



Life Group Leader Guidelines



Congratulations on your decision to lead an FUMC Life Group. Enclosed are a few guidelines for organizing your class, meeting guidelines, and a suggested covenant for your group entitled "Life Group Ground Rules."

What is a Life Group?

A Life Group as we have defined it here at FUMC, is a group of up to 12 people who meet regularly to share their walk with God together. Our campus-wide "Journey Through the Bible" is our "curriculum," along with the "Life Journal" to record how God is speaking through His Word in our lives. These resources provide the gateway to learning about each other and supporting each other in our personal walk with Jesus. Information shared within the Life Group is to be kept confidential.

What a Life Group is not:

- *A Life Group is not a Bible study for information, it is for personal transformation.*
- *A Life Group is not based on other books, videos etc.*
- *A Life Group is not to be a prayer meeting - keep prayer concerns to immediate members and their immediate family as much as possible.*
- *A Life Group is not a social hour.*

Your Role as a Facilitator

Your role in leading a Life Group is to facilitate the meeting, not to teach. Some basic suggestions for meeting structure would be:

- Fellowship time as members gather.
- Begin on time.
- Open meeting with prayer.
- Begin with a personal testimony about your week with God and how it is with your soul.
- Guide the discussion so that each person has a few minutes to give their testimony about their walk with God that week.
 - 1. How is it with your soul (how are you really)?**
 - 2. What's God been speaking into your life through the Bible this week?**
 - 3. How's it going with loving the people that God has put in your life?**
- Close with prayer, keeping the meeting between 1 - 1½ hours.

Most Important Traits of a Facilitator

We want to create helpful, engaging, and relevant environments. After that we let God do what only He can do – change lives. But we know that in addition to God’s handiwork, the success of each group hinges on the quality of its leaders. We use three traits to describe the qualities of a good Life Group leader: **humility**, **teachability**, and **management of group dynamics**.

1. Humility

Humility comes from a strong, growing relationship with Jesus. It is the acknowledgement that we are all sinners and totally helpless without the love of God. Because we have been so dramatically changed by this love, we want to move out of the way to help seekers connect with God in his timing.

- Humble leaders approach conversations as fellow journeyers, not as ones who are handing off truth.
- Humble leaders sit on the same side of the table as their group members, acknowledging they are also in need of a Savior.

2. Teachability

Teachability is an attitude, a spirit that says, “I will constantly be learning about myself, others, and culture so that I can be of use in new and different ways.”

- Teachable leaders are always inviting feedback because they know it isn’t about leading perfectly; it’s about continuing to respond effectively to the people God has placed in their groups.
- Teachable leaders actively pursue what it means to create open and conversational environments for people to explore the topics and experience community.

3. Managing Group Dynamics

Your task as a Life Group leader is to create a warm, caring atmosphere where people can be real and friendships can grow. A good atmosphere may be described in words such as these: *warmth, trust, enthusiasm, patience, open-mindedness, caring, acceptance, sensitivity, humor, and informality*. Both the individual and the group are respected. Persons are attentive and sensitive to one another’s thoughts and feelings, and persons feel comfortable in expressing honestly their deepest thoughts and feelings.

Practical Tips:

- *Stay aware of the time and flow of sharing.*
- *Don't monopolize the discussion or allow any one person to talk too much. Thank them for sharing and turn to the next person.*
- *Redirect and stay on schedule so that everyone gets a turn and you still finish on time.*
- *If there is a desire to continue a discussion, plan to talk further after the meeting has ended.*

Drawing Out Quiet Persons

- Recognize that persons participate in ways other than talking and that a person has a right not to speak. Allow persons to pass rather than respond to a particular question.
- Emphasize that all contributions have value. Hesitancy to speak may be related to a fear of saying the wrong thing or of appearing foolish.
- Be sensitive to when the quiet person may want to speak and simply needs some encouragement from the leader. Watch for nonverbal clues. Take care not to embarrass by asking a direct question but rather by inviting a person to speak through such phrases as "You look as though you would like to add something."

Working With the Person Who Monopolizes

Tact and sensitivity are called for when responding to persons who tend to monopolize the conversation in the group.

- Be sensitive to what the persons are saying by their behavior as well as in their words.
- Recognize that your attitude toward the person who is dominating will be communicated through your tone of voice, body language, and facial expression as well as through your words.
- One response you may make is to summarize what the person has said and invite others to add to the discussion or to give their opinion.
- Rely on other group members to help manage the group process. When a group is functioning well, all persons in the group take some responsibility for participation and thereby cut down the possibility of one person dominating.

Group building and maintenance should be discussed when the life group is forming and deciding on group rules. The ground rules might include some agreements about how persons are expected to participate and how the group will monitor itself.

Handling Conflicting Opinions

A healthy group climate depends on the understanding that differences of opinion are welcomed, that persons are encouraged to think for themselves, and that persons may feel comfortable in disagreeing with one another and with the leader.

The leader who is not personally threatened by views contrary to his or her own will quickly establish a tone of trust and acceptance in the group. When conflict of opinion occurs, treat it as good, natural, and potentially rewarding.

- Maintain responsibility for the direction of the session.
- Recognize that sometimes resolution is not desirable, necessary, or possible, and that continuing difference of opinion is acceptable.
- If the discussion is not relevant to all group members, suggest that those who wish may talk further after the group has adjourned.
- Be aware of time and know when to move on.
- Compliment the group on the enthusiasm and strong feelings they bring to their discussion.
- Demonstrate caring and acceptance of persons both during and after points of conflict.

Leading Discussion

- State the questions to be discussed. Help group members to know what they are discussing and why.
- Allow time for thought. Don't be afraid of silence, because silence need not be empty; and it invites thought. Don't rush to rephrase the question.
- Listen. Be sensitive to feelings as well as to words. Listening includes awareness of the speaker's point of view as well as the words being heard. Occasionally summarize what is being said without evaluating or judging.
- Indicate your listening by eye contact, a nod of the head, and a spoken word or two.
- Remember that you stop listening when you begin to think about how you are going to respond.
- Avoid approving or disapproving, agreeing or disagreeing (unless there is an error in fact) with what a person is saying.
- Acceptance of people does not require acceptance of their ideas, interpretations, attitudes.
- Create possibilities for all persons to contribute so that none monopolize the discussion.

Getting Started

The first meeting of the group will be a time to get to know each other and establish expectations for the Life Group. Help members understand that it is a transformational group not an informational group. One of the ways you can clarify these expectations is by using a group covenant.

A *group covenant* is a set of boundaries that define what is expected out of the members of your Life Group. There should be some discussion of the covenant and changes can be made to the list as long as everyone is in agreement. Then each member agrees to the covenant to be established in the group. Each member should keep a copy so that it can be referred to later if needed. It may be helpful to revisit this document from time to time as needed if the group begins to drift from its original purpose. Attached is a suggested covenant agreement for FUMC Life Groups.

Congratulations for taking this step of faith to lead an FUMC Life Group. Know that your pastors and staff are here to support you if you need help. Even though it is called a "Life Group" it does not mean a *group for the rest of your life!* Know that there will be adjustments, some groups will end for one reason or another and some will split off to form new groups. Whatever happens know that you are appreciated and we are proud of you for following the call to serve others and help them in their walk of faith.



Expectations: Faithful reading of the Journey thru the Bible daily reading assignments and journaling or note taking on what God has been speaking into your life through the readings or daily devotionals.

Life Group Ground Rules

1. Attendance. To give priority to the group meetings.
2. Participation. Everyone participates and no one dominates.
3. Confidentiality. Anything shared in the meeting is kept confidential.
4. Support. Permission is given to call upon one another in time of need.
5. Empty Chair. The group stays open to new people at every meeting.
6. Accountability. To give permission to group members to hold you accountable for goals you set for yourself.
7. Group Goals.
 - a. Growth
 - b. Outreach
 - c. Leadership Development
 - d. Group Multiplication
8. Advice Giving. Unsolicited advice, please use caution.
9. Support of the leader in facilitating discussion and providing direction for the group.
10. Prayer. To pray regularly for each other.

I Agree _____ Date _____