

Fairfax Community Church



STARTER GUIDE

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Welcome!

Whether this is the *first* or *fifth* time you've used this Starter Guide, it is designed to set your group up to succeed from week one! As a group, rely on this resource to help you get to know one another and Fairfax Community Church's approach to small groups.

The purpose of a small group at Fairfax Community Church is to help people love God and love others by creating a predictable and conversational environment that pursues Christ through authentic community. Small groups are marked by discipleship that happens through mutual learning, mutual care and mutual accountability.

Together you will explore what it means to be involved in mutual learning, mutual care and mutual accountability. As you get to know each other through sharing your stories, you will develop the kind of authentic community that is essential to group life. We are excited about what God has prepared for you and your group!

At the end of this guide, your group will evaluate whether or not to continue meeting together. If your group decides to continue meeting, you will be making a commitment to share in each other's lives for the following 18 to 24 months. As that time period draws to a close your group will prepare to adjourn, giving you the opportunity to share your experience of group life with others as you join a new group!

Small groups are at the core of what we do here; they are one of our two essential environments. By choosing to connect to a small group, you are entering into the blessings that come through pursuing community!

Following GroupLink, one of our Small Group Directors will email the group, introducing themselves. For your convenience our Small Group Directors contact information is also provided on the next page.

With gratitude,
The Small Groups Team

Tips on using the Starter Guide

This guide has been designed for use by groups that contain people across the spiritual spectrum. The main goal of this guide is to paint a picture of how to create a safe small group environment that promotes growth in Christ. This guide contains four conversations, comprised of an opening, discussion, and closing. Each piece is designed to be easily read together as a group. Most of the conversations can be completed in the course of one small group meeting, but they may also roll over into the next week.

Don't teach ... facilitate.

One of the keys to a good group is good facilitation. This includes starting and ending meetings on time, keeping the conversation on track, and encouraging participation by all the group members. One way to share participation is by taking turns using this guide to facilitate your weekly conversations. This guide is available online: www.fairfax.cc/starterguide.

Pray.

Every time your group meets, you should spend some time in prayer with each other. But don't let it end there! Continue in prayer on a weekly basis for the members of the group and what is going on in their lives. The regular habit of lifting each other up in prayer goes a long way toward building authentic community. To help establish this habit, we've included a place to record prayer requests during your weekly "Conversation."

Communicate.

Encourage the group to stay in touch with each other between your group meetings. Tools such as email, Facebook, text messages, and phone calls are a great way to keep each other up to date on your lives, your needs, and opportunities for you to build community.

Use your Small Group Director.

Our Small Group Directors are here for you! If anyone in your group has a question related to group life, don't hesitate to contact us.

You can call the Small Groups Team at 703-745-1030 or email us:

Andy Gingrich – andygingrich@fairfax.cc

Kayla Allen – kaylaallen@fairfax.cc

Attachments.

In the back of this guide are three attachments. They exist to help your group in the early, formative weeks by providing important contact and reference information.

Conversation One – Getting Started

Opening

Plan to begin promptly at your starting time. At your first meeting, it will be helpful to determine how the group would like to approach meals or refreshments. If your group needs to discuss childcare arrangements, do that now as well.

Groups have a variety of solutions to the question of childcare. Some hire an outside babysitter (or two), others hire teens from within a group member's family, while other groups rotate childcare among group members.

Discussion

When you left GroupLink, you were handed a card, "Best Practices," and asked to read it. We believe the content of that card is truly a life-giving catalyst to a new group. We would like you to read these best practices together as a group. As you read, this is a great opportunity to begin marking your group with transparency and honesty! Following "Best Practices," we'll help guide you through praying together as a small group.

Best Practices

Discipleship in Small Groups

It is our hope that you have joined a small group because you have a desire and hunger to grow in your relationship with Christ. Social activities, service, and Bible study are all a part of small groups, but at the core of community life is discipleship. God has brought your group together for a specific time and purpose. Begin to pray for God to show you what he wants to do through your group and how He wants to transform you. In your group you are responsible for your spiritual growth. Come to group weekly with an open heart to be changed by the Lord through others and we promise you'll never be the same. So, how do you want to grow? What do you hope to learn through this small group?

Frequency

The best way to build momentum and trust in your group is to spend time together. We recommend meeting weekly for small group. Commit to show up, invest in conversation and build meaningful relationships. Your group meets once a week but remember you have six other days in the week to connect with other group members. How could you invite these group members into your weekly routine?

Availability

As your group journeys together, it is important to make your small group a priority. Think ahead about potential obstacles or schedule conflicts. To invest in your small group fully, you need to be available to attend group regularly and be fully present without distractions. During the week, please be accessible by answering emails, texts, and returning phone calls promptly. This helps build a sense of unity within the group. Are there obstacles you need to address or move to make yourself available for small group?

Common Practices

In your small group, it is helpful to build a sense of rhythm and routine. During your weekly meetings, cultivate a predictable environment. Most groups meet at the same location each week and have a flow to their time together. Your meeting should include a time of study, sharing stories, prayer and looking ahead to the weeks to come. Other common small group practices include eating together, attending a worship service together, serving the community and having fun together. How can your group foster a sense of rhythm and routine built around common practices?

Common Resources

Over the course of your group's life cycle, you will have the opportunity to share your home, food, money, time and other resources with group members. Fairfax.cc encourages small groups to be the first line of care for group members. If everything we have belongs to God, we ought to hold onto our belongings loosely and be open to sharing our resources, as well as our lives, with others. Time after time, we have seen small groups gather around a group member and provide support that reflects the love of Christ. What is your current comfort level with walking alongside of this group, sharing life and resources?

Praying Together

The time you spend together in prayer is powerful because of the connection formed between the members of your group and God. By sharing requests that are personal in nature, your time sharing and in prayer will remain most focused.

At first, not necessarily everyone in a group is comfortable praying out loud. It's important that your group have an open and honest conversation about praying together. Start with these questions.

- How has prayer been a part of your life?
- Have you had the opportunity to prayer with others?

Tips for Praying in Groups

- Never force someone to pray. Encourage those who are uncomfortable to join the group in silent prayer. In the same vein, don't unexpectedly single someone out to pray unless they've indicated that they are comfortable being asked on the spot.
- The group leader can guide your prayer time by focusing the group on one topic and then moving to a new topic after a sufficient amount of time has passed. For those new to faith or praying aloud, this structure can be helpful.
- Using index cards, write your name and requests down. Then place cards in a pile and have each person take a card and pray for the requests. The card can be taken home as a reminder to continuing praying throughout the week.
- The group could use a prayer journal to record each week's requests. In a given week one person can pray through the requests or the journal can circulate around the group with each person praying for another. If you use a

journal, return to previous weeks in the future and make sure to update those areas of prayer and celebrate where appropriate.

- In groups with men and women, split by gender for prayer. Some do so weekly and others monthly. This allows for a higher level of transparency.

- Many groups record weekly requests and send them out to the group to continue in prayer for one another throughout the week.

- Consider a study on prayer itself. Take time to learn more about what prayer is and it's connection to one's relationship to God. This may help provide clarity and alleviate fears associated with prayer.

Prayer Requests

Closing

For the next couple of weeks, everyone in the group will have the opportunity to share their story. We've put together an exercise to help frame the storytelling. We call this a Life Map – instructions are on the next page. Decide now who will share next week and who will share the following week. Follow the instructions and come prepared to share on your week. We suggest each person takes 5 or 10 minutes to share.

Life Map sharing schedule

First week

Second week

Life Map Exercise Instructions

Many people find it helpful to draw a map of their life, noting key events, people or places that have shaped who they are. Include your spiritual journey in this process. Reflect your personality and creativity in the design of your map. Whether you want to draw pictures, bubbles, list items, or create a timeline, give others in the group a glimpse of how you've become who you are. This provides incredible context for group conversations in the weeks and months ahead!

This should take 15-30 minutes to design. Bring your Life Map with you next week and think through how to share it in 5-10 minutes.

To help get you started

Key events:

Key people:

Key places:

Key words to describe your spiritual journey:

Conversation Two – Sharing Your Story

Opening

Fellowship is an integral piece of your weekly group gathering. As a group, determine how much time you plan to spend in fellowship prior to transitioning to your study time. Also consider where the placement of prayer would be best during your meeting each week.

Discussion

Those who are scheduled to share their life map may begin. After each person shares their life map, be ready to ask questions, affirm growth and celebrate significant life events. Take note of the time so that everyone scheduled has an opportunity to share.

Closing

Allow time at the end of your group meeting both weeks to pray. God's grace is often described as the blessing of receiving what we don't deserve and God's mercy is the blessing of not receiving what we do deserve. This is a perfect time to pray, recognizing God's grace and mercy in the lives of each person who's shared their story.

Prayer Requests

Conversation Three – Life Together

Opening

Predictability is important with groups. Finding a consistent rhythm is key for group life success. We recommend that your group occasionally breaks from the regular meeting routine. Whether you break monthly, in between studies, or at another interval, it's important to be intentional. For many groups, these off weeks or celebrations include a potluck, social gathering, prayer gathering, service opportunity or a combination of these. As a group, talk about what type of meeting rhythm you would like to pursue and what an off week might look like.

Discussion

A healthy small group dynamic develops a shared sense of value related to learning, care and accountability as well as serving together. As your group shares these values, you will experience tremendous growth individually and collectively.

Three M's

We commonly refer to the “Three M's” as building blocks for group life.

Mutual learning encourages a shared discovery of who God is and how He works. Acts 17:11 tells of a church that was “open-minded...eagerly [receiving] the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day.” As a group, you have the opportunity to take an active role in your personal spiritual development as well as that of the others in your group!

- What excites you about sharing together in your pursuit of knowing God more deeply?

- Part of what makes mutual learning so powerful is sharing the facilitation of your group studies. What would it look like for your group to share the facilitation role amongst various group members?

Mutual care expresses itself in small groups through serving as the primary line of care for one another. Care for one another grows out of a love for Christ and a desire to love each other. John 13:34-35 reveals that, “Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.”

- What is the relationship between love for someone and care of them? Share about an experience where you received loving care.
- How have you cared for others?

When your group enters a significant and/or ongoing care situation within the group, please remain connected to your small group director can help provide support and direction. See the attachment, “Community Care Resources” for more on available resources at Fairfax Community Church.

Mutual accountability is an extension of caring for one another. When you invest in the life of the others in your small group, an “intersection” forms because you’re doing “life together.” As a result, the group becomes responsible for the growth, attitude, and behavior of one another. Accountability is all about putting action to responsibility. The Bible frames our relationship to one another as different parts of the same body.

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 25)

1 Corinthians 12:12-26 encourages our understanding of how we fit into the body of Christ. Your small group is a depiction of this image. Truly, accountability is a gift within a small group because of the opportunity to encourage and challenge other members of the body to which you all belong!

- What has been your experience with accountability?
- How might your group encourage consistent, ongoing development of one another's spiritual growth?
- If your group contains men and women, how would occasionally gathering into same gender groups for prayer or discussion affect accountability?

Serving Together

Throughout his ministry, Jesus made a point of restoring people from physical infirmities and social injustices as well as restoring them spiritually. Jesus invites us to join him in that work. In fact, the best way to grow in your faith is to give it away. A serving mentality aligns our focus with God in work that it is restoring and redeeming. As a group, there is wonderful value in the shared experience of serving together. Many groups find that serving on the weekend or during their normal meeting day and time helpful. It's up to you!

It's possible that not everyone in the group will be able to make every service opportunity. Don't make all hands on deck a prerequisite to serving as a group. It is better to have some of the group serve than not serve at all.

- Have you been in a small group that's served together? If so, share about your experience.

We ask that groups commit to serving together at least twice a year. It is our hope that service becomes part of the rhythm of your group. To get started, visit www.fairfax.cc/o2volunteers to become familiar with Fairfax.cc's ministry partners. You may contact the partner directly to find service opportunities for your group. Additionally, we keep frozen entrees on hand to readily give to families connected to our church who are in crisis. For more information, contact Lynn: lynnlundberg@fairfax.cc.

Tips for serving

- Consider partnering with another small group. Connect with another group directly or contact your small group director to help make a possible connection.
- Serve during the time of your group meeting.

- Are there needs that you are aware of in your community or organizations you are already connected to?
- If there are children in your group, consider an opportunity that welcomes children or arrange to have one couple plan to care for the kids while the group serves. Next time, arrange for a different couple to stay with the kids.

Closing

Next week, your group is going to talk about who is going to apply to step into the role of small group leader. Over the next week, reflect on the time you've spent together as a group and ask who's been influencing the group toward discipleship. Come prepared to have a thoughtful conversation about selecting a small group leader.

Prayer Requests

Conversation Four – Leadership

Opening

Take a few minutes to review the Small Group Agreement. Much of the agreement should sound familiar given your conversation in the first week. This should allow for a direct conversation over these items. If you have any questions don't hesitate to contact your small group director!

Small Group Agreement

Helping your small group to normalize expectations in order to help create an authentic and predictable environment.

Values & Goals

Community – Life is not meant to be lived in isolation. Small groups intentionally pursue relationships where one can know and be known by others.

Authenticity – The atmosphere of a small group should encourage openness and transparency among members. This is an environment where people should feel free to be themselves.

Confidentiality – For authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues disclosed within a small group will not be shared outside of the group.

Respect – Group members should never say anything that will embarrass their spouse or members of the group.

Availability – A primary responsibility of community is to prioritize for specific relationships. This requires a willingness to be available to meet each other's needs.

Adjournment – All small groups have a natural life cycle. We expect small groups at Fairfax Community Church to adjourn proactively after 18-24 months. This allows members to multiply their positive group experience by returning to GroupLink and getting into a new group, intentionally connecting with others who have yet to experience group life.

Group Norms

It is important that everyone on your group is on the same page when it comes to basic group expectations. Talk through the following:

1. Where will the group meet?

2. At what time will your meetings begin? End?

3. Understanding that groups have a life cycle, when do you anticipate adjourning?

4. What are the childcare arrangements/expectations (if applicable)

Discussion

We influence people every day. Through our jobs, our families, and our friendships we have countless opportunities to shape the thoughts and decisions of others. The way in which we influence people is an important component of leadership. Jesus provides wonderful footsteps to follow in how he influenced others.

- Read Philippians 2:1-18. What do verses 3 and 14 say about influence?
- How does imitating Christ (verses 5-11) change the way we influence others?

Selecting your Small Group Leader

What is a small group leader?

We believe that when it comes to leading a small group, the overarching quality of leadership is influencing direction. With the big picture in mind, a small group leader pursues what he or she believes is best for the health of the group. This involves the leader being fully present relationally within the group and maintaining an accurate “temperature” of the group dynamics. While decision-making itself is important, the process the group undergoes (e.g. choosing a study or service opportunity, finding the best way to care for a member of the group) ought to reflect the leader’s influence, not their control.

How do we choose our small group leader?

This element is crucial to the success of your small group. Much like the formation of your group, the selection of leadership might also be an organic process. As you reflect on the first several weeks that your group has met, consider who has already influenced you. As you consider who is qualified to lead, ask yourself, “Does this person possess a genuine relationship with God?, Does this person help foster vibrant conversation?, Will this person be a champion for the group, possessing genuine care of each person as well as encouraging everyone to remain active participants?”

What can I expect from our leader?

Your small group leader is a follower of Jesus Christ. That means you can go to them to talk about your spiritual journey and to process your questions. It doesn’t mean that they will have all the answers but they will help you clarify your perspective. Also, your small group leader is connected to a Small Group Director (see attachment on Small Group Director for more information). In addition to meeting 1-on-1 with the group leader, the director is available for any questions or ideas the leader or the group may have. Lastly, your group leader will lead your group through the phases of your group’s lifecycle, including adjournment. The small group agreement will touch more on this.

What other responsibilities does a small group leader have?

Your small group leader will meet regularly with your group's Small Group Director for 1-on-1 coaching specific to your group. As a new small group leader, he or she will attend a new leader training. In the fall and spring, leaders attend a Leadership Development gathering with other Fairfax Community Church small group leaders, where they are further equipped to influence your group well. Your leader is the primary "lifeline" between the church and your group, connecting your group to resources for care, growth, and service.

As a group, discuss who you believe will make the best leader for your small group. This may or may not be someone with prior small group leadership experience. Ultimately, this decision is about developing a consensus rather than taking a vote.

Whomever the *group* chooses to serve as the potential leader should contact their small group director.

As you close in prayer, thank God for the way He has been present in your group since it formed. Ask that he would guide and direct your group in a way that honors him and promotes growth in you.

In the attachments, we've included a helpful piece, "How to Choose a Study." We encourage everyone to read this as you group prepares to decide what study you will choose next. Plan to have this group conversation next week during your celebration or the following week.

Closing

Plan to have dinner together next week. Whether you go out to a restaurant or choose to go potluck style, celebrate these first weeks together! Next week is also a good time reaffirm the group's intention to continue on together for 18-24 months (from when your group formed). If the group dynamic, meeting day or time is not working for someone, this would be the time to voice those concerns and consider stepping out of the group.

Prayer Requests

ATTACHMENTS

Your Small Group Director

What is a Small Group Director?

Small Group Directors at Fairfax Community Church are dedicated to helping small groups create predictable and authentic environments, focused on discipleship. The relationship between small group leaders and directors develops through one-on-one meetings, leadership training, email, and phone correspondence.

What should I let my Small Group Director know about?

Be sure to keep us in the loop on:

- group dynamics
- study questions
- service opportunities
- care needs
- participant changes
- stories of transformation

Anytime you, or someone in your small group, has a question, perceives something is “not quite right,” or feels like the group is disconnected, let your Small Group Director know!

Who are the Small Group Directors?

Andy Gingrich oversees all Men’s small groups as well as some of the Married Couples’ and Mixed Adult groups. Contact him at andygingrich@fairfax.cc.

Kayla Allen oversees all Women’s small groups and College groups, as well as some of the Married Couples’ and Mixed Adult groups. Contact her at kaylaallen@fairfax.cc.

Both Andy and Kayla can be reached by calling 703-745-1030.

How to Choose a Study

1. Start with the purpose of the small group.

“Why are you here and what do you want to get out of this group?”

Everyone in the group ought to share these thoughts with the rest of the group. The leader needs to record what is shared. Look for patterns in how people answer, describing the purpose of the group. Group answers into broader categories and look for primary goals.

For *example*, one small group’s conversation landed with the following primary goals with other related ideas falling under these primary pursuits.

Goal 1: Mature spiritually

- Understand God’s word
- Increase Bible knowledge
- Answer spiritual questions
- Apply God’s word in a practical way

Goal 2: Learn how to live the Christian life

- Serve others
- Build community
- Connect with the church

2. Ideas for Specific Studies

In parallel with the first question, talk about any specific bible studies, books, or DVD studies that you are aware of or specific topics you would like to study. The leader should make a list of these things. Prioritize this list based on the group’s goals you’ve established. The leader can also consult the Small

Group Resource Library for ideas. Contact your Small Group Director for more info!

Building a prioritized list of studies that reflects your primary goals and varies in length, theme, medium (e.g. DVD, book, bible study) will give the group vision and direction for your first study as well as a tentative list for future studies. Along the way, we encourage each group member to purchase a copy of the current study.

Further questions to help build your list of potential studies

- How does this study reflect our group's goals of growth and discipleship?
- Is the depth appropriate for our group?
- What is the required preparation time? Is it realistic for our group?
- Will the length of the total study maintain group interest? Are individual chapters/sessions reasonable for the weekly timing of our group? (Note: we recommend 6-8 wk studies)

Community Care Resources

If someone in your group is experiencing a difficult time, we know that the group is the best way for care and encouragement to be provided. When someone is in crisis, the group embraces and upholds the individual. Small groups can be supportive in many spiritual, emotional and even practical ways. But sometimes the group isn't equipped to help in a way that is needed.

The church has resources to help point someone to an extension of care. These resources are available to everyone in your group. Visit www.fairfax.cc/careinfo for more information on these resources and contact your small group director for assistance.



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COMMUNITY CHURCH

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