

Community Group Leadership Manual



Community Covenant Church

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What are Community Groups?

The ultimate goal of life together at Community Covenant Church is to glorify God. We seek to do this by building bridges of connection with Him, one another, and the world. Therefore the intention of Community Groups is to equip the people of God to live life and exercise their spiritual gifts to that end.

The “Mini-Church”

A Community Group is a small group of individuals who meet together on a weekly basis to discuss and practice Scripture, pray, worship, encourage one another in the Christian life, and reach out to an unbelieving world.

Community Groups are intended to function as a “mini-church.” This means they ought to replicate, on a smaller scale, the marks of the larger church family of Community Covenant Church. This means that Community Groups should embody the vision of Community Covenant: to build bridges of connection with God, one another, and the world.

There are several ways God may use a Community Group to accomplish this purpose. Group members may experience conversion, recommitment of their lives to faith in Christ, a season of maturing, the development of spiritual gifts, and/or blessing our city. Group members may begin exercising their gifts as leaders becoming, themselves, Community Group leaders. Relationally, people can develop friendships with other believers. Often group members begin to care for one another in practical ways (meals for those with medical needs, helping one another move, rides, house projects, etc.). Other times friends from Community Group help think and pray through life decisions.

We are trying to accomplish a lot with Community Groups. We hope they will be meaningful times of studying God’s Word, prayer, worship, learning, growing, serving, reaching out to others in and out of the church, accountability, sharing life together, and much more. Obviously all of these elements will not occur at every meeting, but hopefully, over the course of time a Community Group will incorporate each of these and function as a “mini-church” within the larger body of Community Covenant.

Two Critical Components of Church Life

Community Covenant Church is committed to discipleship. Sunday worship services and mid week Community Groups are two critical components of discipleship at Community Covenant. Acts 2:42-47 gives us a wonderful picture of the early church. Verse 46 tells us that they were “attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes.” During Sunday worship we join together corporately as “the temple” (Eph. 2:21-22) to acknowledge God as our creator and redeemer and to offer ourselves to him in hope that he would continue to mature us both individually and as a body of believers. During the week, we gather in homes as Community Groups to “break bread” and personally engage one another regarding our lives of faith, encourage one another according to our individual needs and life situations, and impact our surrounding community for his glory and honor.

As you can see Community Groups are not a new or novel idea. Christians have been gathering together in small groups at homes ever since the Church was born. Perhaps one of the reasons they did this was because there were over 3,000 people in the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:41). Even in a church

our size it is very difficult to cultivate meaningful relationships apart from a small group community. Therefore Community Groups are the primary place for people to feel connected to Community Covenant Church.

Two Types of Community Group

Some Community Groups will consist of people from various stations in life. These are called Intergenerational Community Groups. They are comprised of married people, single people, those with children or without, single parents, young and old, new believers, not-yet-believers, or those who have known Christ for many years. People from vastly different backgrounds contribute to a rich Community Group experience. People with varied perspectives are able to share insight when discussing Scripture and encouraging one another to live out the Christian life.

Some groups will consist of people from the same station in life. These are called Life Stage Community Groups. Some of these include married groups, family groups, post-college groups, etc. While members may still come from many different backgrounds, they find commonality in a particular stage of life that enables them to encourage and challenge one another in their faith and also develop peer friendships.

Community Group Leadership

Since Community Groups are such a vital part of our life together as a church, your role as a leader is crucial. At Community Covenant Church leaders are recognized as people who are consistently seeking growth and maturity in their daily walk of faith in Jesus Christ, exercising their spiritual gifts, and serving the body.

The Priesthood of All Believers and Gifts for Building the Church

Part of what it means to be a Christian is to follow Jesus and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The result of the indwelling of the Spirit is that believers are endowed with spiritual gifts. Along with gifts comes responsibility to exercise the gifts by using them to strengthen and edify the Body of Christ and to bring the Gospel to an unbelieving world, all to the glory of God.

The New Testament teaches that there is not a hierarchical system among God's people, rather we are all called to serve as a kingdom of priests, all exercising our gifts together (1 Cor. 12, 1 Pet. 2:4-10, Eph. 4:11-13, Rom. 12:3-8). All believers possess spiritual gifts, whether they are aware of it or not, and ought to use them!

The Marks of a Community Group Leader

Community Group Leaders ought to display certain spiritual gifts, strengths, and personal characteristics. However, no Community Group leader has reached perfection, nor are they expected to. Here is a list of qualities of a Community Group leader:

- There is evidence in their day-to-day life, habits, and desires that they are growing in Christ.
- They exhibit a commitment to Sunday worship services and Community Groups including preparedness for Community Group, participation in discussions, worship, etc.
- They show pastoral interest in the lives of the people around them. They display relational characteristics of connecting, caring, encouraging and reaching out to others.
- They exercise spiritual gifts. Although all spiritual gifts can be used by God in Community Groups, the most common are pastoring, encouragement, discernment, hospitality, prophesy, administration, and evangelism.
- They are developing the ability and habit to converse with others regarding issues of faith and what they are learning from spiritual disciplines such as reading Scripture, prayer, worship, and teachings on Sunday.
- Their personality includes the ability to be assertive (at least somewhat) when necessary and simultaneously humble. They are able to lead and be led.
- There is a willingness to serve including a commitment to coordinating the logistics of Community Group (weekly meetings, Sunday hosting duties, group outreach, service projects, etc.) and to participate in leadership training, retreats, and meetings.

Myths Regarding the “Qualifications” of a Community Group Leader

Occasionally a capable leader will shy away from an official role as a Community Group Leader because he or she has a misconception of what it takes to be a leader and what a Community Group leader does. The following are some false assumptions that are NOT REQUIRED of Community Group leaders:

- Community Group leaders must have lives that are totally together and nearly flawless if not perfect.
- Community Group leaders must have a superior and commanding knowledge of Scripture including all the answers to difficult questions.
- Community Group leaders must read extra books and prepare beyond the study materials used for their groups.
- Community Group leaders must intimately disciple each and every person in their Community Group.
- Community Group hosts must have immaculate, spotlessly clean, dust-free homes.
- Community Group hosts are responsible to personally provide everything to everyone anytime anyone needs anything.

Community Group leaders are like all other people. They are imperfect, sinful, people with full lives beyond leading a Community Group. However, their love for Jesus and desire to serve Him and His body equips them to be leaders.

Roles & Responsibilities of Community Group Leaders

There are three general areas for which Community Group leaders are responsible.

Pastoral: Shepherding Your Group

Since Community Groups are essentially “mini-churches” leaders need to be pastoral. Don’t be intimidated! Functioning as a pastor means simply that you exercise spiritual oversight for the group. You are the shepherd of your group. The paid pastoral staff is not capable of relating to and nurturing each and every person at Community Covenant Church. Community group leaders relate to and get to know members of their Community Group by virtue of meeting together on a weekly basis. Community Group leaders pastor or shepherd their group members by:

- Praying for the Community Group members.
- Encouraging group members (during group time and/or individually) to pursue spiritual disciplines and be in intimate fellowship with other believers.
- Being attentive to life circumstances that may be difficult. This might include an encouraging phone call, note or e-mail, or coordinating assistance in moving or helping with meals.
- Encouraging Community group members to take an active role in, and responsibility for, the life and wellbeing of the Community Group.
- Enabling members of the Community Group to begin to, or continue to, exercise their spiritual gifts in the body (in Community Group, youth group, children’s ministry, etc.).
- Exhorting or challenging an individual regarding recurring and unrepentant habits that are inconsistent with a Christian lifestyle. (Hopefully this is infrequent!)
- Leading the group in community service projects and outreach for the purpose of impacting Santa Barbara, Goleta, and the world for Christ (i.e. serving at Transition House, Life Network, or the Rescue Mission, organizing a barbeque for un-churched friends, supporting/sending a missionary, etc.).
- Praying over and raising up future leaders. Community Group leaders ought to replicate themselves by seeking and mentoring potential future leaders.

Each leader should have a rough idea of the spiritual condition of the people in their group. If someone suddenly disappears from Sunday worship for a month, who should call them to see what’s going on? The Community Group leader who knows them best. If someone needs counseling it is their Community Group leader who ought to be able to direct them to help or notify their Encourager for direction. The point is that a shepherd needs to know the condition of the sheep! This does not mean that you have to personally disciple everyone in your Community Group. But, it is important for a shepherd to encourage discipleship relationships among the members of the group. Here are a few suggestions on time-effective ways to shepherd/pastor your group:

- Use the phone! Take just a few moments on the phone to say hello and see how someone is doing.
- Use your eyes. Look around on Sundays for people in your group. Connect with him or her. If someone from your group is not there, is there a reason?
- Use your lunch hour. Just about everyone can grab a brown bag lunch at least once a week. If a leader did this once a week in the course of a few months he or she would have shared a meal with everyone in his group.

Logistical: Orchestrating Your Group

Community Groups don't just happen. Leaders orchestrate several basic logistical aspects of a Community Group which include:

- Getting people in the door to Community Group each week.
- Facilitating a discussion of the study (not teaching the study), times of worship, sharing, and prayer. These can be delegated to capable members and potential future leaders as well.
- Planning or delegating the planning of meals, dessert or extra-curricular Community Group activities.
- Coordinating Sunday hosting duties (all Community groups are responsible on a rotating basis).
- Creating a welcoming, comfortable, trusting, chaos free, environment where group members can safely and sincerely share.
- Communicating information to the leader's Encourager regarding changes in membership, leadership or other pertinent issues.

Personal: Growing in Christ

The pastoral and logistical responsibilities of leaders are crucial to developing healthy, productive Community Groups. However, the ability to function in these roles does not come out of a vacuum. Exercising leadership flows from one's personal life. The greatest thing that you can do for your group is to be in love with Jesus. The hope is that each leader is developing personal habits which enable him or her to:

- Grow deeper in personal relationship with God. To be growing does not mean that you have "arrived" spiritually!
- Develop gifts and abilities in leadership.
- Let people see your successes and failures, joys and frustrations in your spiritual journey.
- Ask for help when a situation arises which is beyond your comfort zone and personal ability to address.
- Enjoy serving as a Community Group leader. If leading is consistently too stressful or overwhelming a break is recommended for a season with the invitation to return to leadership when able. Leadership is not intended to cause burnout!

Roles & Responsibilities of Group Members

A rich Community Group experience is the responsibility of each person in the group not just the leaders. The core elements of a Community Group are facilitated by the leaders. However, when Community Group members invest themselves they will experience deeper fellowship, enjoy Community Group more, and grow closer to God.

It is our hope at Community Covenant Church that group members embrace Community Groups in such a way that produces commitment and enthusiasm to make the group experience good for all involved. The following list may be useful to discuss early in the formation of a Community Group as well as when a group is struggling to be coherent.

Be Consistent

Attend Community Group every week. Consistency helps people in the group to get to know and appreciate one another, to pray for and encourage one another, to trust and enjoy one another.

Be Prepared

If your group curriculum requires preparation then do it! Preparation will ensure valuable discussion. Lack of preparation will ensure lack of discussion. Set time aside during the week to examine God's Word and prepare for the Community Group discussion.

Be Real

Remember that each and every person is an important member of a Community Group. Because we are all created as unique and valuable individuals by a gracious and merciful God, we will each contribute to our group in a way no one else can. All of us! This gives us great freedom to be real with one another that we may truly know and be known by one another.

Be Together

Enjoy each other's company. Have meals together before Community Group or after church, or any other time! Interact socially. Spend time together with one another outside of weekly Community Group meetings.

Be Curious

Ask each other questions and share with one another about your lives. "What is your story?" "Where have you come from in life?" "What issues impact your life?" "What takes your time?" "How do those things impact your Christian faith?"

Be Responsible

Be responsible with personal information shared in Community group. People will not feel safety in sharing if what is shared is not respectfully held in confidence. Care, encourage, but don't gossip!

Community Group Composition

Community Groups at Community Covenant Church are ongoing, with a consistent roster, rather than a place to drop in when convenient. Community Groups entail commitment over the course of a season. Time together is necessary for a group to develop relationships through worship, sharing and studying Scripture, which in turn enable members to encourage and challenge one another to live the life God calls us to.

Regardless of size, Community Groups are designed to be open to new members. This is important if we want to see every Sunday attendee in a Community Group and to fulfill the third bridge of reaching the world for Christ. Adding new members can bring new life to a group that has become stagnant and predictable.

Several factors are considered when Community Groups are formed.

Seasons

Just as the calendar year has seasons, so also the “church year” has seasons. For Community Groups we divide the year into three seasons, fall, winter/spring, and summer. September is the beginning of the fall season. It is also the time when Community Groups are heavily promoted during Sunday Worship Services. Therefore, September is a great time to form new groups or for existing groups to welcome new people. Each September people who attend Sunday Worship Service will be encouraged to sign up for a Community Group. There will be another promotion with sign ups in January, the beginning of the winter/spring season.

Taking Breaks or Ending a Group

Between seasons are good times for Community Groups to take short breaks. Groups tend to naturally break during December. Groups also tend to take a break midway through the winter/spring season during Easter. Sometimes groups need to take an extended break for a season (i.e. summer). This is okay! It is a good, healthy, and biblical thing to take a Sabbath rest. Sometimes, for various reasons, a Community Group must permanently stop meeting. This is also okay! Community Groups are not necessarily intended to go on forever.

The Life Cycle of a Community Group

Logistically the optimal size for a Community Group is between 10 and 15 people. Jesus gathered with 12. Certainly smaller groups can thrive, but if a group gets larger than 15 people, due to dynamics, it begins to cease being a small group.

In some cases a Community Group may need to be temporarily closed to new members. This decision should be made after a leader has sought council from his or her Encourager.

If a Community Group grows larger than 15 people it is important to begin thinking about multiplying the group. This can be a very rewarding experience for a group and it can be a very challenging experience. If a group allows itself to grow to this point it is important to plan to plant a new

Community Group. This will require willing and prepared people to lead the new group. It is important for the leaders to work closely with their Encourager in this instance.

Identifying New Community Group Leaders

It is our desire at Community Covenant Church that every person that attends Sunday worship would participate in Community Groups. That means we need more leaders! Therefore it is crucial that Community Group Leaders notice people in their groups who exhibit gifts, qualities and habits of leadership. The next step is to affirm them as they develop and function as leaders, and then encourage them to move into recognized Community Group leadership. The names of potential leaders should be given to the Community Group Leader's Encourager for follow-up.

Material

Study guides that correspond to the Sunday sermon are provided for Community Groups. When a group uses the study guide members are expected to complete the weekly studies individually and come prepared to share their discoveries with their Community Group. The upcoming sermon would then cover the same passage or topic. By wrestling with a biblical passage individually, wrestling with it together as a group, and finally hearing from the pastor, we can be sure that we have effectively heard from God through his Word.

That being said, Community Groups are free to choose whichever material they would like to study, provided that material is biblically based. While we are not completely against Community Groups spending seasons reading spiritually edifying books, we strongly suggest that they spend most of their time in the Bible. God's Word is amazing, inspiring, life-changing, scary (in a good sense) and fun.

Encouragers

The Encouragers exist to be a resource and an encouragement to Community Group Leaders. The Encouragers provide training materials, prepare leaders' meetings, and provide leadership, vision, and direction for the Community Group ministry as a whole.

Every Community Group Leader will be assigned an Encourager. Any questions that a leader might have regarding their group ought to be directed to their Encourager who is available to meet individually with the leader to field questions, trouble shoot, or brain storm.

Hosting

Community Groups have the privilege and joy of serving the larger church family by helping with Sunday hosting on a rotational basis. This includes helping provide refreshments, distribute bulletins,

and take offering. Leaders should obtain a Hosting Guide from Bev Matlick through the church office. Bev may be reached at 967-2671x101 or bmatick@community-covenant.org.

Sample Community Group Covenant

When a Community Group begins it is important to clearly communicate to the members the expectations of the group. Often times leaders will present the group with a Group Covenant. A Group Covenant outlines clearly and concisely the commitments of the group. The following is a sample Group Covenant. Feel free to use this however you see fit. You may copy it directly, edit, or amend it to fit your Community Group.

As a Community Group Our Goal Is

To build a bridge of connection with God, one another, and the world.

As a Community Group Our Ground Rules Are

1. All members share equally in the ownership of the meeting. Please come prepared to minister and be ministered to.
2. The group will move from house to house as the group may decide.
3. We want to be courteous to one another by not having one person dominate the conversation.
4. We desire to take our masks off and be transparent with one another.
5. We will help keep the interaction in line with what Christ is doing in our midst and refrain from "chasing rabbits". (Story telling that is irrelevant to the subject being discussed.)
6. We will all be responsible for the care of the children in our group.
7. We will keep matters shared in the group in strict confidence. Please don't share anything talked about here with others.
8. We will reach out to family neighbors and friends with Christ's love, trusting God to deepen their relationship with Himself through the group. We will all work together to determine an evangelism plan that works best for our group relationally.
9. We will each be open to being involved relationally outside of meetings, in which we will be deepened in our walk with Christ.
10. As God grows us and as we encourage one another, we each will be open to becoming leaders as God leads us to plant new groups.

Thank You!

We, the Encouragers, want to thank you for answering God's call to serve him as his under shepherd. We pray that the Good and Chief Shepherd Jesus Christ will bless you and use you for his glory to your great delight. If you have any questions regarding the Community Group ministry in general or your Community Group specifically please do not hesitate to contact any one of us. God bless you!

The Encouragers

Brian & Alicia Larson	687-1274	brianguy7@hotmail.com
Steve & Molly Long	967-7485	long@ece.ucsb.edu
Christian & Jill Schalesky	967-2744	cschalesky@community-covenant.org
Denise Bogard	571-0161	denise.bogard@gmail.com