gathering of four or more people who meet on a regular basis, providing a **safe place** to engage in authentic **relationships**, to experience spiritual **transformation** and who include others on the discipleship journey.

- They are places of mutual ministry where each member uses spiritual gifts to **serve** the others
- They provide fellowship and mutual support, building one another up and caring for one another so that the world can be influenced through their good deeds
- They are vehicles for discovering truth and for **developing leaders** who can shepherd and disciple others

II. Why Groups?

- Provide an optimal environment for the life change that Jesus intends for every believer
- Strategically puts a leader into proximity with growing believers
- Enables every believer to connect and grow by multiplying groups and leaders
- Intentionalizes care, prayer, and encouragement for every believer

III. “Core Values” of Community Groups

A. Authentic Relationships

Self disclosure, care giving, humility, truth telling, affirmation

B. Community

Following the early church pattern of accountability, acceptance, fellowship

C. Safe Environment

Confidentiality, unconditional love and support producing a safe place for people to express themselves appropriately

D. Care

Each person receives support, prayer and encouragement

E. Open Groups

Groups are open to everyone, providing an opportunity to reach lost people

IV. Key Functions of Community (a.k.a. Life) Groups

A. Teaching

Learning and applying God’s Word

B. Fellowship

Building supportive, mutually accountable relationships

C. Worship

Praising God for who He is and for what He has done

D. Prayer

Listening to and sharing intimately with God, interceding on behalf of others, and for God’s work in the world

E. Ministry

Using spiritual gifts and loving each other in practical ways to meet needs

F. Growth

Impacting our community by *being* the Good News so that others want to follow Christ

V. Missional Aspect of Community Groups (1:59)

One distinctive of Community Groups at MCC is that we ask each group to incorporate a missional facet into group life. This means that each group should seek out ways of serving individuals, groups, ministries, or whole communities that are not part of the group.

- Groups may partner with other ministries at MCC to help them be successful at their mission. These could be ministries that serve a population within the church, or outside the church. Examples include: A group might volunteer to help the ministry to senior citizens setup and cleanup at their next event; A group could offer a night of free childcare to young couples in the church, etc.)
- Many groups partner with parachurch ministries like the Northside Outreach Center (NOC) or the Robinson Theater Group to serve under-resourced communities in our region. Still other groups help families with special needs by partnering with ministries like The Resource Connection.
- Other groups prepare and serve meals to homeless individuals in the inner city by partnering with ministries who have been doing this safely for years.
- Still other groups learn of needs in the community (i.e. light yard work, simple repairs, or cleaning out an attic, etc.) and partner together to meet them
- We love the missional aspect of our Community Groups. It helps the group grow together through shared experiences, it prevents the group from becoming too focused upon itself to the neglect of others, and it glorifies the goodness and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ from whom all of this good flows.

VI. Let's Explore a Typical Community Group Meeting (3:52)

- Time: aim for 1.5 hours. (Respect the needs of the host/children.)
- Typical group agenda:
 - 15 mins. – fellowship/food?
 - 15 mins. - Group Ice Breaker OR Children's devotion & prayer
 - 40 mins. – Group discussion about topic
 - 20 mins. – Adult prayer and/or worship
- Location: as central as possible; rotating after a few weeks if desired; respect for host's home
- Arrangement of room: remove barriers, no one behind anyone else, comfortable seating
- What about the food? (important, not *main* thing; give people inexpensive 'out'; clean up!)

VII. How will people get connected to your group? (2:07)

- GroupUP Event – A mixer among people looking for groups and group leaders is offered in February & September each year.
- Weekly announcements/videos, directing to G.F. & to MCC/ChurchTeams website after GroupUP!
Online sign-ups for groups will begin immediately after GroupUP!
- Personal invitations to your group is the most effective means of growing your group (Grand Foyer conversations, other church venues, Facebook, etc.)

VIII. Expectations of Leaders (3:26)

- Invite people to come to GroupUP! and join your group (G.F.; other venues; Facebook; etc.)
- Use the small groups website (via MCC's website) to set up your group & register group members.
- Monitor group size to keep it between **8 – 15** people (but realize that most weeks at least someone will be missing)
- **Pastor** your group – love on them, communicate frequently via emails, txt msgs, etc.
- **Network** with other ministries (i.e. Marriage Ministry & Partners who encourage couples, OO, prayer ministry, GriefShare, etc.)
You are not to be THE source/answer person (although you may be).

IX. Roles of Community Group Leaders (2:09)

The effective small group leader must function in the following three roles:

- **A Gatekeeper** - As a gatekeeper, the leader determines who speaks and who doesn't speak. A good leader will **limit** the comments of someone who is overly talkative, and **draw out** those who are more reserved in a way that doesn't embarrass them. A typical gatekeeper statement might be, "Let's hear from someone we haven't heard much from yet."
- **An Orienter** - As an orienter, the leader keeps the **meeting on track**, heading it in the desired direction. An orienter keeps the group from getting off onto unproductive tangents. A typical orienter comment may be, "That's a great question and perhaps we can discuss it later, but let's get back to answering our original question..."
- **A Pacer** - As a pacer, the group leader keeps the discussion topics moving at a pace so that all that the material can be covered. Leaders who are poor at this rarely get beyond the first discussion question. Most people are ready to move on to the next topic or question after a certain amount of time. The pacer senses this and initiates movement. A typical pacer comment might be, "We could talk about this topic for hours, but our time is limited so let's move on to the next question."

X. Child Care Options for Community Group (2:36)

Whenever possible, groups should create childcare options:

- "Orange Groups" are focused on equipping parents to be the primary disciplers of their children through hands-on experience. These groups have different agendas & activities that are provided during our fall message series.
- **Option 1 – Split the meeting.** During the first 30 minutes, include children of all ages for the welcome/snack time and offer a brief, family-led activity. It might be somewhat related (or completely unrelated) to the adult series/topic.
Then, move the children into a child-friendly area/room and begin 50 minutes of "grown-up" time to cover the topic, to worship, and to connect via prayer. Rotate care for the children among group members (as described below).
- **Option 2 – Adults-Only Meetings.** Determine in advance that certain weeks will be "grown-ups only." Then choose from the these suggested ideas:
 - Rotate childcare among two members of group (not husband/wife, if possible)
 - Utilize paid childcare workers (paid by the whole group or by the members w/ kids)
 - Rotate care by sub-groups (i.e. For the 1st hour, the men are with the kids while women meet & discuss the material, pray, etc.; then vice versa)

XI. Small Group Facilitating Skills – Part 1 (5:08)

Each week the leader should:

- Pray:** *about* your meetings and *for* your group members
- Be prepared. Be familiar enough with the material so you that you can basically lead the group by memory. (Please don't simply read the material...BORING!)
- Always level the meeting through icebreakers (part of material you will receive)

Ask BEFORE you ask!

Always contact someone **before** the meeting (or at least before it starts) and ask if they would be willing to read or pray in front of the group. NEVER NEVER NEVER put anyone on the spot during a meeting to read a scripture or to lead out in prayer. This will nearly kill the shy people in your group and they probably won't return.

Practice Active Listening

Communicate with others so they feel they have been heard and understood; are valued and important.

How? Examples include: eye contact, give feedback that says “I heard you”, invite others to comment on what the speaker has just said, thank the individual for adding to the conversation, etc.

Ask Good Questions

Two types of questions:

1. **Information Questions** – These relate facts (i.e. Job? Where do you live? How long at MCC?)
2. **Experience Questions** – These draw out of people what’s in their mind or heart about the facts. (i.e. What did it feel like to grow up there? How did learning your coworker is a Hindu affect your relationship with her? What was it like to discover that your best friend was gay?)

Use lots of open-ended questions (not answerable with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’). Many will be included in your material.

Helping Someone Who is Hurting

Caring for people who are hurting will help them feel cared about and heard. When others share pain it helps them (and those who are serving them) grow.

How? Validate their pain (i.e. I’m certain that did really hurt your feelings.) Don’t ignore their pain or simply throw scripture at it, empathize and let them know they are understood. Pray briefly for the person if the time seems appropriate. Then move on with the plan for the night.

XII. Small Group Facilitating Skills – Part 2 (2:44)

Group Prayer

Prayer is an important part of small group life. It engages us **directly** with the Holy Spirit who wants to encourage and bless people. The presence of Christ in the middle of your group is CRUCIAL to its effectiveness. Prayer helps remind us that He is present and draws us to Himself.

- **Model prayer yourself** – as the leader, model the kind of prayer you want (i.e. use simple, conversational words, keep your prayers short, be authentic, etc.)
- **What should your group pray about?** Bless someone in the group; pray for a difficult situation someone has shared; worship God together; include your children in prayer whenever it is appropriate to do so (and let them pray, too!). If someone prays, it is good for one person to agree in prayer with them afterward (but don’t simply repeat everything that’s already been prayed). Others can agree and add something, if they wish. When there is a lull in the praying, move the group on to pray for someone else, the next need, or conclude the prayer time.
- **How?** Pray together as a group; or break into groups of three’s and have them pray together for their specific needs; pair up people to pray for one another for the next week (encouraging them to contact one another at least one time to touch base)
- **Maintain a Group Prayer Journal.** Ask an administrative type person in your group to keep a simple notebook in which to record group prayers and answers to prayers.

XIII. Dealing with diverse people in your group: (4:06)

1. The Overly **Talkative** Member

- Establish rule: No one can speak a 2nd time unless anyone else who wants to speak has had his/her chance.
- No interrupting
- In the meeting, indicate you’d like to hear more about that person’s area of interest after the meeting

- Privately affirm person's contributions and remind them that others need to be given opportunity to make a similar impact.
2. The **Answer** Person
 - Lovingly redirect discussion to other group members: "What do the rest of you think about this passage/question?"
 - Affirm what is right about the person's answers but invite other points of view.
 - Remind the group that silence can be good at times, too.
 - Remind group beforehand of how trite answers or oversimplified responses make others feel. Ask group members to monitor themselves during the group.
 - If it continues, speak to the person privately (and away from group) and describe what their manner of sharing is doing to the group. Tell them the truth in love.
 3. The Member with an **Agenda** (power struggles & soap boxes)
 - Periodically remind everyone of the main focus of the group: Discussing God's Word together, reflecting and applying the message from Sunday to everyday life, learning to build healthy relationships, etc.
 - Discuss privately with individual to discern the underlying cause.
 4. **Superficial** Discussions
 - Early on, most people share facts more easily than feelings. Expect this in the first several weeks of group life.
 - As the leader, model through your sharing how deep and open you would like others to share.
 - Ask "feeling" questions rather than "opinion" or "fact" questions.
 - Once in a while, ask closed-ended questions that elicit specific, below-the-surface answers (i.e. "Have you ever personally felt like you failed God?")
 - Rephrase the question if necessary, just to be certain that your group members know what you've asked them.
 - Create and maintain a safe climate in the group by reminding them: "What's said in the group remains in the group." Break into smaller sub-groups if the group is too large.

XIV. **About Apprentice Leaders (2:11)**

One of the most important things you can do as a leader is to identify other potential leaders within your group.

How to spot a rising apprentice leader:

- Pray – ask God for clarity
- Look for someone who takes group seriously & embraces the community group vision of the church
- Notice someone who challenges your leadership in positive ways that help the group
- Look for people whom *you* feel are gifted to lead; They may not see it in themselves.
- Observe them as they interact with others and as they **serve** others

Responsibilities of an apprentice leader:

- Love & support the leader and the group.
- Willing to **learn** from what the leader does (and doesn't do). Must have a desire to develop skills.
- Asks the leader for opportunities to lead various portions of meetings (or an entire meeting, eventually). As the leader, you should give parts of your meeting away to others and observe how they do. Note how the other group members respond to their leadership.
- They look for others who might become an apprentice also.