



THANK YOU FOR STARTING AND LEADING A NEW GCI CONNECT GROUP!

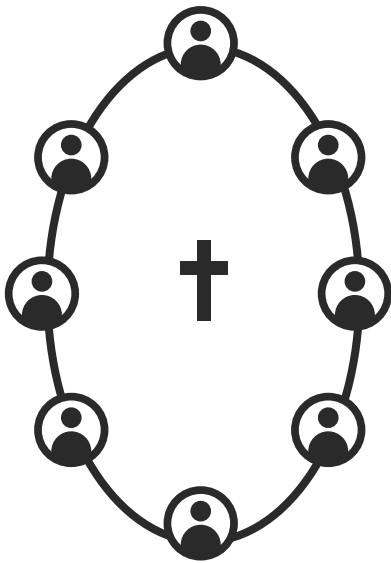
We believe Connect Groups are the perfect place for a community of believers to grow in their love for Christ and one another. In this kind of context people are transformed by God's love. Basically, we see the Faith Avenue as a place for deeper discipleship & relationships.

We have developed a basic curriculum to support our Faith Avenue leaders. The curriculum is meant to facilitate discussion that will help disciple new believers and veteran members. Along with the curriculum, we wanted to provide some facilitator best practices to help create a space where people feel a sense of belonging and where enriching, practical spiritual conversations can occur. Here are some best practices to help provide some additional support as you start your group.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF A CONNECT GROUP?

- To create a safe space for seekers and members to connect with God and one another. To share, to grow spiritually and to build relationships with one another.

WHY START A CONNECT GROUP?



- We are sanctified through relationships. As we unpack spiritual truths and practical ways to live out our faith, the Spirit is working in and among us, purifying us and transforming us more into the image of Christ. Through these intentional and honest conversations, we experience the love of Christ through one another.

- In his ministry to and with the twelve disciples, Jesus modeled connect group ministry. He did not just preach truth to this group. He lived daily life with them, and they ministered together. He was available and provided opportunities for them to grow in leadership.

- We see connect group type ministry at the heart of who our Triune God is, and at the center of the early church.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

WHAT ARE SOME QUALITIES OF A CONNECT GROUP LEADER?

- ✝ **Passion for Christ** – be a disciple before discipling others.
- ♥ **Passion for people** – a desire to care for and draw out participation from others.
- 🕒 **Commitment to invest the time** - reliably be available both during the set group time and for other relational opportunities.

WHAT ARE SOME CONNECT GROUP BEST PRACTICES?

When inviting others to participate in your group, have a clear purpose/shared goal and expectations set, create a format (when do you meet, how long each gathering will be, how are children included, etc.).

- Because **Connect Groups** have both spiritual and relational purposes. Our Team Based-Pastor led model recommends having one person serve as a host and another as the facilitator of the discussions. The host creates a warm welcoming environment (often in their home), and provides refreshments. Sharing food together develops relational intimacy. The facilitator prepares for the discussion and leads the group through the curriculum, drawing out participants to share and discuss making sure all voices are able to contribute.
- For group dynamics, we find that 5-15 people meeting weekly or bi-weekly are the size and frequency that work best.
- As you will notice in our curriculum, we find it best to set a six to eight-week timeframe for groups. This allows people to commit for a set time and explore if the group is a good fit for them.

• In the initial meeting discuss group norms and expectations. What will we commit to as a member of this group? How will we create a safe space for everyone? How can new members be integrated into the group? We have provided a [“Shared Covenant of Care”](#) worksheet that will allow your group to discuss and commit to your group standards or norms. Here are few suggested standards:

1. Give priority to attending each week unless unavoidably hindered.
2. Faithfully complete the weekly home study assignments.
3. Participate in the group discussion as I am able.
4. Pray by name for each member of my group during the weeks the group is meeting.
5. Refrain from discussing needs expressed in the group with anyone outside the group.

WHAT ARE SOME BEST PRACTICES FOR GROUP FACILITATION?

Please...

- ✓ Encourage participation.
- ✓ Guide the conversation around the set topic.
- ✓ Model group standards in your interactions and remind members of the standard when decisions are made that conflict with them.
- ✓ Reflect and summarize to the group the overall feelings, reactions, ideas, or solutions shared during the discussion.
- ✓ Resolve conflict by mediating differences in point of view.
- ✓ Be organized and flexible. This helps create the structure, while allowing you to respond to group needs.

Do not...

- ✗ Present yourself as the expert.
- ✗ Dominate the conversation by bringing the conversation back to your experiences, rejecting ideas without thoughtful consideration, using the group to share your personal opinions and values.
- ✗ Compete to have the deepest idea, last word, or be the favored person in the group.
- ✗ Disrupt the process of the group with excessive joking, mimicking, etc.
- ✗ Withdraw by becoming passive or overly formal.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A GROUP MEETING

- ✝ **Pray** – join with the Trinity in praying specifically for the individuals in your group and for an openness toward the movement of the Spirit in and among you.
- ✋ **Content** – to best facilitate the group, become familiar with the flow, big idea, and application of the scriptures. Consider how to contextualize the material for your group.
- 👥 **Coordinate** - connect with the host to discuss relational building opportunities and needs for creating the atmosphere.

HOW TO WRAP UP A GROUP AFTER THE LAST SESSION

- **Evaluation** – create a method to get feedback for the group’s experience. This promotes quality and provides accountability, and allows for next steps to be determined.

- **Continuity** – provide next steps.

- o Has the group grown and created a need to multiply?
- o Will the group continue to meet after the six to eight weeks?
- o Will the group desire to take a break? If so, provide some relational opportunities to check in with each other during the break.
- o Are there other groups starting that members can choose to join?

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ON BEING CURRICULUM?

On Being is a four-part interactive connect group curriculum, designed for biblically-based, dynamic discussions around being a disciple.

We will be rolling out a different curriculum quarterly throughout 2021.

The four curricula are: Being a Christian Neighbor, Being the Church, Being with Jesus, and Being with the Bible. Each curriculum has a Facilitator Guide and a Participant Workbook. Included in this document is an appendix with additional resources for facilitators.

Below is the key for each icon included in the Facilitator Guide:



BIG IDEA - main theme of the lesson



SCRIPTURE - Bible passage for this week's lesson



BIBLICAL CONTEXT - additional analysis on this week's passage



CALL OUT - reminder to read this section out loud or explain the concept



APPLICATION QUESTION - questions that bring out of the participants the personal relevance of this week's passage



CALL TO ACTION - How the BIG IDEA impacts how we live our lives

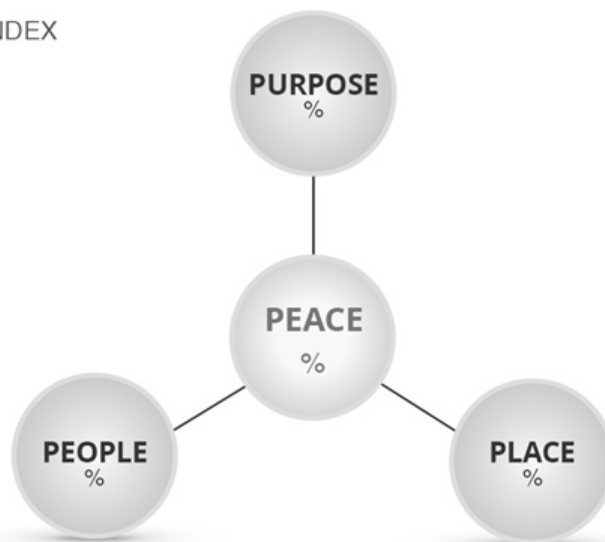
**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Romans 15:13**

APPENDIX

Sample Icebreakers (for consistency and variety, please rotate between 2 or 3 icebreakers throughout the course of the curriculum):

- Names of God: display or sort out on separate cards the names of God. Ask group members to choose one that answers the question, “How is God revealing himself to you this week?”, and share why.
- Examen: Go around and ask members to reflect and respond to one of the question pairs below:
 - o What was the most life-giving part of my week?
What was the most life-thwarting part of my week?
 - o What are you celebrating this week? What are you grieving this week?
 - o When did you feel most connected with God, others, and self?
When did you feel least connected with God, others, and self?
- Peace Index: Reflect on each of the following categories: your people (relationships), your purpose, and your place (environment). Combine these factors to develop your peace index. Share your percentage and a few reasons why you chose that number.

PEACE INDEX



- Looking over your week, your day, and how you feel right now, which biblical figure would you say you are and why?
 - o Abraham—A little lost but feeling God is leading me
 - o Mary Magdalene—Sickly and dependent but had an intimate friendship with Jesus
 - o Many examples!

Sample Opening Prayers:

- Begin five minutes of silence allow the group to become centered in the present moment, and then have the leader or assigned group member say a short prayer or simply say amen.
- Responsive reading or reading of a written prayer

Sample Closing Prayers:

- Ask a group member to read a scripture or quote that embodies the theme of this lesson and then pray.
- Give a few group members a descriptor of who God is (God is present, God is powerful, etc.) Ask them to read the descriptor and pause for a moment of reflective silence and then have the leader or another member of the group close in prayer.
- Read the Apostle’s Creed together.

