

## COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER GUIDE

For the week of August 29, 2021

*This guide is designed to give helpful hints in preparing & leading your group in discussion.*

### WELCOME TO THE FALL QUARTER OF COMMUNITY GROUPS!

*This week we kick off our Fall Community Group Quarter. Your first meeting is designed to give you time to get acquainted, connect with each other, as well as time to discuss how to make your Community Group meetings great! The study questions have been shortened this week to allow ample time to accomplish all of this.*

*To prepare for your first meeting, take some time to focus on the questions below and be prepared to share your answers with the group. Have a great meeting as you come together to connect, encourage one another to grow and see how God might work!*

**Online Groups** - *If your group is meeting online, make sure you send the link to your group.*

#### GETTING READY FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

Each week in this section you'll find the most important information for your group.

##### ⇒ GOALS OF THE FIRST MEETING

- *Re-connect with existing members and meet new members*
- **Clarify your group's direction / expectations / commitments using the Community Group Covenant**
- *Pray for the building of relationships and spiritual growth of the group*

##### Items Needed for the First Meeting

- *Decide if you're doing Potluck or if you are providing the food. Potlucks can help people attend however, do what is best for this Covid season.*
- **Community Group Covenant** – *Review this with your group. This was emailed to you last week in your leader email, and can also be found online in our church center app.*
- *Nametags for in-person groups (Print or write them out ahead of time.)*

##### Contact Your Group in Advance

- *Contact all members before the first meeting to welcome them to the group. You can check your roster online to see all the members of your group and their contact information.*
- **IN-PERSON GROUPS** - *Inform members of the location and time of your group and how you're handling food based on COVID & the CDC guidelines.*
- **ONLINE GROUPS** – *Make sure you send the link to your meeting well in advance and preferably again on the day you meet.*

#### AGENDA FOR FIRST MEETING

*Looking for more guidance on your first meeting? You can find the "First Night Agenda" on how to make your first night great on the Leader Tools page of our church center app or a link to each document in the email Chris sent all of us.*

**HOW WE MEASURE OUR SUCCESS WEEK TO WEEK: Hearing from everyone at every meeting and keeping God's Word at the center.**

**Make sure you leave plenty of time to answer the questions in the "Looking Ahead" section and spend time going over the Community Group Covenant with your group.**

- **Welcome and Eat** – *In regards to a meal at your first meeting, CDC guidelines recommend no sharing of food. Pre-packed food is a good option. Online groups could eat virtually.*
- **Group Sharing** – *Discussion Note: You can transition from the "Getting to Know You" section to the "Looking Ahead" section.*
- **Go over the Community Group Covenant** – *Use the last question in the Leader Guide below and transition into reviewing the Commitment Form.*

- **Try to allow 45 minutes for the “Looking Ahead” section** so you have plenty of time to have everyone answer and go over the Community Group Covenant.
- Close in prayer.
- Mingle afterward.

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

**Discussion Note:** Add these questions if you have new people in your group or a completely new group. If it hasn't happened before the meeting officially starts, have everyone in the group share how long they have been attending STF, if they have been in a Community Group before and their favorite hobby.

**Discussion Tips:** These are effective for both in-person and online groups. Remember to set time limits to ensure everyone has an opportunity to answer the questions. Possibly use the “Tag— You're It” method to ensure everyone can share. Once one person is finished sharing, they select the next person to share.

1. Ask one or a few of the following questions to get to know your members better:

- What are one or two things you enjoyed most this summer?
- Play “Would you rather”:
  - *Would you rather go to a movie or to dinner alone?*
  - *Would you rather have an unlimited gift certificate to a restaurant or a clothing store?*
  - *Would you rather watch the big game at home or live at the stadium?*
  - *Would you rather hear the good news or the bad news first*

2. Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching, was there anything you heard for the first time, that caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

## LOOKING AHEAD

What are you looking forward to in your Community Group this quarter? *Important question to have everyone answer. You can transition from here into going over the Community Group Covenant Form or include the next sub question.*

These are unusual times on so many levels in our culture today. Is there anything specific you need prayer for, or is there a focus you would like to have in order to grow this next quarter?  
*Everyone may not have an answer here. You may want to give some options like: more regularly reading their Bible, praying specifically for family and friends, better witness at work or with friends, etc.*

**Transition Statement to Community Group Covenant:** *“It's great to hear what each of you have said about what you want to get out of your time in our group. One of the great benefits of being in a Community Group is the opportunity to have help from others as we seek to be strategic and intentional about our spiritual growth. The Community Group Covenant is designed to serve as intentional guidelines to help us make the most of our time together.”*

Go over the Community Group Covenant Form with your group.

**Close in prayer:** *If you have anyone new in your group and you don't know them, it is recommended to close with your host or one person praying. Next week, the Study Questions will include an introduction to praying in a group, so if you have a new group or a lot of new members, it's suggested that you wait until week two to do any group prayer.*

**Mingle with everyone after the meeting.** *Even if you're online, stay on an extra 10 minutes to see if anyone wants to connect and hang out just like you would at an in-person meeting.*

## THE PURPOSE OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

Community Groups exist to promote spiritual maturity and personal growth through meaningful Christian relationships and the study of God's Word. (Romans 8:29 & Hebrews 10:24-25). Here's how it will happen:

### SHARE

Each week we'll take time to share what is happening in our lives. At first this sharing will include planned sharing questions, called "Getting To Know You." But after the first few weeks, it will become more informal and personal as we feel more comfortable and will be called "My Story".

### STUDY

Each week we'll study a section from God's Word that relates to the previous weekend's sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life.

### SUPPORT

Each week we'll learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded (John 15:9-13). This care can take many forms, such as prayer, encouragement, listening, challenging one another and meeting real needs.

### SERVE

Spiritual growth is fostered not only by what we gain through the support and input of others, but also through service to others. The role each of us fills is important to the health of the church and for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the community in which we live (Ephesians 4:11-16). Throughout the quarter, it is our hope that you can find and/or be affirmed in the ways God has designed you to serve and make a difference in God's Kingdom.

### ABOUT POLITICS IN COMMUNITY GROUP

*We do believe it is important for Jesus followers to think through and process how they engage in politics. But due to the polarizing nature of our current political climate, we want to keep our Community Group meetings free of politics and focused on relationships with each other and Jesus/God's Word.*

Presenting the Good News of Jesus' saving grace to all, and the unity we have as believers is vitally important to us. In light of this, remember to keep politics completely out of your Community Group discussions. We exist to minister to everyone who wants to know Jesus.

If someone in your group starts to take things in a political direction (be it with humor, a rant, or even a "prayer request" for a specific outcome), gently remind them that the body of Christ (and South Tampa Fellowship) is made up of followers of Jesus – some of whom are Republican, Independents, Democrats, etc.

# LEADERS GUIDE - COMMUNITY GROUP COVENANT

- *When discussing – use the proactive leadership style – clear direction, yet flexible. The writing in red is to help you how to word each section.*

Leaders	_____	Ph.#	_____
Hosts	_____	Ph.#	_____
Station in Life	_____	Campus	_____

*Community groups thrive on participation! The purpose of this Covenant is to help you to discuss and clarify your group's goals, expectations, and commitments.*

## **COMMUNITY GROUPS: THEIR PURPOSE**

Community Groups exist to promote spiritual maturity and personal growth through meaningful Christian relationships and study of God's Word (Romans 8:29 & Hebrews 10:24, 25). We'll do this by focusing on four primary activities:

### **SHARE**

Each week we'll take time to share what is happening in our lives. At first this sharing will include planned "sharing questions". But after the first few weeks, it will become more informal and personal as we feel more comfortable.

### **STUDY**

Each week we'll study a section from God's Word that relates to the previous weekend's sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life. *Our goal is to interact interpersonally on the topic and how we can practically follow Christ, not to answer all the questions.*

### **SUPPORT**

Each week we'll learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded (John 15:9-13). This care can take many forms such as *prayer, encouragement, listening, challenging one another, and meeting real needs.*

### **SERVE**

Spiritual Growth is fostered not only by what we gain through the support and input of others, but also through service to others. The role each of us fills is important to the health of the church and for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community (Ephesians 4:11-16). Throughout the quarter, it is our hope that you can find and/or be affirmed in the ways God has designed you to serve, and make a difference in God's Kingdom.

## **FIVE MARKS OF A HEALTHY GROUP**

For our group to be healthy, we need to...

1. **Make spiritual growth our number one priority (Romans 8:29).**  
*⇒ Tangents – they are okay sometimes, but sometimes we need to be refocused. We'll need to keep spiritual growth our focus and stay on topic.*
2. **Accept one another (Romans 15:7).**  
*⇒ We will have different preferences.*
3. **Take care of one another (John 13:34).**  
*⇒ When crisis happens we're there to help with support, prayer, encouragement, listening, meals etc.*
4. **Treat each other with respect (Ephesians 4:25-5:2).**

- ⇒ Listening to one another, if one's talking let's all listen, nothing worse than two conversations going on at once.
- ⇒ Our goal is to listen, not give advice. (Advice is given when asked for) We are not here to judge or fix – unless someone asks. An example of giving advice is by saying, “Well this is what I think you should do.” On the other hand, that doesn't mean we can't question what is said or what someone is doing.
- ⇒ Some of us have the gift of gab, also known as a dominator – be careful, I as a leader might have to help you.
- ⇒ Be careful of gossip prayers. For example, “we need to pray for (person's name) because they are doing this ...”
- ⇒ No put-downs.
- ⇒ What is said here, stays here – of course we never promise confidentiality if something shared would be harmful to yourself or someone else and/or if I, as the leader, need to seek counsel on how to respond to an issue in the group.

**5. Keep our commitments to the group (Psalm 15:1-2, 4b).**

- ⇒ Please give us a call if you can't make it to Community Group so we know what's going on and how to pray for you.

**GUIDELINES & COMMITMENT**

1. **Dates** We'll meet on \_\_\_\_\_ nights for \_\_\_\_\_ weeks. Our final meeting of this quarter will be on \_\_\_\_\_. *Fill in blanks*
  
2. **Time** We'll arrive between \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ and begin the meeting at \_\_\_\_\_. We'll spend approximately \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in singing (optional), \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in study/discussion, and \_\_\_\_\_ minutes in prayer/sharing. *Fill in blanks*
  
3. **Children** Group members are responsible to arrange child care for their children. Nursing newborns are welcome provided they are not a distraction to the group!
  
4. **Study** Our studies will focus on the same topic covered in the previous Sunday's sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life. *Not to answer every question.*
  
5. **Prayer** Praying for one another. *You'll go over tips on topical prayer the second week of group. Remember - being forced to pray in group or just the idea of it can cause people to not want to come to your group. If you have new people in your group, you might want to say something like this: "It's exciting to see how God works in our lives through prayer. We also realize prayer in groups is something many have never done. Know that you will never be forced to pray." Let them know you'll talk more in the weeks to come on how we do group prayer and that we break a lot of the stereotypes of what it means to pray.*

6. **Homework & Attendance**

Joining a Community Group requires a commitment to *attend each week and do the homework ahead of time*. Obviously, allowances are made for sickness, vacation, work conflicts, and other special events—but not much more!

*This commitment is the key to a healthy group.*

If we cannot come to a meeting, we will call \_\_\_\_\_.

⇒ *Emphasize the importance of the commitment to attendance and preparation. (A good group starts with good preparation)*

⇒ *Make sure that everyone is with you. (Do we agree? Is this what we want? Make eye contact, etc.)*

⇒ *Most weeks require 20-30 minutes of homework to prepare for the group study and discussion.*

7. **Desserts**

*Have a sign-up form so members take turn bringing the dessert. This will help in retaining members and attendance.*

8. **Social & Service Project(s)**

*Emphasize the importance of a quarterly social and service project. As a leader and host, have 2 or 3 suggestions ready and 2 or 3 potential dates. Choose a date or ask the group to bring their calendars next week. New groups are preferred to have their social by mid-quarter.*