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God's Grace in Small Groups: Creating an Engaging, Relational, and Formative Small Group  
Ministry in the Methodist Tradition

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## **Abstract**

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This paper explores the ways that small groups can build community and increase commitment among church members. The Methodist tradition has a long history of small group discipleship. The class meeting of early Methodism provided a way for members to connect with each other and experience accountable discipleship, but the class meeting is virtually nonexistent in modern Methodism. How can that history be revived and lived out in congregations today? This paper reflects on an implementation of a new model for small groups in Floyd United Methodist in Floyd, Virginia. Three new groups were formed for members in the church community to meet together. These small groups used a guide that was developed around the model of the early Methodist class meeting, as well as the tools of appreciative inquiry and asset mapping. In launching these new groups, both new and long-time members of the congregation were able to form new friendships and become more committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

God's Grace in Small Groups: Creating an Engaging, Relational, and Formative Small Group  
Ministry in the Methodist Tradition

By

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## Introduction

Alongside worship services and missions, pastors and church leaders often include small groups as a necessary part of a church's ministry. Yet, small group ministry can sometimes be an afterthought, and they exist in today's churches in a wide variety of ways. Some churches use a more traditional "Sunday School" model offering classes before or after a Sunday morning worship service, while other churches may offer small groups which meet in homes during the week that go through Bible studies or discussion questions together. This paper will explore the benefits of small group ministry and share how a United Methodist congregation revisited a historical model of small group ministry from Methodism's past to reignite their small group ministry.

Small groups themselves are wonderful tools in organizing and sustaining any community. Small groups exist in the world generally for care and support, learning, achieving a shared task, and sustaining values and commitments.<sup>1</sup> These reasons for small groups can also be applied in a faith context. In church small groups, research indicates that people who participate in a small group are more committed to the church overall, attending worship more often and giving more time and money to the church, no matter the size of the church.<sup>2</sup> Studies have also shown that churches that offer robust small group ministries are more racially and ethnically diverse and are more likely to grow in membership.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Walton, *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups* (SCM Press, 2014), 81-82.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Small groups can also help churches with member retention. Larry Osborne in his book *Sticky Church* posits that small groups are the answer to keeping members engaged and committed to a congregation.<sup>4</sup> Small groups can be an excellent way to engage people who are new to church or searching for deeper community. What many church leaders like Larry Osborne are addressing is the tendency for American churchgoers to “church shop.” Some churches struggle to retain members for many years. Small groups are one way church leaders are seeking to create a deeper commitment among members to their particular congregation.

The primary reason for small groups in local churches is the opportunity for deeper discipleship. When people participate in small groups, they are much more likely to report feeling closer to God.<sup>5</sup> Jesus modeled discipleship in small groups by inviting a small group of twelve to be his disciples. David Lowes Watson draws a helpful distinction in Jesus’s ministry. He states that while Jesus had unconditional love for all and ministered to crowds of people, when it came to discipleship, Jesus placed conditions.<sup>6</sup> Being a disciple of Jesus required sacrifice and commitment to the way of Christ. Just as the disciples were able to grow in their faith by being closer to Jesus, so Christians grow in their faith when they are close with each other in small groups. Small groups are places where the divine and the world intersect to form ecclesial practice.<sup>7</sup> The work of Christ and the ministry of the church is lived out in individuals

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<sup>4</sup> Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Zondervan, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Theresa F. Latini, *The Church and the Crisis of Community: A Practical Theology of Small Group Ministry* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 50–51.

<sup>6</sup> David L. Watson, *Class Leaders: Recovering a Tradition* (Discipleship Ministries, 1998), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Latini, *The Church and the Crisis of Community*, 7.

when they bring their faith into their everyday lives. Small groups help facilitate that work by connecting the church's ministry with the everyday lives of its members.

In my own experience, small groups have played a vital role in my own faith development. The Sunday School classes I attended as a child taught me and formed me in the Christian that I am today, and my own calling was reenforced through small groups I participated in during college. Many deeply committed Christians point to small groups as an integral part of their faith formation, yet many churches today struggle to organize and effectively carry out small group ministries. Churches today often wonder how to keep people engaged in the life of the church or how to invite their members into deeper commitment to Christ and the church. An effective small group using the components of John Wesley's original class meeting model can foster Christian community and encourage deep discipleship within congregations.

### **The Role of Small Groups in Formation of Methodism**

For those of us in the Methodist tradition, a small group lies at the heart of the beginning of the Methodist movement: the Holy Club at Oxford. This group formed after a movement of religious societies began in England, and John Wesley and his brother Charles were inspired to form a small group of their own.<sup>8</sup> The Wesleys, as well as George Whitfield, illustrated what it means to participate in small groups through the Holy Club. These three along with others met regularly for Bible study, prayer, devotion, and other means of grace. They were also insistent on helping those around them as a part of their group participation. They visited the sick and those in the hospital, and they visited with people in prison and gave food to people who were hungry.

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<sup>8</sup> David L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance*, (Discipleship Ministries, 1987), 68–69.

This early small group in 16th century England is what many today point to as the beginning of the Methodist movement. Even though George Whitfield had profound theological differences with John Wesley (particularly around Calvinism and predestination), they still were close friends, illustrated publicly by Wesley preaching Whitfield's funeral at Whitfield's request. Most attribute this to the lasting friendship that they had going back to this early small group.

### **Class Meetings in Wesley's Day**

John Wesley believed so strongly in the benefits of small groups that he organized Methodists into class meetings. Class meetings were an important part of early Methodism during the time of John Wesley. Because Methodism was reaching people who were either unable or barred from attending congregations, small group meetings became the primary means of spiritual and religious practice for many Methodists. Wesley organized two main kinds of meetings: the society and the class meeting.<sup>9</sup> Societies were the larger gatherings of Methodists, but class meetings served as the foundational unit. Class meetings were for approximately twelve people (though some were as large as twenty). Classes were intergenerational and were not separated by gender or marital status.

Methodists had to regularly attend a class meeting for three months before they were eligible to join a society.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of the class meeting was to "implement an accountable discipleship among the society members."<sup>11</sup> A common phrase used in describing the work of the

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<sup>9</sup> Steve Cordle, *The Church in Many Houses: Reaching Your Community Through Cell-based Ministry* (Abingdon Press, 2005), 47.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 95.

class meeting is “watching over one another in love.”<sup>12</sup> It was through class meetings that people learned about the Bible, shared the struggles and joys of life, and served their communities in Christian service. In class meetings, participants were asked:

- “1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?”<sup>13</sup>

While these questions were prodding, Methodists wishing to go deeper in their practice of meeting together with others could join a band meeting. Band meetings went even further into accountability, and there were different types of meetings. Out of all the types though, class meetings stood as the foundational organizational unit of early Methodism.

Class meetings were not only a requirement of early Methodists, but they also enabled many to take on new leadership roles. People regardless of their gender or economic status were able to be class leaders. Wesley selected class leaders personally for most of the classes. Soon, the number of classes became so great that other leaders began to help select the class leaders. When Wesley died, there were around one hundred thousand Methodists who were a part of over ten thousand small groups.<sup>14</sup>

### **Class Meetings and American Methodism**

When Methodism moved to America, class meetings remained a central part of the Methodist practice. Methodists were still required to attend class meetings regularly, and failing

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Seedbed Publishing, 2014), 22.

<sup>13</sup> Cordle, *The Church in Many Houses*, 48.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 47.

to do so resulted in expulsion from Methodist membership. Due to the lack of preachers, class meetings became the regular gathering body of Methodist congregations, and often the line between church and class was blurred.<sup>15</sup> For most Methodists, their class leader was their primary provider of regular pastoral care, only seeing their circuit-riding preacher once a quarter. The class leader did visitation, seeing those who were new members, those who were sick, and those who were falling away from the faith.<sup>16</sup>

Then, Methodism in America began to grow exponentially (Methodism in England was growing also). As Methodism grew, the less strict Methodists became about adhering to class meetings. Conflict arose among Methodists as the Methodist movement began to transform into a church. Class leadership was not uniform in qualifications, understanding, or practice. And as it became more socially acceptable to be a Methodist, there was greater desire to move away from the deeply personal questions of the class meeting. Eventually in 1889, a conference committee decided to keep class meetings as a basic organization unit but no longer required attendance as a basis for membership.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Sunday School Movement and the Loss of Class Meetings**

In American Methodism, class meetings eventually gave way to “prayer meetings,” then to Sunday School. The decline of traditional class meetings in American Methodism coincides with the rise of the traditional Sunday School model. Sunday School quickly became the primary

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<sup>15</sup> Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> Kenneth C. Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism: Second Edition* (Emeth Press, 2009), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 137.

model for Christian formation and education in American churches. Sunday School classes were not focused on group discussion but rather instruction from a teacher, usually using a curriculum. Over time this model of Christian education took the place of class meetings in Methodist congregations, and listening to a teacher talk about the Bible became more popular than promoting traditional Methodist class meetings.<sup>18</sup> Another major reason for the decline of class meetings was the move from circuit riding preachers to stationed pastors. When Methodists began to be able to hold Sunday service every week with a pastor present, then the class meetings began to lose their value. Class meetings were commonly held after the Sunday service, but eventually they were stopped.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the move away from class meeting caused membership and attendance to begin to level out, eventually stopping the growth and starting a decline that still exists today in American Methodism.<sup>20</sup>

### **Small Group Movements Outside of Methodism**

In more recent American church history, small group models other than “Sunday School” have made a resurgence. Many contemporary and “non-denominational” churches do not have traditional Sunday School classes. Rather, they offer small groups that meet in members’ homes and other locations during the week. While this may primarily be because of a lack of space, it has also signaled a shift in popular religious practice in the United States. Other contemporary groups may trace their roots back to the class meeting style gatherings of England. One example

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<sup>18</sup> Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism*, 70.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel Emerick. *Spiritual Renewal for Methodism: A Discussion of the Early Methodist Class Meeting and the Values Inherent in Personal Groups Today* (Methodist Evangelistic Materials, 1958), 44.

<sup>20</sup> Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 30–31.

is Alcoholics Anonymous, where members inquire about one another and share openly with the goal of changing behavior.

### **Case Study: Reintroducing Wesleyan Small Groups in the Local Church**

Floyd United Methodist Church is an active congregation in the heart of small-town Floyd, Virginia. The church is known for its community events, uplifting worship services, and excellent music ministry. It is not necessarily known for its Christian education ministry, and small group ministries are a weakness of the church. Historically, the church has used the Sunday School model; however, like most congregations, the congregation has experienced a decrease in attendance and this model needs reinventing or replacing for the church to have a long-term Christian formational ministry based around small groups.

The congregation has just over 300 members, with an average attendance of 100. The congregation is in a rural town with people living throughout the county. It is a mix of people, with different political leanings and convictions on social issues. The congregation is also intergenerational, with many young families as well as retirees. The diversity of the congregation is unusual for southwestern Virginia, but it reflects the diversity of the Floyd community. People from all over the country have moved to Floyd to retire in its rural setting.

The town of Floyd is quite small with most people living outside of its bounds. The church, though located within town, is a church for the whole county. While the congregation is diverse in age and ideology, it reflects the lack of diversity in the surrounding county. Floyd County has approximately 15,658 people. The county is 49.7% percent female (compared to the church's 59% female), and the county is 95% white. People who identify as black make up 2.2%

of the county, with Hispanics at 3%. The congregation also reflects this lack of racial diversity, as it is 99% white.<sup>21</sup>

The mission of the congregation of Floyd United Methodist Church is “to share the good news of Jesus Christ in order to bring about Christian revival and inspire scriptural holiness.” The congregation’s vision statement is “to be a place of worship, prayer, learning, fellowship, and service in Floyd so that lives may be transformed in the name of Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> These statements were approved during my first year as their pastor in 2019. In many ways, these statements reflect how the congregation sees itself. Even though the congregation is growing in terms of attendance and membership, it is changing. One of those changes is Sunday School attendance, and the word “revival” in the mission statement alludes to the desire of some of the older members to return to the way church “used to be.” Sunday School attendance at the time of the adoption of these statements was in steep decline with only around 25 weekly participants.

The vision statement attempts to list the different actions or ministries of the church. “Worship” is listed first and is seen as the primary function of the local church. As their pastor, I have observed how the worship service serves as the primary venue for the congregation to connect with one another. Before and after the worship service, people visit and talk with one another causing the service to consistently begin late. After the service, many people remain in the Sanctuary to visit and catch up with friends and neighbors. The church invests a lot into its music ministry, and the primary emphasis of worship is clear.

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<sup>21</sup> Data on Floyd County is from the U.S. Census, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/floydcountyvirginia>.

<sup>22</sup> “Who We Are,” Floyd United Methodist Church, accessed December 2, 2024, <https://www.floydumc.com/who-we-are>.

“Learning” is also included, and it is true that Bible study is important to the congregation. Sunday School classes could be one way that this component of the vision statement is lived out; however, most people attend a midweek Bible Study that I teach as the pastor in order to learn more about the Christian faith. “Fellowship” is a word the church members use often. Each month, the church hosts a breakfast before the worship service on the fourth Sunday for members to attend and fellowship together. During the summer months, the church also hosts an event entitled “Friday Night Food & Fun” where members of the church and community are invited to a free meal and fellowship together in the church’s picnic shelter behind the church’s parking lot. This is a popular event which also speaks to the focus of “service” in the church.

The church has a deep connection to the local community in the way that it serves. While the congregation does do a couple of international mission projects annually, much of focus on service is tied to the local community. In addition to the free Friday night meals, the church hosts blood drives regularly, provides meeting space for local nonprofits free of charge, and every Sunday collects canned food and other nonperishables for the local food bank. All of this speaks to what the congregation values, but how can these values be lived out in small groups?

When people began returning to in person events after the COVID-19 pandemic, church leadership began to see how different we had become as a church. Not everyone was comfortable attending large gatherings, and additionally many new people had emerged who had worshiped online. These people were knowledgeable about the church from watching the worship services, but the church did not know these people. Not only did the congregation need to create new ways for people to grow in their faith, but the church had to also consider how to build and form Christian community. It was important that the new people coming into the church feel included

and be introduced to others. It was also important to the leadership of Floyd UMC to invite people into deeper commitment. During the pandemic, the church saw some members move to other congregations who had taken different approaches (or taken no action) in response to COVID-19. This caused the church to seek ways to foster a deeper commitment to Christ and to the congregation among its members.

### **Communicating and Explaining Small Groups to the Congregation**

In launching these small groups, the first and major challenge to overcome was explaining a different kind of small group ministry to the church. For most people in the congregation, Sunday School was the only model of small group ministry they had witnessed. Just the idea of sitting in a circle and discussing a topic, rather than sitting in rows and listening to a presentation was unsettling for some. Others seemed to believe that small groups were not necessary for spiritual growth. The emphasis the congregation places on the worship service showed in some members' insistence on visiting with each other in the Sanctuary before and after the service instead of attending Sunday School. When confronted with the possibility of a new way of doing small groups, many in the church were confused as to even why it was important.

To begin, the history of the Methodist movement and historical emphasis on small groups was taught to the church's leadership. At a Church Council meeting, a presentation was given explaining this history of class meetings and how they functioned in early Methodism. The leadership was then asked to participate in one of these small groups as a part of their service to the church in their leadership role. Just as historically class meetings were required for Methodists, it was an *expectation* that church leadership participate in some kind of small group.

Once the leadership was onboard, the idea of a new small group ministry was shared with the larger congregation.

The congregation was made aware of a new small group model being launched through a simple Sunday morning announcement. This announcement did not give many details of what the groups would look like, but instead focused on role small groups can play in our spiritual growth. The “ask” was not for people to consider being *in* a small group, but rather to think and pray about whether they would be willing to *host* a small group. It was explained that the new small groups would meet in homes rather than rooms in the church. Hosts were asked to open their home up at least twice a month for a small group and to provide hospitality through working to provide some kind of food at the group’s gatherings (whether coordinating a potluck or providing simple refreshments) and a comfortable place for up to twelve people to gather.

In making the requests, several people volunteered to host a group—as long as they did not have to lead the group’s meeting. It became clear that people either had the gifts and abilities to be a host *or* to lead the group. In every group that was formed, the hosts were not the ones leading the group. Someone else was recruited to lead the group’s gatherings.

### **Training Group Leaders**

One of the key lessons learned in implementing these small groups was to equip and train leaders to carry out the groups. Because a small group ministry that is different than Sunday School is foreign to many in the church today, leaders will need to be trained in what they are expected to do as a group leader. Churches implementing a new way of doing small groups must share a new vision with people who can lead these groups. Communicating this vision and training leaders can be a challenge, but the more a congregation invests in the group leaders the

more successful the groups will be. When it comes to small group leadership, a helpful way to approach recruiting leaders is “Identify, Invite, and Invest.”<sup>23</sup>

Pastors and ministry leaders must take the time required to prayerfully and thoughtfully identify who in the congregation would make an excellent leader. In Methodism, the “Class Leader” was a highly respected office. John Wesley carefully selected class leaders who he believed to be deeply committed to the Methodist faith and exemplary in their good works. He also commanded that those selecting group leaders never choose preachers to lead the groups. Wesley even advised that the most “insignificant” person be placed as the leader.<sup>24</sup>

When people are invited to be group leaders, the invitation must be honest and comprehensive. People need to know what all is involved in being a group leader. For example, it requires time spent in study and preparation. It also requires time for training and a willingness to touch base with the pastor about care concerns and report on participation, etc. Group leaders must also understand confidentiality and be committed to attending the group’s meetings. Additionally, persons considering being group leaders must also understand that they might have to step outside of their comfort zone. They will need to pray for the group, both privately and in the group’s meetings.

### **The Format of the Groups**

In crafting a format for the groups, I discovered that some structure was needed, but how the groups lived out their purpose looked different based on the people in the groups. Wesley’s original class meetings, though with some structure, were flexible and allowed leaders to meet

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<sup>23</sup> Ryan T. Hartwig, Courtney W. Davis, and Jason A. Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*. (Zondervan Reflective, 2020), 184.

<sup>24</sup> Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, 100.

their members where they were.<sup>25</sup> Since people in the groups were at different places in life and at different stages of their faith journey, this made flexibility necessary. What emerged was a guide for the groups with a structure consisting of four movements: fellowship, share, discover, and pray (Appendix A). As long as the groups stayed within this structure, the meetings were spiritually meaningful and created grace-filled spaces for the group members.

The first movement of *fellowship* enabled the groups to get to know one another and “break the ice.” During this part, groups provide food and a warm welcome. Some groups provided dinner, while other group provided light refreshments. The importance of eating together was taken from Jesus’s ministry, when Jesus ate with people, including those who were “sinners and tax collectors,” people who others despised. Jesus’ example of radically welcoming all served as the foundation for this first movement. An effective small group should be one that is able to welcome people in such a way that each person feels like they belong.

During this first movement of fellowship, introductions were always made, if needed. Any time a new person attended, people would introduce themselves and get to know each other. Because this first movement is more informal, with people gathering and moving around, introductions were never awkward or required people to be “put on the spot.” But rather, people introduced themselves more casually, which allowed for connections to be made quicker. It was also a time for the group’s leaders to make sure they had everyone’s contact information. This is an important step in making sure that people feel a part of the group. Most groups chose to use a text group, but there are a variety of ways that groups can connect. Whether through text, email, or church-provided apps, establishing communication is important for any group to last.

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<sup>25</sup> Emerick, *Spiritual Renewal for Methodism*, 46.

All three of the Floyd UMC groups provided food during this first portion of their gatherings. This allows people time during this first part to let down their guard and get to know each other better through light conversation. It also allowed time for people to arrive late without feeling like they were interrupting the meeting. For the young adult group at Floyd, this time evolved into a full dinner. Providing dinner helped parents be able to bring their kids and have one less thing to do that day. The young adult group also provided childcare which would begin during this time and last through the gathering. During this time, parents could get their kids settled in a room where the kids could play during the meeting. Parents could also use this time to meet the person (for this group, a high school student) who would be staying with the kids.

The second movement for our groups' gatherings was a time to *share*. This time built upon the historical Methodist question of "How is it with your soul?" To contemporize it some, we used the question, "How is your walk with Christ?" The benefit of this kind of question is its openness. Group members can respond in a variety of ways depending on their level of comfortability. When a group is just beginning, answers to this question will be more general, as if they are simply replying to someone who asked them how they were doing. As the group progress and trust is built among group members, answers will become more personal and detailed.

The hope of this question is that, after trust is built among group members, people will be able to use this time to talk about the ups and downs of life. This is the key to carrying out small groups in the Methodist tradition: the group members must be accountable to each other. The phrase "accountable discipleship" was first used by David Lowes Watson, but it has since become a key descriptor of Wesleyan-style small groups. Steven Manskar in his book entitled

*Accountable Discipleship* invites Methodists today to see Covenant Discipleship as a modern interpretation of the classic Methodist class meeting.<sup>26</sup>

Covenant Discipleship is based around a covenant that all the group members write together to bring clarity and commonality as to what each member is being accountable. Manskar's model invites group members to write a covenant with commitments in four areas: acts of compassion, acts of justice, acts of devotion, and acts of worship.<sup>27</sup> This pattern is promoted on the Discipleship Ministries website of The United Methodist Church. While resources about Covenant Discipleship were made available to the groups at Floyd, none of the group leaders decided to introduce a covenant in the first year of meeting together. The fear was that the covenant would be too intimidating, and first trust must be built between group members before something like that could be implemented. In the future, covenants may be made introduced and then added to gradually so as to not overwhelm anyone new to the Christian faith.<sup>28</sup>

The third movement for the gatherings is entitled *discover*. This was a time for learning from each other about a particular topic or study. Many small groups in today's church use some form of curriculum, whether a published quarterly or more often a DVD-based Bible study. While a group certainly could implement a form of Bible study during this time, I instead opted to develop a new curriculum to guide the discussion time. This curriculum was heavily influenced by research around appreciative inquiry and asset mapping. By using these tools,

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<sup>26</sup> Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household* (Discipleship Ministries, 2000), 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>28</sup> For more in depth instructions on how to craft a covenant, see Steven Manskar's book *Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups & Class Leaders*.

participants in this part of the gathering were invited to reflect on their past and imagine how God could use them together with the others in the small group to do ministry.

The discover portion of the format had an overall flow to it. First, the participants would take turns sharing their faith story. This was always done by invitation and clearly stated that no one had to share. Sharing stories (or “testimonies”) continued for over half of the groups’ meeting during their first cycle (the fall of 2024). Then, the groups moved to understanding their gifts using a spiritual gift assessment tool provided by website of Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church. After sharing their results, the groups discussed its surrounding community—its strengths and needs. From this conversation, the groups planned service projects to help address the needs and lean into the gifts of the group. Finally, the last part of the *discover* portion was to imagine what the group would look like during the next cycle.

The first weeks of sharing faith stories was based around appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry was developed as a tool for organizations to reflect back on what has gone *right* in order to plan for the future instead of what has gone wrong.<sup>29</sup> In order to incorporate this into the small group, participants were asked to answer reflection questions when sharing their faith story. Of course, grace is a major part of the approach to the groups. If someone shared something difficult from their past, there was always grace shown towards the person. However, the reflection questions did not focus on the person’s mistakes from the past, but rather how they made it to the groups and ways God has been at work in their lives in the past. The discussion questions were:

1. Where did you grow up?
2. What was your family like growing up?
3. How did you come to know Christ?

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<sup>29</sup> Cameron Harder, *Discovering the Other: Asset-Based Approaches to Building Community Together* (Alban Institute, 2013), 83.

4. How did you find our church?
5. Have you been a part of other denominations or religions?

In answering these questions, participants in the groups were able to get to know one another much better. This allowed the group to develop strong friendships quickly which helped to cement the groups together. While these may seem like basic introductory questions, they led people to share positive ways that they have experience God's grace in their lives. This allowed the groups to build a foundation of understanding that enabled the groups to flourish.

The next portion of the discover section relied on asset mapping to understand the gifts of the groups' members and surrounding community. Asset mapping looks at the gifts of individuals or a community in order to cultivate positive change and helpful processes.<sup>30</sup> Michael Mather in his book *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything* articulates how asset mapping can make a profound difference in a community. One of the principles he articulates is, "Everything begins with and builds on the gifts of our neighbors."<sup>31</sup> Before participants in Floyd's small groups planned ways to serve their community, they took an online spiritual gifts inventory. This inventory provided a helpful way to understand the spiritual gifts of the members. The results of the inventory were just part of the gifts assessment. Participants discussing their results allowed for more in depth understanding of the unique gifts of each individual and the stories behind what appeared in the results.

After better understanding the gifts of the individuals in the group, the third part of the discover section was to use the gifts of the group to plan a service project. For example, the young adult group did work at a local Christian summer camp, primarily because one of the

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<sup>30</sup> Harder, *Discovering the Other*, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Mather, *Having Nothing, Possessing Everything* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 120.

directors of the camp was a member of the group. Her deep connection with the camp was a gift for the group, because she knew exactly what needed to be done. Another group realized that all the members of the group were empty nesters, and many had spiritual gifts of care and teaching. After understanding those as gifts, they planned a Parents' Night Out for others in the church community who still had young kids at home. The event would allow the group members to use their gifts to care and teach the children during the event. The results of the spiritual gift inventory also helped members of the groups know how they can contribute better to the overall church community, even going as far as to discuss what committees would best fit them! Part of asset mapping is not just understanding but creating helpful processes and connections.<sup>32</sup> Each cycle the groups discuss their gifts and plan a service project. This conversation extends beyond the group member to the broader community as well, identifying gifts in the community such as nonprofits working with the poor that the groups can support.

The final part of the discover process is an evangelistic component. Group participants were asked to imagine what might be next for the group. How does the group need to change? Who can we invite from our church community to be a part of our group? How can our group work cooperatively with other groups and organizations inside or outside the church to serve the community? This final component asks small groups to see beyond themselves and prayerfully envision their future as a group.

The final movement in the meeting pattern may seem simple: *pray*. Yet, it can be the most challenging one of all. In this moment, people are invited to share prayer concerns. From my own observations, this has proven to be the most vulnerable time for members. The second movement (share) invites group members to be extremely vulnerable, yet in an unfamiliar way.

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<sup>32</sup> Harder, *Discovering the Other*, 110.

Asking for prayer concerns is a language that many people who are familiar with church understand. It is during this part of the gathering that people shared about the illnesses of relatives and work struggles.

Another reason this part may seem difficult is the unfamiliarity of praying in front of others. Even people who were raised in church their whole lives may be uncomfortable praying out loud. Two of the three group leaders reported asking other members to pray because they were not comfortable with praying (hence the instructions in the training section on ensuring your group leaders have experience praying out loud). This was not a problem, though, as other members in the groups stepped up. The final prayer at the end also serves as a blessing and benediction for the meeting. Often the prayer reflects on the group's gathering through thanksgiving and lifts a take-away from the gathering in the form of a petition before God.

### **Evaluating and Replicating Small Groups**

While attendance is certainly a popular metric, there are other ways to evaluate the effectiveness of small groups. By looking at the initial purposes of the groups, you can ask whether or not these purposes are being fulfilled. If a congregation has decided that small groups should help people in certain places in life, then you can evaluate whether or not the participants of the small groups are in the same place in life or are having needs met for where they are in life. If learning is a goal of a congregation small group ministry, then an evaluation of the effectiveness of the study or lessons taught could be an evaluative tool. If a small group's purpose includes outreach into the community, then a report on a service project that the group completed could be useful in evaluating the group.

In evaluating the groups, it also will become clear when groups need to replicate. By looking at attendance, if you see a particular group is excessively large, then that group may need to divide into multiple groups. Similarly, if a group within a particular small group has reached a new place in life (for example, some in the group have started families and now are caring for young kids) then the group may need to turn into two groups. Another reason for replication would be if group members move to different areas and wish to start groups in new neighborhoods. Three helpful questions to ask are: “Have you achieved your purpose?” “Are you growing in number?” and “Are new leaders ready?”<sup>33</sup> These simple questions will help any ministry leader evaluate the current state of their small group ministry.

Neil McBride gives four areas for evaluation that are helpful in determining the next steps for a small group: details, format, relationships, and leadership.<sup>34</sup> Details refer to the general details of when and where a group meets. Usually, these details are inflexible and changing them will upset the rhythm of the group. In thinking about format, consider not just the proposed format but also how well a group sticks to that format. If someone is dominating the conversation and preventing the group from moving through all parts of the format, this is something that needs to be addressed. Relationships refers to how well the members of the group get along with each other. A small group that is hostile toward each other will not succeed. And finally, leadership must also be addressed. There are times when a person needs to step away from leadership. Perhaps this person turned out not to be a gifted leader and someone else would do better. More likely, when someone needs to step aside from leadership it is because life situations have changed, and they are no longer able to make the commitment. Allowing people

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<sup>33</sup> Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive*, 206.

<sup>34</sup> Neil McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (NavPress, 1990), 124–125.

to transition out of leadership when needed will save a group from dying out because of inadequate leadership.

### **Tools for Evaluating Small Group Ministry Effectiveness**

As previously mentioned, attendance is only one way to gauge effectiveness. Surveys and interviews are also ways to measure a small group ministry's impact. In Wesley's day, class leaders were expected to meet with the minister once a week. Class leaders provide ways to receive feedback and hear stories from the small groups which can shed light on their vitality. Another important measure is the number of small groups. Small groups should be growing and multiplying. The number of small groups is the main measurement that Floyd UMC has chosen to study over time. Another helpful measurement is the percentage of members (or those who attend) that are a part of small groups. Unlike in Wesley's day, Methodists today exist as a fully separate church with its own worship services. Since small groups are ways for people to go deeper in their faith, they rarely are means for evangelism. Small groups with accountable discipleship grow best out of worshipping communities (e.g., a member invites another church member to attend with them or a church member talks to the pastor about going deeper in their faith). Effective small groups are ones that invite people who are in a shared worshipping community into accountable discipleship practices.

### **Survey Results from Case Study**

After the groups had met for four months, two of the three community groups at Floyd United Methodist Church gathered to share a dinner together and to discuss insights from their time as a group (all three were invited, but no members from the third group were able to attend).

The small group participants enjoyed spending time with each other, while meeting others and hearing other people's perspectives on small group experiences. As a part of the event, small group participants were invited to complete surveys about their time in a community group. Thirteen people completed the survey about the small groups (Appendix B). Of the thirteen who completed the survey, seven were from one group and six were from the second group represented.

The survey was divided into two parts. The first provided quantitative data. It asked respondents to rank statements on a scale from 1 to 10 on how true the statement was to their experience in a community group. The statements were: “My community group helped me grow closer to God,” “My community group helped me to know others in the church,” “My community group gives me a sense of belonging,” “I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group,” and “The people in my community group are a source of support for me.” The table below shows the average responses to each statement.

**Table 1: Average Responses from the Community Group Survey**

Statement	Average Response
My community group helped me grow closer to God.	7.7
My community group helped me get to know others in the church.	9.7
I feel like I belong in my community group.	9.2
I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group.	7.8
The people in my community group are a source of support for me.	8.8

The results from the survey show that the community groups enabled participants to grow closer to God and each other. The results also show that the groups so far have been very inclusive. People feel like they belong in the group and feel supported by their fellow group members. It also shows that people felt more committed to the church. The statement that received an average score between 7 and 8 (the lowest ones) were the statements focused on discipleship: growing closer to God and being more committed to the church. One reason for this may be that the groups' initial focus was not on going deeper in faith but simply laying the groundwork for that to occur later through getting to know other group members. Another reason for this could be that other ministries in the church are oriented toward discipleship formation, but these small groups are unique in their goal to build deep community within the participants.

The second part of the survey consisted of open response questions. The questions were: "What is the best part about your community group?" "Why did you decide to participate in a group?" "How has the group changed you?" "Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?" "If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?" and "What would you like to see in the future for community groups?" The responses to the survey were anonymous, and the full answers from each survey participants are included in Appendix B. These responses indicated clearly that people's motivation in participating in these groups was to get to know others in the church more. The groups were filling a void in the ministry of the church where people were not able to feel really connected to the worshiping community. Another theme from the responses was the openness and welcoming nature of the groups. "Welcoming," "friendliness," and "open" were repeated words in the responses. Overall, the responses were very positive, with many people desiring the groups to meet more often.

One of the takeaways from this survey was that the small groups helped people feel more comfortable not just in the group, but in the church as a whole. One participant stated, “I don’t feel anxious about showing up to church alone and feel like I belong to the church family more.” The welcome that was extended in the small group was translated as a welcome into the larger church community. The groups served as an effective way of welcoming people who are new to the church community. For two of the three groups, over half of the participants in those groups have joined the church or started attending within the last three years.

Another key takeaway from the survey was that the format of the groups was new to the participants. This could speak to why the discipleship related statements got the lowest average responses. Discipleship through conversation and mutual sharing is new to the church community. One survey responded expressed a desire to “dive into the Bible more.” Another stated they would like their group to have a “designated book” to study, and another stated they wanted more guidance for their group’s discussion. This illustrates that most churches do not simply rely on sharing but instead use some kind of Bible study or published curriculum to guide the group. Kevin Watson speaks of this as an “addiction to curriculum” present in today’s churches that must be overcome in order to fully live into what it means to do small groups in the Methodist tradition.<sup>35</sup>

A final takeaway from the survey was the success of the groups’ ability to incorporate service into the expectation of the group. The service project that resulted from the appreciative inquiry and asset mapping was mentioned in the surveys multiple times. These respondents saw the service projects as part of the group’s overall mission and purpose. One respondent stated

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<sup>35</sup> Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 7.

desiring to do more things “out and about” with their group and meeting in different locations. Though the groups involve introspection and personal commitment, there is an outward reaching component to the groups as well.

### **The Life Cycle of a Small Group**

No small group will last forever. A common life cycle of small groups put forth by Jeffery Arnold is a four-step cycle of a honeymoon period, followed by a period of conflict, leading to an action period, and finally termination.<sup>36</sup> Since the groups at Floyd are new, these groups haven’t experienced this full cycle yet. However, in carrying out a small group ministry, a church must be prepared for how to replicate the groups. The first stage in Arnold’s cycle is a “honeymoon period” characterized by excitement and fresh joy surrounding the group. All of the groups at Floyd seem to still be in this initial phase. Arnold’s second stage is one of conflict. This could be the result of inadequate leadership or simply frustration over finding meeting times that work for all members. The third stage is where the group settles in and does its work. This is where small groups best accomplish their initial purpose. The final stage in Arnold’s cycle is termination where for any number of reasons a group disbands.

Other, more hopeful, cycles acknowledge that there may be times of disagreement, but that the small group’s life cycle begins with an introductory period, followed by a season of spiritual growth that ultimately should lead to replication.<sup>37</sup> This assumes that when the group is evaluated it is healthy and fulfilling its purpose well. Groups that are healthy will eventually

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<sup>36</sup> Jeffery Arnold, *Starting Small Groups: Building Communities that Matter* (Abingdon Press, 1997), 22.

<sup>37</sup> Hartwig, Davis, and Sniff, *Leading Small Groups That Thrive*, 201.

need to replicate to continue to be the most effective that it can be.<sup>38</sup> This ultimately means though that the group will not last forever, and it may mean that the group comes to an end sooner than the members expect or desire in order for the overall small group ministry of the church to be the most effective it can be.

### **Conclusion**

Launching the new small group format proved to be an effective way of connecting members of the church community with each other and building lasting community. All three groups launched are still currently meeting a year later, and with time, I believe these groups will only grow stronger in their commitment. As the Sunday School model begins to fade out from American Christian religious practice, these kinds of small groups can offer a way for churches to invite people into small group discipleship in meaningful ways. Now that the groups are established, in place of a general announcement inviting participation in the groups, those who have participated in the groups will be invited to share with the broader congregation what the group has meant to them. This approach I believe will not only be more effective at communicating the benefits of this kind of small group ministry, but it will invite worshipers to consider being a part of this kind of group. It will speak to the heart of why the groups exist to begin with—to bridge the gap between the Sunday morning experience and the everyday lives of worshipers. Bringing back some of the practices and values from the early class meeting of Methodism will not solve all the problems facing the church today, but it is one effective way in building Christ-centered community in today's world and inviting church members to become more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 202.

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# God's Grace in Small Groups

A Guide for Leaders

Timothy Hale

# The Purpose of Small Groups

Small groups are places where spiritual friendships are built, and community is formed. Small groups are in our DNA as Methodists. The Methodist movement originated as a small group meeting at Trinity College at Oxford University in London. From there, Methodism spread through small groups called Class Meetings. When Methodism first came to America, all Methodists were required to participate in Class Meetings because of how important they are to our spiritual growth.

In today's world, no church requires members to participate in small groups, but they are still great opportunities for discipleship and faith formation. Our goal as a congregation is to have everyone who is a part of our church family participating in a small group of some kind. This model of small groups may be new to you, but it is based on the original model of a Class Meeting from early Methodism.

A successful small group is one where people are warmly welcomed, encouraged in their walk with Christ, united in their love for Christ, able to grow deeper in their faith, and inspired to share God's love with others.

# Group Gathering Format



## 1. Fellowship

This is a time for informal conversation. Food or refreshments may be provided, or a potluck meal could be shared.



## 2. Share

This time marks the beginning of the structured gathering. Group members share briefly about how they are doing in their walk with Christ.



## 3. Discover

This part of the gathering follows a guided program in which group participants will discover more about each other and what or where God might be calling them.



## 4. Pray

This is the final part of the gathering. Prayer requests are collected, and a group leader or member prays to end the gathering.

# Fellowship

*Warmly inviting all who enter.*



1. Provide food or perhaps conversation starters/icebreakers
2. Create communication channels
  - a. The church provides the Church Center app and instructions on how to join (see appendix).
  - b. Another option is to create a group text or Facebook Messenger group (avoid emails as they can become impersonal).
3. Warmly welcome folks, especially those who are new, to the group.

# Share

*Sharing the joys and difficulties of life.*



The share portion is perhaps the most important part of the gathering. In the share portion, members of the group will get a glimpse into the lives, joys, and struggles of other group members. This is a sacred time when Christian community is formed as people grow closer to each other.

1. Begin by going around the room and ask how people are doing.

Early Methodists asked this question: “How is it with your soul?” This simple question allowed people to answer generally, yet it was framed about their spiritual health. Another great way of asking this question is, **“How is your walk with Christ?”**

Answers to this question will be simple at first, yet as the group progresses answers will become deeper.

2. Establish a simple covenant to help guide this time. This can be introduced on the second or third meeting to give time for people to get to know each other a little before diving in. The appendix includes example covenants. Consider sharing an example covenant with the group as they think about what they want to include in the group’s covenant.

Crafting a covenant can be intimidating, so approach the covenant with a relaxed, yet serious, tone. It is important that the covenant be something that all the members of the group can stick to, as well as something meaningful that encourages members into deeper relationship with Christ.

If the group is new or has mostly people who are just getting to know each other, you are welcome to pick a single clause at first, such as, “We will pray for each other daily” and start there as your only commitment.

# Discover

*Discovering who God has called us to be.*



The movement of the Discover portion is:

**Story → Gifts → Service → Evangelism**

## 1. Story

Have members of the group share their faith story.

Where did you grow up?

What was your family like growing up?

How did you come to know Christ?

How did you find our church?

Have you been a part of other denominations or religions?

Consider starting these as the leader to give an example. Schedule people to share their story in advance, so people can prepare. Understand that some people may not wish to share their story. This can be for a variety of reasons. Everything the group does should be a “challenge by choice.” Explain this upfront. It’s also a good idea to place time limits on the stories to remain respectful of everyone’s time.

## 2. Gifts

In this part, the group explores the spiritual gifts of the members of the group.

## 3. Service

The group will plan a service project to share God’s love with others.

## 4. Evangelism

What’s next for our group? Who can we invite to be a part of what we have experienced?

# Pray

*Praying for one another in love.*



1. Take prayer requests
2. Have a member of the group pray for the requests and to end the time together.

# Example Small Group Covenant 1

## Our Covenant

Knowing that throughout history God has entered covenant relationships with his people, and because we are called by God to be and make disciples of Jesus, we form this group. Our covenant provides the framework for a balanced spiritual life, enabling us to be better disciples. With God as our guide, we promise to approach one another honestly in a spirit of Christian love, and to provide accountability and encouragement to grow in faith.

### Acts of Compassion

- I will balance the time I devote to church, work, family, and friends.

### Acts of Devotion

- I will include the members of my Community Group in my daily prayers.

### Acts of Justice

- I will become more aware of social situations through attention to the news (newspapers, television, magazines, radio).

### Acts of Worship

- I will faithfully join in corporate worship each week unless prevented.

Trusting in grace, I pledge to support each member as I leave the confines of comfort in my search to do God's will in the world. By affixing my signature to this document, the singular "I" becomes the communal "we".

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Example Small Group Covenant 2

## Our Covenant

Knowing that throughout history God has entered covenant relationships with his people, and because we are called by God to be and make disciples of Jesus, we form this group. Our covenant provides the framework for a balanced spiritual life, enabling us to be better disciples. With God as our guide, we promise to approach one another honestly in a spirit of Christian love, and to provide accountability and encouragement to grow in faith.

### Acts of Compassion

- I will balance the time I devote to church, work, family, and friends.
- I will practice listening to other people as a ministry of grace.
- I will express feelings of genuine appreciation to at least one person daily.

### Acts of Devotion

- I will practice daily devotions, including the reading of scripture and prayer.
- I will include the members of my Community Group in my daily prayers.

### Acts of Justice

- I will become more aware of social situations through attention to the news (newspapers, television, magazines, radio).
- When I am aware of injustices practiced in my community, my nation, and the world, I will speak out.
- I will get to know at least one person of a different ethnic background at my place of work.

### Acts of Worship

- I will faithfully join in corporate worship each week unless prevented.
- I will offer my resources faithfully to support the work of God's kingdom, beginning with the local church with which I am affiliated, with the tithe as my guide.

Trusting in grace, I pledge to support each member as I leave the confines of comfort in my search to do God's will in the world. By affixing my signature to this document, the singular "I" becomes the communal "we".

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Find more examples of clauses at: [www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/sample-covenant-clauses](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/sample-covenant-clauses)

# Community Group Timeline

This is an example of a timeline for a cycle. As a group leader, you are free to craft your own timeline for your group.

<b>Week 1</b>	Extended Fellowship Time + Introductions
<b>Week 2</b>	Sharing Our Stories (Discovery Movement 1) & Introduction to Group Covenant
<b>Week 3</b>	Sharing Our Stories (Discovery Movement 1) & Group Covenant is Set
<b>Week 4</b>	Sharing Our Stories (Discovery Movement 1)
<b>Week 5</b>	Spiritual Gifts (Discovery Movement 2)
<b>Week 6</b>	Planning a Service Project (Discovery Movement 3)
<b>Week 7</b>	Evangelism (Discovery Movement 4)
<b>Week 8</b>	Capstone Event (ex: shared dinner or lunch)

# Example Agenda: Week 1

Time	
25 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation (Collect Contact Information, if needed)
20 min.	<b>Share</b> Introductions
10 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Overview of the Group (Timeline & Purpose)
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer

# Example Agenda: Week 2

Time		
15 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation	
15 min.	<b>Share</b> Introductions (if needed) & Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"How has the past week been?" or "How have you been since our last gathering?"</i>	
25 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Two or Three People Share Their Faith Story	
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer	

# Example Agenda: Week 3

Time		
15 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation	
15 min.	<b>Share</b> Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"What's one thing we can pray for you about?"</i> and a Group Covenant is Set	
25 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Two or Three People Share Their Faith Story	
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer	

# Example Agenda: Week 4

Time		
15 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation	
15 min.	<b>Share</b> Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"How is your walk with Christ?"</i>	
25 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Two or Three People Share Their Faith Story	
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer	

# Example Agenda: Week 5

Time		
15 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation	
15 min.	<b>Share</b> Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"How is your walk with Christ?"</i>	
25 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Everyone Share Results of Their Spiritual Gifts Inventory	
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer	

# Example Agenda: Week 6

Time		
15 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation	
25 min.	<b>Share</b> Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"How is your walk with Christ?"</i>	
15 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Plan a Service Project	
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer	

# Example Agenda: Week 7

Time		
15 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Food & Casual Conversation	
25 min.	<b>Share</b> Everyone Answers the Question: <i>"How is your walk with Christ?"</i>	
15 min.	<b>Discovery</b> Reflection on the Group: <i>"What's next for our group?"</i>	
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer	

# Example Agenda: Week 8

Time	
5 min.	<b>Fellowship</b> Welcome & Prayer
50 min.	<b>Share</b> A Meal Is Shared
5 min.	<b>Pray</b> Closing Prayer

# Further Reading

*Leading Small Groups that Thrive* by Ryan T. Hartwig, Courtney W. Davis, and Jason A. Sniff (Zondervan, 2020).

*Disciples Making Disciples* by Steven W. Manskar (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

*Having Nothing, Possessing Everything* by Michael Mather (Eerdmans, 2018).

*The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* by David Lowes Watson (Discipleship Resources, 1985).

*The Class Meeting* by Kevin M. Watson (Seedbed, 2014).

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 5 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 8 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 8 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 6 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Getting to know more people and spending regular time together.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

To become more connected to the church and develop more of a community.

### How has the group changed you?

I feel a greater sense of belonging in the church.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

Just normal scheduling challenges.

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Friendly, relaxed, committed

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

More of a biblical focus and to continue with opportunities for serving the community and the church.

Which community group did you participate in?

Young Adults Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 10 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 10 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 10 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

The people

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

To get to know people

### How has the group changed you?

Feel more at home in the church

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

No

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Like minded support

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

Bigger group

Which community group did you participate in?

North Floyd Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 4 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 9 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 9 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 9 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 8 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Getting to know others in the group, and feeling part of the church.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

To get involved with the church.

### How has the group changed you?

It's made me more open to opportunities within the church.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

No

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

- Fellowship
- Laughter
- Service

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

I would like a bible study or some further structure that could help with furthering knowledge and relationship with God.

Which community group did you participate in?

Young Adults Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 10 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 10 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 10 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Meeting and growing new relationships

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

To get more involved in the church and develop relationships

### How has the group changed you?

New friendships and community

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

Daily schedules and child care

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Community, service, friendship

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

Just continuing small groups

Which community group did you participate in?

Young Adults Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

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The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 6 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 8 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 8 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 9 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

I enjoyed listening and sharing with the group about our paths growing up and how we got to UMC Floyd.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

I wanted to form stronger relationships in the church and grow closer to God again.

### How has the group changed you?

I don't feel anxious about showing up to church alone and feel like I belong to the church family more.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

Yes, sometimes timing was difficult to make it back to Floyd twice in a day. Also my child was distracting sometimes but I'm glad he got to come!

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Casual, open, and welcoming

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

I would like to dive into the Bible more to study God's Word.

Which community group did you participate in?

Young Adults Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

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## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 9 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 10 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 6 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

The fellowship and gaining genuine friends whose faith values are aligned with mine.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

I was invited and knew I could benefit from being in a community group.

### How has the group changed you?

It's helped me open up to others and be more external with my faith. It's difficult for me to connect with people and form new relationships. This is the first group I've easily assimilated into.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

None.

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Welcoming, supportive, inclusive

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

More frequent meetings, if possible. More times doing things "out and about" with each other - switching up the setting.

Which community group did you participate in?

Young Adults Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

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The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 10 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 10 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 10 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Getting to know folks in church on a deeper level than we could have by just attending services.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

We are new to the church and thought this was a great way to get to know people in the church.

### How has the group changed you?

It is helping me be more comfortable with my faith in public.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

No

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Friendly comfortable engaging

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

Different types of groups for different activities.

Which community group did you participate in?

North Floyd Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 7 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 8 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 7 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 8 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Making friends with like minded Christian people

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

To get better connected with members of the church

### How has the group changed you?

It has helped me be more open about myself

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

Talking about myself with others

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Kind, caring, happy

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

A designated book for us to read and discuss

Which community group did you participate in?

North Floyd Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 10 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 10 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 10 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Spending time with others. It has been fun to watch our group grow and how it has changed week to week.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

To be more involved and gain a solid support group.

### How has the group changed you?

I had never been a part of a small group before this. It has forced me to step out of a comfort zone and really self reflect on where I am in my spiritual journey.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

Not necessarily any obstacles. Just overcoming my introverted self.

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Supportive, caring, and involved.

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

I really enjoyed our service project. It would be nice to continue projects and give back to our community.

Which community group did you participate in?

Young Adults Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 8 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 9 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 9 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 8 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 8 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Being able to commune and share with people of faith on a more intimate level.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

I wanted to form closer relationships with my church family.

### How has the group changed you?

I feel closer to the people in my group and reassured in my faith.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

No

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Relaxing, uplifting neighbors

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

Service projects

Which community group did you participate in?

North Floyd Group

Sunday, December 8, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 6 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 9 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 6 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Getting to know the new members of our church and developing a Christian relationship with them.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

Due to health issues, we have been unable to attend Sunday worship services at church and I need the personal connection these small groups provide in a short time period. We also live near the host couple and felt this group would be a good fit.

### How has the group changed you?

It has made me realize how much I miss being in church with other people. I am looking forward to the time when we both can attend worship services regularly and return as active members.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

None

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

- Positive
- Supportive
- Focused

**What would you like to see in the future for community groups?**

I would like to see them continue with the same format—small groups meeting twice a month.

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**Which community group did you participate in?**

North Floyd Group

Monday, December 9, 2024

# Community Groups Survey

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 5 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 8 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 8 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 8 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 5 / 10

### What is the best part about your community group?

Friendly, interesting group.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

Very close to where we live.

### How has the group changed you?

It has not changed me.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

No

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Open, friendly, happy.

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

Continue the groups.

Which community group did you participate in?

North Floyd Group

# Community Groups Survey

Monday, December 23, 2024

Thanks for filling out this survey about your experience in community groups!

## Rate each statement below based on your experience in your community group.

The scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not true and 10 being very true.

My community group helped me grow closer to God. 10 / 10

My community group helped me get to know others in the church. 10 / 10

My community group gives me a sense of belonging. 10 / 10

I am personally more committed to the church after participating in a group. 1 / 10

The people in my community group are a source of support for me. 10 / 10

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### What is the best part about your community group?

Opportunity to discuss current events with a group of Christians. Getting to know new couples in our church.

### Why did you decide to participate in a group?

Opportunity to talk to other believers about personal battles in a comfortable setting.

### How has the group changed you?

Not sure if "change" is the correct word. But love our group members and enjoy the dialogue. Lots of support among us.

### Were there any obstacles you had to overcome in order to participate?

Just figuring out our agenda and goals for a new avenue of faith growth.

### If you had to describe your community group in three words, what three words would you choose?

Open expression!

### What would you like to see in the future for community groups?

Resources or materials to guide our discussions

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Which community group did you participate in?

North Floyd Group