

Life Group Handbook (often otherwise known as Small groups, Community Groups, Sunday School, Church Education)

The Bible calls us to unity (e.g. I Peter 3:8) *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*

The human counterfeit of unity is uniformity. Uniformity is merely the collection of similar people. Unity is the integration of the gifts and strengths of diversity all pulling in the same direction. It is more powerful, adaptable and biblical.

Life Groups must be developed in such a way as to allow and encourage unity.

Primary Purpose - Friendship

At South Spring Baptist Church, the primary purpose of Life Groups is to give the opportunity for our members and guests to *make friends* within our congregation.

Remember the old song from the 80's TV show, Cheers?

"Making your way in the world today takes everything you got; taking a break from all your worries should would help a lot... Sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name, and they're always glad you came. You wanna be where you can see troubles are all the same..."

As our ministry continues to grow, the main worship meetings will not likely be places where people can meet each other and develop fellowship easily. Events are likely to become opportunities more and more, for members to serve, but not really make friends. It is important for followers of Jesus to know each other and to be known by each other. Isolated Christians aren't very successful. We all need somewhere where people know our names.

There are about 400 verses with the phrase "one another" in them. These kinds of relationships are a vital and irreplaceable aspects of the Christian Walk.

Well, we agree, and though we aren't opening a new pub or anything, but we do want to invite others and each other for an opportunity to come hang out together in fellowship. The Bible seems to agree as well.

Look at the "Bulletin" from the first church services (found in Acts 2:42):

"...And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

Notice the community nature to the early church. Teaching might not require us to know each other well (though talking about the teaching of others might) but fellowship, eating, and prayer all are about developing relationships (especially in that part of the world).

In a growing church, that can become difficult and even impossible in the regular worship service. It is easy to just attend and vanish with anonymity. There will always be people who want to do that in church, but we do not think that is best, so we do not want anyone stuck with only that option.

That is why this is an “*opportunity for our members and guests to make friends within our congregation.*”

Our prayer is that you will, each and all, take that opportunity.

As a secondary, but still vitally important power of some Life Groups: It also is meant to be a good potential way to introduce *new friends* to the church (entry point) who might not otherwise be comfortable.

Church and church buildings and traditions intimidate people sometimes, but they might feel good about visiting someone’s home for some chips and salsa and a book study.

Secondary Purpose – Service Integration

Meeting Options

Semester Based or Ongoing

Semester Based

For the sake of getting the chance to make new friends, and to avoid some of the pitfalls of typical church fellowship group models, most of our life groups run on a semester basis. There are fall & spring semesters and sometimes groups run in the summer as well. There will be a schedule for creating the Life Groups (around August and January) and then the groups will run for as many meetings as the group leaders desire.

Ongoing

A few Life Groups run without the semester break (most of these on Sunday mornings, as mentioned below). Ongoing Life Groups are also growth life groups and have to have a strategy for growth and multiplication.

Sunday Morning or Other meeting times

Sunday Morning

These are essentially the same as traditional Sunday School classes. Many of them are age or life-stage related (though not all). They tend to run continually, without semester breaks, though the semester based ones are sometimes hosted on Sunday mornings as well.

Other Meeting Times

Life Groups can meet at any time that the leaders choose that work within the overall system of the working of the church. There are multiple times during the semesters when Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry are running programs as well. These are great times for Life Groups to be hosted, obviously. Even in these times, having spots for all kids is not guaranteed; clear communication is key.

Sometimes, the best times for groups are when the target audience is available – lunches, early mornings, evenings, etc.

Ingredients

Life Groups must include:

The Preeminence of Christ (Col 1:15-18)
Intentional Community (Luke 10:1-2)
Friendship (Proverbs 27:6)
Fellowship (James 5:13-16)

They might also involve some mixture, (but not necessarily all) of these, meeting by meeting:

Service (Ephesians 2:10)
Accountability (Gal :1-2)
Education (Philippians 4:9)
Prayer (James 5:16)
Experiences (Romans 12:4-5)
Encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25)
Mission (Matthew 28:18-20)
Growth (Ephesians 4:11-16)

So, while some groups and some meetings might involve prayer requests and prayer, not all will. And, again, be creative as to the methods for people to gather.

How to start a Life Group: (aka: “So you want to start a life group”)

Omnia ad majorem Dei gloriam

This Latin motto – meaning “all things to the glory of God.” Our vision is that shepherd-hearted people will be able to lead and facilitate Life Groups based on their passions, interests, perceived needs and gifts. We want people to see how hobbies, sports, books, studies, and more can be lived out for their growth and God’s glory.

Life Groups are lay-led ministries. The goal is that the lay-leaders are free and well trained. The leaders will become equipped equippers.

1. Recommend a Life Group idea to the staff leaders and get feedback.

Life Group leaders need to be established members of church of good standing and reputation. It is important to remember that leaders need to work hard to protect the name of Christ first, and also that of the church or the leadership and membership. Pray through the ideas and ask God to guide you. He knows what your life holds next even when we don’t. Please communicate consistently any issues that could affect these throughout the process.

2. Decide what kind of Life Group it will be.

You need to determine purpose, topical, audience, etc. Creativity is encouraged in the creation of Life Groups, within the bounds of the purposes of these groups.

3. An idea for a Life Group does not guarantee that one can be created.

Similar groups, schedules, space and other community issues may keep a life group from being created at any given time. Be patient and graceful about these decisions, please.

4. Team up with another leaders.

We recommend that each group have more than one leader or leader couple, since if the one leader has a crisis, the entire group may dissolve.

5. Sign up for training, if/when it is offered. Attend training.

SSBC’s new training plan will require each teacher to take the different classes for their area by 2020 and following before they can lead a group or teach a class.

6. Start up – and keep in contact and communicate often.

After signups, the leaders will be given the contact information for those who signed up for the group. Make sure and communicate well with them. Especially any changes to the program need to be communicated.

7. Debrief, think, pray about next semester.

You may decide to try to host the Life Group again whether you think it went well, got many people, etc. or not. It is not a failure to determine not to host it again.

Plan:

Develop a Grid of following through these populations and topics

Target populations

Unchurched people

Newly churchd people

Foster/adoption

Singles of various ages

Marred without kids

Parents of young children

Parents of older kids

Parents of teens

College

Empty nest

Seniors

Topic/Teacher classes

Special Needs kids

Widows

Topics

Evangelism

Hermeneutics

Finances

Marriage

Children

Disciplines

Bible

Life Group Development Plan 2018

Our goal is that there is great freedom for Life Groups. Our desire is that people will have room to express their gifting, interests and passions to develop friendships (*make friends*). However, this mechanism doesn't work to accomplish this unless the leaders are equipped to shepherd us effectively.

By Sept 1 2018(?)

Roll out the Training Plan

By Sept 1 2020

Only Trained Leaders & Teachers can Lead or Teach Life Groups

Training

- * There would be significant Training – maybe 20 hours.
- * There would be various teachers expressing different strategies.
- * There would be various topics

Bibliology and Hermeneutics,
Spiritual Gifts,
Community Development,
Learning Styles,
Drawing Boundaries,
Making friendships,
Leadership Support,
Facilitating Scriptural conversations,
SSBC strategy & vision, etc.

Some of this training might be online and require projects, etc

Eg. Spiritual Gifts – Training is recorded and will be online.

Homework: Write at least 20 notes to 20 people making examples of each of the 16 gifts at least once (“I see this gift in you...”)

- * There would be different additional training tracks

Children
Youth
Adults

- * Some of these classes might need to be retaken every few years.
There would be continued CEU requirements.