NEW SMALL GROUP

LEADER GUIDE

ARC'S MISSION We exist to lead people to be fully devoted followers of Jesus.

Why small groups matter

Following Jesus is personal, but it was never meant to be private. Small groups create a dependable place where people are known, pray, seek to become like Jesus and do as he did, and encourage each other to take a next step in their faith.

The goal is not a perfect community. It is a community in which God uses ordinary people, over time, to form people in Christlikeness through healthy spiritual friendships.

Your role: create conditions for growth

A small-group leader is a shepherd, not the group's teacher or therapist. You help people belong, engage with truth and grace, care for one another, and respond to what God is doing.

- **Welcome people intentionally.** Learn names, notice who is new or quiet, and make room at the table.
- **Guide rather than dominate.** Ask good questions, keep the conversation moving, and let members discover together.
- **Model the culture.** Be prepared, honest, dependable, teachable, prayerful, and appropriately vulnerable.
- **Help people take a next step.** These may include simply returning next week, asking for prayer, serving, joining a class, baptism, or a deeper practice of following Jesus.
- **Share the care.** Invite members to encourage, pray for, and follow up with one another. You do not carry every need alone.

REMEMBER God changes people. We don't. Give grace relentlessly, and trust the process.

Prepare well. Hold the plan loosely.

Preparation communicates care. It also frees you to be fully present when the group arrives.

Before each meeting

- Pray for each person by name and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom, love, and attentiveness.
- Review material you intend to discuss. Identify keys truths and applications, hoped-for responses, and two or three ideas you most want to discuss.
- Coordinate practical details: time, location, childcare expectations, food, accessibility, technology (if needed).
- Communicate clearly. Send a brief reminder and note anything members should bring or complete.
- Prepare the environment. Aim for comfortable seating, minimal distractions, and a setting that puts people at ease and supports conversation.
- Plan the landing. Know roughly how you will close, pray, and end on time.

Build a healthy group culture

Culture forms quickly. Name expectations early, model them consistently, and revisit them when the group needs a reset.

VALUE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Confidentiality	What is said in the group stays in the group. Safety concerns are the exception. Leaders seek help rather than promise secrecy.
Grace and respect	We listen without fixing, shaming, or debating. We can disagree without becoming disagreeable. Bring light, not heat.
Participation	Everyone is encouraged to share. No one is pressured. Make space for different personalities, backgrounds, and stages of faith.
Shared ownership	Members help with hospitality, prayer, communication, and care. The group is not a performance by the leader.
Consistency	We arrive, communicate absences, begin and end near the agreed time, and protect the group's rhythm.

Facilitate a life-giving discussion

Good facilitation is less about saying impressive things and more about helping people listen to Scripture, to one another, and to God.

Use questions that open, deepen, and apply

1. **Open:** What stood out to you? What surprised, encouraged, or challenged you?
2. **Deepen:** What do you notice in the passage? What does this show us about God, people, or faith?
3. **Clarify:** What makes you say that? Where do you see that in the text or in your experience?
4. **Apply:** What might obedience, trust, or a next step look like this week?
5. **Pray:** How can we pray for you as you respond?

Habits of a skilled facilitator

- Ask one clear question at a time, and then allow silence. People often need several seconds to think.
- Listen for what is underneath the words. Reflect back what you heard before moving on.
- Invite, do not pressure: "Jordan, is there anything you'd like to add?" is better than putting someone on the spot.
- Connect contributions: "That builds on what Maya noticed…" This turns a string of answers into a conversation.
- Affirm participation without declaring every answer correct. Try: "Thank you for sharing that," or "That's an important question."
- Keep Scripture central without turning the meeting into a lecture. When opinions multiply, return gently to the passage.
- Watch the clock. Protect time for application and prayer instead of letting the opening question consume the meeting.

When the conversation gets difficult

One person dominates.

Thank them, then widen the circle: "I appreciate that. Let's hear from someone who hasn't had a chance yet." Follow up privately if the pattern continues.

The room goes quiet.

Wait. Rephrase the question, make it more concrete, or let people discuss in pairs before returning to the whole group.

Someone gives advice or tries to fix another person.

Redirect toward curiosity: "Before we offer solutions, could we ask a few questions and understand more?"

A controversial issue takes over.

Acknowledge its importance, clarify what the group can address tonight, and return to the main purpose. Offer a separate conversation when appropriate.

You do not know the answer.

Say so. "That's a good question. I'd like to look into it and come back next time." Then follow through or ask a pastor for help.

LEADER POSTURE Be curious. Be calm. Be clear. Your tone often shapes the room more than your words.

The first meeting

The first night is about connection, clarity, and confidence. People are deciding, often quietly: Do I belong here? Is this safe? Will this be worth returning to?

A simple plan

1. **Welcome personally. Be** ready early. Greet each person by name and introduce people to one another.
2. **Share something light. Food** or a simple opening question lowers anxiety and helps names stick.
3. **Explain the purpose.** Cast your vision for what you hope your group will be like and describe what members can expect this season.
4. **Agree on the expectations.** Discuss confidentiality, participation, attendance, communication, and ending on time.
5. **Begin meaningful conversation.** Use accessible questions. Avoid demanding vulnerability before trust exists.
6. **Pray simply.** Explain how you will approach prayer, invite requests without pressure, and keep the first experience warm and unforced.
7. **Clarify next week.** Confirm time, location, preparation, communication channel, and the best way to reach you.

The first few weeks

- **Prioritize trust over depth.** Appropriate vulnerability grows as people experience consistency and care.
- **Follow up quickly with** anyone new or absent. A short, personal message communicates, "You were noticed."
- **Notice the group's patterns:** who speaks first, who stays quiet, who connects outside the meeting, and who may need extra care.
- **Share small responsibilities early.** Ask members to bring a snack, open in prayer, send reminders, or lead one question.
- **Reinforce expectations gently.** It is easier to shape culture in week two than repair it in month six.

Prayer, care, and wise boundaries

Groups are often where people first say what is really happening. Receive that trust with compassion, and remember that faithful care includes knowing when to involve others.

When someone shares a need

1. **Listen without rushing.** Give full attention. Thank them for trusting you with what they've shared.
2. **Clarify what they want.** Ask, "Would it help most for us to listen, pray, offer practical support, or help you connect with someone?"
3. **Pray with permission.** Keep prayer honest, hopeful, and free of promises God has not made.
4. **Follow up.** A brief message within a day or two can matter more than a perfect response in the moment.
5. **Escalate when needed.** Contact Pastor Svea or other pastor or ministry leader. In an immediate emergency, contact emergency services.

WHEN TO BREAK CONFIDENTIALITY Seek help whenever there is concern about immediate danger, suicide or self-harm, abuse or neglect, violence, serious impairment, or a situation beyond the group's ability. Share only with the people who need to help.

Healthy pastoral boundaries

- You are not expected to diagnose, counsel beyond your competence, investigate allegations, or become someone's only source of support.
- Avoid secret-keeping, rescuing, financial entanglement, or one-on-one situations that compromise safety or trust.
- Keep communication appropriate and transparent. When care becomes frequent or complex, involve ministry leadership early.
- Honor privacy, and unless someone's safety or well-being is at risk, do not share anything about someone if they haven't given you permission to do so.

After every meeting

- **Review:** Who engaged? Who seemed unsettled, isolated, or ready for a next step?
- **Respond:** Send promised information, check on absences, and follow up on care needs.
- **Record:** Complete attendance records in Church Center.
- **Reach out:** Contact another small group leader or Pastor Svea when you need support.
- **Release:** Pray, entrust people to God, and resist carrying the group as though everything depends on you.

Lead from grace

You will have awkward silences, unfinished conversations, last-minute cancellations, and nights that feel ordinary. That does not mean God is absent. Keep showing up. Keep listening. Keep pointing people toward Jesus. Celebrate small steps, learn as you go, and let others help you.

A FINAL WORD You do not have to lead perfectly. Be faithful, stay connected, ask for help, and trust God to use you in His work.