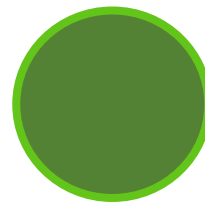




Small Group Leader Guide





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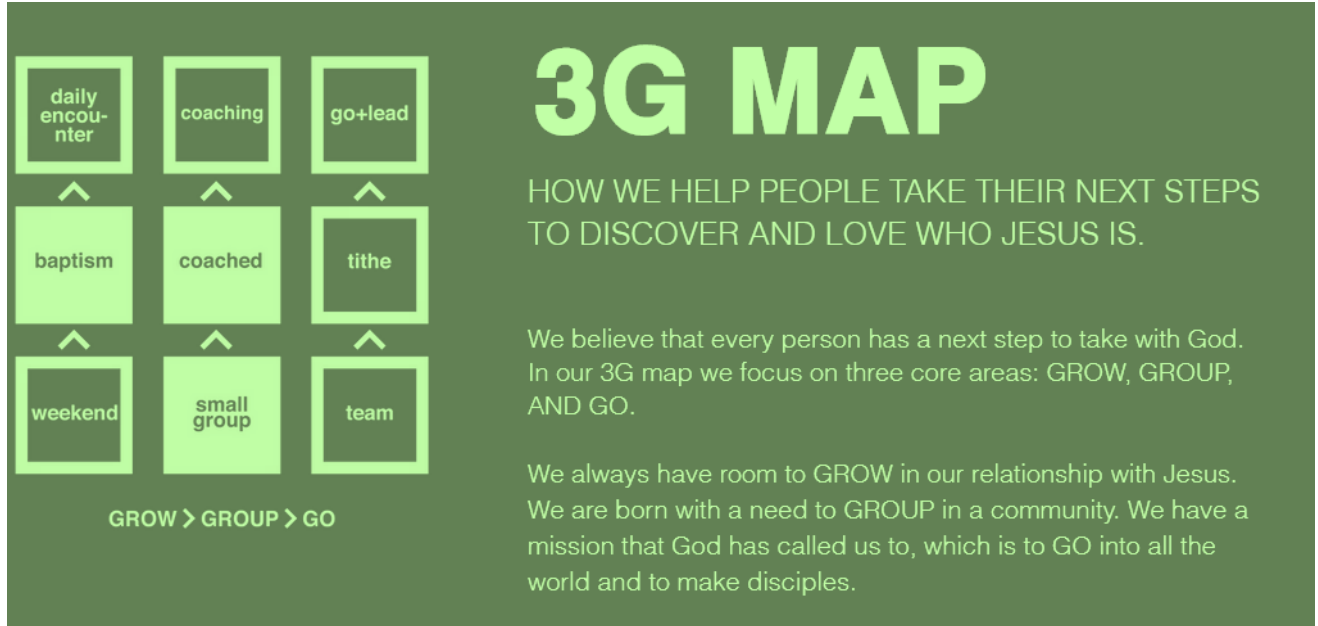


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WHY SMALL GROUPS?

Mission: To *help* people DISCOVER and LOVE who Jesus is



“Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matthew 28:18-20

We believe that life change happens best in group environments and that God has called the church to follow Jesus’ example by living in an authentic community with one another, intentionally pursuing spiritual transformation and living our lives on mission.

At Unite Community Church, group involvement is the answer to discipleship and a connection that goes beyond a Sunday morning experience. Simply put, we don’t believe that being involved in a group is optional but rather *vital* for the health of our church body and our collective impact in the community, country and world.

PRIMARY SMALL GROUP GOALS:

1. GROW

Create Authentic Disciples – grow spiritually, understand the scriptures deeper (differentiate truth from lies), increase our knowledge and application of the Bible to our daily lives. Pray together.

2. GROUP

Create Authentic Relationships – connect deeply with members to become a true extended family that is there for each other through life’s good and hard times

3. GO

Connect the Unconnected – always have an open seat and atmosphere for new members; continually invites others to be connected and feel welcome

Multiply and Serve – Real growth happens when others are challenged; Identify an apprentice, set a growth date and regularly schedule community service events with your group. To “GO+LEAD” where you live, work and play. Unite with the community to create a Jesus Movement in our schools, workplaces, and communities.

NEW GROUP START-UPS

Five things a brand new Small Group needs to decide: WHERE, WHO, WHEN, WHAT and HOW

1

WHERE – where will you meet? Options include your home, an alternate Host’s home (another church member willing to open up their home for group), or a public space (Tim Hortons, church meeting room, etc.).

2

WHO – what type of group do you want to be? (men’s only, women’s only, diverse/all ages, married couples, parents, etc.)

3

WHEN – create your group meeting schedule and decide if you will meet:

- a. All year round
- b. Seasonally AUG-NOV & JAN-MAY (breaking during the summer)

4

WHAT – Decide what materials you will use for your study

1. **After the Message** – Your Small Group discussion can be based on the Sunday Sermon; After the Message questions will be provided by a campus Pastor to facilitate your SG discussion
2. **Independent Book Study**
3. **Independent Lesson Study**
4. **Scripture Reading** – Pick and read a single chapter of the Bible to study with your group. After reading you ask the following (or similar) questions to your group:
 - c. Who is God or Jesus in this chapter? (What is His character?)
 - d. What is He doing/what is He up to?
 - e. In light of who He is and what he’s up to, who are we?
 - f. What does this mean for us and our identity?
 - g. What is our next step? How will we live out the gospel this week?

*Most people are more open to joining a new group because an existing group already knows each other, whereas a new group takes away that intimidation. Many new groups have a particular curriculum or study to follow that generates appeal/interest. If your group is new, ask your Small Group Network Leader what study you should start with.

5

HOW - how will you invite people into the group? How will the group keep in touch outside of group meetings (GroupMe, Messenger, etc.)? How will you serve together?

- As a start-up group, you should start by personally inviting at least 12 people that you know to your group. Personal initiation is the most effective way to grow Small Groups. Ask for a list of unconnected members from your SG Network Leader if you don’t have people to invite.

- Remember that people will NOT feel bothered by your invitation – they will actually feel affirmed and cared about. So don't be afraid to INVITE, INVITE, INVITE!!
- Small group is not just for accountability, learning scripture and relational growth but it's an opportunity to fulfill the mission of the church and serve one another in love; see "Go weeks" for the desired service structure for UCC Small Groups.

GROUP MEETING STRUCTURE

Groups should last around 1.5 hours and ideally not exceed 2 hours in duration. A suggested schedule would be:

15-20 Minutes	Hang out/snacks/socialize
5 Minutes	Church Announcements/Follow up from Last Week
5-10 Minutes	Ice Breaker
30-40 Minutes	Study Time
10 Minutes	Closing Prayer

FOOD TIP: Snacks and food are an optional part of Small Groups. However, since people tend to bond over food, we encourage including meals at least occasionally. If you do choose to include them, make it as easy for everyone as possible by:

- ✓ Alternating the "food host" each group so it's not a weekly responsibility for all
- ✓ Have every member chip in money for take out
- ✓ Have each member bring only one ingredient (i.e. Taco night and everyone only has to bring one thing – meat, shells, diced tomatoes or Loaded Baked Potato Night – everyone brings a topping and all you have to make are baked potatoes)

ICEBREAKER TIP: Icebreakers are an extremely important but often overlooked part of Small Groups. Icebreakers are a great way to make new members relax and have fun and also can be used as a tool to help members open up and get to know one another. Some sample Icebreaker questions are listed below:

1. Name one of your pet peeves.
2. What was your favorite family Tradition growing up for (insert current holiday)?
3. If you had to Quarantine for 6 months with any (3) people dead or alive who would they be and why?
4. What was your favorite birthday gift you have ever received?
5. What was your most embarrassing date?

Remember: Starting with an Icebreaker is a great way to make the tone of the night fun & relating! Make sure the icebreakers you choose fit the personalities of the group so that everyone feels comfortable and included. (See the [One Note Icebreaker Guide](#) provided by your SG Network Leader for a list of ideas.)

PRAYER TIPS: Praying together is such an important part of Small Group.

- Have your apprentice or another member lead in prayer (don't put them on the spot though, ask ahead of time).
- Occasionally break off into groups of two to three to pray or break off into male and female groups. This will help build closer bonds within the group.

- Make sure someone records the prayer requests each week and shares them with the group via GroupMe
- Follow up on Answers to Prayer so that the group can see how God is working

FUN TIPS: It's very important to remember to incorporate FUN in your groups! If a group is missing this element, it will no longer hold the relational value of a Small Group and will instead become a class. In addition to regular service projects together, plan regular group outings and one on one outings with your members. Encourage regular communication throughout the week and stay connected. People need authentic relationships that are valuable with people that truly care about them and what's going on in their lives.

- Find out what your group likes to do and plan activities together (i.e. bowling, ice skating, shopping, movies, etc.)
- Celebrate milestones together– (i.e. birthdays, anniversaries, births, marriages, etc.)
- Ensure “hang out time” is always incorporated into your group times

FACILITATING DISCUSSION

1

USE OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

Open ended questions are crucial to facilitating valuable discussion in your groups. Developing good questions takes preparation on the part of the leader but will help enrich the conversations and ensure real life change happens through thoughtful rumination of scripture. If you have group members who are very well versed in scripture, don't be afraid to ask them broad questions: “Can you suggest other scriptures that touch on this theme?”

The Ultimate Roadtrip, Leading Small Groups by Crupress lists the following categories of essential questions:

Type	Example	Use
LAUNCHING	<i>“What’s the most generous thing that someone has ever done for you?”</i>	To cultivate interest in the study by raising an issue that your passage addresses.
EXPLORING: OBSERVATION	<i>“In Ephesians 2:1-10, what kind of tone was Paul using to communicate?”</i>	Questions that help answer, “What does it say?” to help the group discover what the author wanted to communicate to his readers.
EXPLORING: INTERPRETATION	<i>“In Ephesians 2:1, what does it mean to be dead?”</i>	Questions that help answer, “What does it mean?” in order to understand the original meaning of the passage.
EXPLORING: SIGNIFICANCE	<i>“In light of Ephesians 2:4-10, why is it important to know that you are now and forever an object of God’s love?”</i>	Explores the question, “What does it matter?” to help the group see the significance of this passage in their life.
EXPLORING: SUMMARY	<i>“In Ephesians 2:1-10, what is it that Paul really wanted his</i>	Asks question that help group members discover the big idea of the passage.

	<i>readers to understand about God's love?"</i>	
RESPONSE	<i>"Twice in Ephesians 2:5-10, Paul emphasized that salvation is by grace and not by works. In what ways do you find yourself still trying to perform for God?"</i>	Asks heart-level questions that expose our Fallen Condition and point to Christ as the solution.

Reprinted from *The Ultimate RoadTrip Leading Small Groups*, by Crupress, 2005, Orlando, FL. 2010 by CruPress.com.

2 SET THE EXAMPLE OF TRANSPARENCY

The more you authentically share and are open with your group members, the more prone your members will be to do the same. So be ready with examples from your own life during your discussion time to share.

3 EMBRACE SILENCE

If you ask the group a question and no one answers right away, a common mistake is the group leader will start talking out of nervousness of silence. Instead, embrace the silence. Look down or look around the room and give a pause of 1-2 minutes for a group member to speak up. Many times group members just need time to start talking. So embrace the silence.

4 EMBRACE SMALLTALK

Since one of the goals of Small Groups is to build authentic relationships - small talk is road to real connection. While you don't want small talk to overtake your group sessions, you want to encourage time for group member's to mingle and just talk about life. Consider setting aside time before the start or at the end for your member's to engage in small talk. Don't let group become just a class or a lecture, create time for connection.

5 LISTEN & DON'T OVERTALK

A common misconception of leading a Small Group is that the Leader has to do all or most of the talking. This is actually completely FALSE! The goal is for the group members to lead the discussion. Learn to listen and don't over talk during group. Be ready with your own personal examples but encourage your members to share. Your role is more of a facilitator than director.

6 BE FLEXIBLE

Sometimes the discussion can go off topic or you may not be sticking to the agenda. Take a deep breath – THAT IS OK! You don't always have to get through the entire lesson or outline, what's important is whether or not deep, relevant discussion is happening. Now if your members are carrying on about Aunt Marge's fruit cake boyfriend for hours then you have to develop the skills to reign the conversations back in but otherwise let your group converse in a natural way. With the stress of life, people are taking time out of their week to come to group so don't make it too rigid and formal. Learn to go with the flow and be flexible.

7 LIFE APPLICATION

The goal of Small Group is Christ centered life change. Take the needed time to ensure your discussion questions point people to life change and help them understand the big ideas of the scripture you are studying. For example, "In light of Matt. 16:24-26, practically speaking how do we take up our cross and follow Jesus? What does that look like for our relationships? What can we do this week to follow that charge?"

GO WEEKS

How can you mobilize your group, even from the start, to be a group that impacts others for God's glory and doesn't just sit around and talk about the Bible? At UCC, we want to leave a legacy and a lasting impact on our community.

We follow the 31 Model. Meet for (3) groups and then serve on the 4th. Your service project can be small (i.e. making cards for soldiers or shut-ins) or can be on a larger scale (serving at the soup kitchen at Hope Clinic, raking leaves for a widow, etc.) See the [OneNote Go Week Resource Guide](#) for an extended list of ideas.

COMMON SMALLGROUP CHALLENGES

Occasionally you will experience road bumps in your Small Group experience. Difficult external life circumstances will occur (divorce, death) and some challenging internal group dynamics may appear (dominant over talker, politics taking over group time, etc.)

Reach out to your Small Group Network Leader to discuss strategies on dealing with any challenges you may be facing with your Small Group.

APPRENTICESHIP

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND DEVELOP YOUR APPRENTICE

We know it can be daunting to think about not only developing a potential leader, but identifying who that potential leader could be. We hope that this resource will serve as a guide as you prayerfully seek an apprentice leader for your group. You may be asking yourself, "where do I even begin?" In this resource, we hope to help you understand the following:

- Why apprenticing is so crucial to the growth of our church.
- What we mean by apprenticing.
- How to identify your apprentice.
- How to develop your apprentice.

WHY DO WE APPRENTICE?

1. It's Biblical

Throughout the Scriptures we see examples of leaders apprenticing those who would follow in their footsteps. Moses apprenticed Joshua, Elijah apprenticed Elisha, Paul apprenticed Timothy and Jesus apprenticed the twelve disciples.

"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." 2 Timothy 2:2

We must invest in future leaders to carry the gospel forward to future generations.

2. It's Strategic

Our mission as a church is to help people discover and love who Jesus is through Small Groups. We *must* create space for more people to experience authentic community and spiritual growth. In reality, the biggest barrier to group multiplication is a shortage of qualified group leaders. Where are we going to find new group leaders? The answer is in our existing groups! They are sitting in our groups waiting to be developed into group leaders. The best way to transform a group member into a group leader is through apprenticing.

3. It's Practical

Apprenticing is the only effective way to equip leaders in a large-scale, relational, volunteer-driven organization. Not only does apprenticing develop the future leader, it also grows the leader who is apprenticing. When you take the time to teach someone what you know, it allows you to take stock of just what it is you *actually* know. As you begin to entrust responsibility to your apprentices and they bring their knowledge, talent, and experience to bear upon what you've shared with them, they will find new and better ways to lead. This will give you the opportunity to learn from them and expand your own knowledge and skills.

WHAT IS AN APPRENTICE?

An apprentice is a **leader-in-training**. Apprenticing is the practice of involving people in ministry for the purpose of training them to take your place. An apprentice is **not** someone who has it all together, and an apprentice is **not** merely an assistant to the group leader. It is someone who has caught the vision of what groups are all about. **A leader and shepherd-in-training.**

An apprentice can take over the leadership of your group, freeing you up to launch a new group, or the apprentice can be trained to plant and lead their own group after a season of training and observation.

HOW DO I IDENTIFY MY APPRENTICE?

In looking for a potential apprentice, it is important to remember that you are *not* looking for someone who can lead your group tomorrow. You are looking for a teachable group member who has the potential to be a great group leader in the future. Below are some key points when choosing your apprentice:

- It is important that this person/couple has a personal relationship with Jesus.
- Is this person/couple worth following? Can they model what it looks like to be in a growing relationship with Jesus Christ?
- Has this person displayed leadership skills (i.e. facilitating discussions, providing care, planning socials, etc.) in your group?
- Are they committed to the mission and strategy of the UCC?
- Have you been able to connect relationally with your potential apprentice?
- Have you seen this person connect with other members of your group?

HOW DO I DEVELOP MY APPRENTICE?

We know that no two apprenticeships will look the same because everyone is unique. There is not a magic formula for developing an apprentice, and naturally you will want to tailor your approach to fit your personality and that of your apprentice.

RECRUITING

Why did Matthew follow Jesus? Because Jesus invited him to. Jesus didn't ask for volunteers to be his disciples — he picked them. He made a general call for people to believe in and follow him, but he handpicked the men who would lead the way. The act of inviting people to leadership, if done well, can communicate that they are valued and respected. Consider the following invitations to leadership:

Sample Approach: *“Our Groups Coach said I need to have an apprentice, so I put your name down. You’d kinda be like the assistant group leader, that cool with you?”*

Alternate Approach: *“I can really see you and your spouse leading a new group. I think you bring a lot to the table and I can tell that you really believe in discipleship through small groups. So, I’d like you to consider being the apprentice leader for the duration of this group, to prepare you to lead your next group.”*

Alternate Approach: *(ask potential apprentice to meet for coffee or dinner) “I have been watching you and I see tremendous leadership qualities in you. I think you would make an amazing leader. Would that be something you would be interested in? You could apprentice under me until you are ready to lead your own group?”*

The invitation is also your first opportunity to cast vision for what apprenticing and group leadership is all about. Share the passion you have for your role as the leader. Share with them why you think their gifts are well suited for the role. Most potential apprentices are going to have some reservations about becoming a group leader; chances are they don't feel qualified to lead a group. Your invitation is an opportunity to address their concerns, while also building them up. It also provides a natural segue into communicating the expectations for both group leaders and apprentices. For the most part, their understanding of what group leaders are supposed to be is governed by what they see you doing. If the two of you are gifted in different ways, and they don't feel like they would be good at the things they see you do well, they may not think they are suited for group leadership. This is a great opportunity to discuss what a group leader is and what it isn't. They may still be overwhelmed, but at least they know what is expected of them. If you've taken this strategic view of recruitment, you will have begun the development process by:

- Affirming their value and leadership skills.
- Casting vision for both the group leader and apprentice role.
- Communicating what is expected of them as apprentices.

If they accept your invitation to leadership, they will be ready to embrace the rest of the development process.

MODELING

The apprentice will learn what group leadership is all about by simple observation. How you lead discussions (listen more than talk, rein in the overtalkers), demonstrate authenticity, how often you interact with group members outside of the group meetings — all of this communications a lesson about group leadership.

It's important to discuss with your apprentice before and after your group sessions how things went and provide specific examples as teaching illustrations (i.e. Sally went off topic so talk about how you redirected the conversation back to the study) For example, if you want to teach sensitivity response tell you apprentice prior to group, “tomorrow night's discussion is probably going to provoke some emotional responses from Kelly, since she recently lost her stepmom who was not a Christian. I'd like you to listen to how I respond to

her comments and questions, and you and I can talk later about why I responded the way I did.” This helps your apprentice pay particular attention not only to what you do, but also your method or approach.

INVOLVING

To build competence and confidence, Apprentices will need to practice leading a group. They will need opportunities to put into practice what they have learned through your modeling. The best way to prepare them is to actively involve them in leading your group.

Start Small —You can start by asking them to take the lead on a specific area such as: planning a social event, leading the discussion time, or leading the prayer time.

Build up — As they show they’re ready, invite them to play an increased role in leading the group. You might give them the opportunity to lead the entire group meeting instead of just one part. Present them with the chance to direct the group through a key discussion like discussing next steps to planting a new group. You can also involve them in major decisions or conflict resolution, as appropriate.

Provide and invite feedback — As they take on responsibility, give them feedback on how they’re doing. Be sure that you give more affirmation than criticism. Just as important as you giving them feedback, ask them to reciprocate. How did you do; what went well, and how could you have done it better?

Encourage training — Make sure your apprentices are invited to any training events. Not only will this provide practical training and vision for group leadership, but it will reassure them that our church is committed to supporting and training them. Success is another competent leader who is ready to take your place as a new group is planted.

PLANTING

The final phase of the apprenticeship process is the multiplication/planting phase. It is particularly significant for your apprentices because that is the time when the idea of leading their next group begins to solidify in their minds. Since planning for multiplication means planning to plant two or more future groups, your apprentices will need to be on board and intimately involved with the planning. Ideally, multiplication should be seen in a group within 18-24 months.

CONNECTING

A group leader is a key position, therefore connecting the apprentice with church staff is crucial to the apprentice’s preparation for group leadership. As soon as you have recruited your apprentice, notify your Groups Network Leader so that the apprentice can be invited into the leadership process.

The Groups Network Leader is responsible for guiding your apprentices through the application process. You can help that process be smooth by being sure to introduce them to each other. There are several steps to approving a group leader:

1. Confirming that the apprentice is a partner of the church
2. Completing the group leader application and background check
3. Interview with a Group Network Leader
4. Approving the applicant

As your group moves into the final third of its life and your multiplication date approaches, follow up with both your Network Leader and your apprentice. Confirm that they are taking the necessary steps to move the apprentice toward group leadership and if there is anything you can do to help.

By making a commitment to identifying and developing an apprentice (replacing yourself), you are playing a significant role in raising up the next generation of leaders and ensuring there will always be a place for those who are needing to connect in a group.

Apprenticing helps people grow in ways they never imagined. As a leader you have the opportunity to identify leadership qualities in someone who doesn't see the leadership potential in themselves. Shadowing a group helps an apprentice practice the trade without the pressure of being fully responsible for it. They can grow from training and encouragement until they are capable to lead on their own.

Learn to coach and emotionally support your group members. They may struggle with group change or expansion because they have struggled to find deeply connected relationships in their lives and therefore may buck the idea of the dynamics changing. Helping your group members understand the love that's behind the growth will help the transition be successful. Have open conversations regularly and remind your members that we must always have an outward focus of growth so that others can experience discipleship and the love of Jesus.

SUMMARY

Your objective as Small Group leader is to shepherd your group members. You do this by:

1. Leading them in spiritual truth and helping equip them with skills in their spiritual walk
2. Helping them discern the difference between what is true and false
3. Providing accountability – lovingly confronting mistakes and providing wisdom & guidance for redirection
4. Properly planning and prepping each group meeting so that group is effective and meaningful (PRAY)
5. Encouraging vulnerability by sharing your personal stories and encouraging others to share
6. Spending time with your group in prayer
7. Devoting time and attention to service projects in the community to share Christ's love
8. Being flexible! People change as they experience life and our world & culture changes as well; there is no official manual for Small Groups so at the end of the day, read the emotional cues from your members and simply love them like Jesus and encourage them to daily seek personal spiritual growth!