



STARTING A LIFEGROUP

VISION

Fulfill the mission of Killearn UMC by connecting people together, growing in faith, and serving others for the transformation of the world.

VALUES

Be welcoming, identify quality leaders, regularly funnel people to groups, encourage diverse groups in diverse settings, provide training and resources, grow church through groups.

KEY ELEMENTS

RELATIONSHIPS: Support and take care of each other.

GROWTH: Become more and more of who God made us to be in community.

COMMUNITY CHANGE: Nurture long-term relationships.

The decision to start LifeGroup is an exciting one! As you begin this journey, we want to you to feel supported and prepared. Work through this packet and feel free to ask questions along the way. Pray and ask God to guide you. For more information, contact Rev. Tim Willcox at twillcox@kumconline.org.

1. CREATING A VISION

These are simply your initial thoughts about what you might want your group to look and feel like. Don't feel pressure to make the perfect description - there will be plenty of time to clarify and shape your vision.

When and where will you meet? _____

Will your group have a common theme? (study, prayer, journal, exercise, etc) _____

How will the community be affected because of your group? _____

What activities will you do as a group? _____

Initially, I want to see God do _____ in my LifeGroup.

2. GATHERING A GROUP

How do I actually get people come to my LifeGroup? Good question! There is a basic truth about people that will help us unpack this topic. **People have two basic needs in community: to understand their purpose and to feel valued.** If these two needs are not being addressed in your group, attendance will probably be a bit shaky. Let's discuss some ways you can meet these needs.

WHY ARE WE MEETING?

As the leader, make sure you can write down - in one sentence - the purpose of your LifeGroup. Don't make it an over-churchy statement that sounds good on paper but won't resonate with the group. Be honest. Be creative. Word your purpose in a way that aligns with the mission of the Gospel and emotionally connects with you and your group.

COMMUNICATE YOUR PURPOSE - OFTEN.

Do not underestimate the importance of reminding individuals of their purpose in your group. People need to be consistently reminded that their presence matters and that they belong. If they are starting to get sick of hearing you say it, they are probably starting to hear you!

Consider yourself in charge of setting the tempo and keeping everyone in sync. Like the drumbeat of a marching band, just one hit or reminder is not enough to keep everyone together. Without a steady beat, you will inevitable loose rhythm as a group. Be consistent in your communication of purpose.

SHEPHERD, DON'T STEER.

The definition of a group leader can be confusing. Don't offer information instead of participation; people don't need you to inform them on how to live their lives, they need you to *participate* in their lives. Walk alongside them through the highs and lows. Be a shepherd, not a ship captain.

WILL PEOPLE COME?

Some will, some won't. But its not about numbers. Its about consistency and quality.

Be present: Worship, church events and community contact are all great ways to invite people to your group. Natural conversations and listening will lead to natural invitations. You can use Facebook and other forms of media to get word out. The Killlearn UMC website will also make your group information available.

GroupLink Event: This is a great event for people seeking a group like yours. You will receive more details about upcoming GroupLink Events on campus as they become available.

3. DEVELOPING YOUR VISION & LEADERSHIP

What does it take to be the kind of leader that people choose to follow? Authors James Kouzes and Barry Posner have conducted extensive research to answer this question, which they reveal in their book, *The Truth About Leadership*. The answer might surprise you!

It turns out, we look for four traits in our leaders, and they are consistent across cultural, ethnic, gender and age boundaries. So if you want to become a better LifeGroup leader, start asking yourself:

AM I HONEST?

Am I forthright, and can my LifeGroup count on my character and integrity (1 Peter 3:10-12)? Am I openly sharing my heart, or just presenting information about my life? Am I aware of and do I share about my own strengths and limitations?

AM I FORWARD-LOOKING?

Am I providing a sense of direction for my LifeGroup, and does the group know what to expect (Proverbs 29:18)? Am I seeking input from my LifeGroup about what they need and taking this information into consideration?

AM I INSPIRING?

Am I positive and do I lead with passion and energy? Am I encouraging others to go deeper and farther in their walk with Christ and personal holiness (Hebrews 10:24)? Do I inspire my group to embrace a cause in the community?

AM I COMPETENT?

Am I capable of following through on what I say I will do? Am I working to improve the skills I need to lead my LifeGroup? Am I comfortable admitting when I don't know something and willing to ask for help (James 1:4-5)?

Not perfect in all of these areas? Don't worry - no one is! Self-awareness and growth are the keys to success. Start thinking about your leadership style. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:5-12 and describe what this leadership style means to you.

When people are together without a clear vision, it's easy for things to get out of control. Instead of growth, you see decay. Instead of creating momentum, you hinder it. So how do you develop and shape your vision? What if you don't feel like a visionary leader? Start on a smaller scale. Ask yourself: **What do you want to see God do in your group in the next six weeks?** Whether it takes six weeks or a lifetime to achieve, a vision is nothing more than a mental picture of your desired destination.

BRAINSTORM

Am I seeing a common area of struggle or need in my group?

What burden or passion has God given me that I could instill in my group?

How would I like to see people grow in their relationship with Christ? How do I want to grow?

If people were to describe my LifeGroup, what would I want them to say about it?

Use the answers to fill in the blank:

Over the next six weeks, I want to see God do _____ in my group.

Now you have a destination! Use this to plan each week so you are leading your group one step closer to that destination. Before you know it, you will be growing together!

4. GROWING & BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

You will be leading a group of people who get together with a mission to become more like Christ through relationship building and service. That's incredible! No wonder you want to grow. Here are some ways to help your group grow:

BE CLEAR

Make sure your LifeGroup has a clear vision and everyone in your group understands it. Be sure you have predictable meeting times and locations. Maintain contact with your group in a way that makes sense for your group context. Try not to overwhelm them as you give direction.

ENLIST HELP

You are not the only one who can invite new people! Challenge your whole group to invite someone new.

MIX IT UP

At some point, it is possible that your vision or routine as a group has reached its potential. Maybe it's time to expand your vision, or change the way you meet. Have an event that is just for fun, serve on week and discuss the next, talk about your group vision together, or just come together for a meal one night. However you decide to mix it up, it can be a welcomed change.

GIVE PEOPLE A REASON TO COME

If people aren't coming back week after week, maybe they feel like they wouldn't be missed. Spread out responsibility amongst your group. For example, you can:

- Make someone in charge of communicating each week.
- Have someone else serve as the host home.
- Take turns providing refreshments.
- Find someone to keep track of events and birthdays.
- Find someone to oversee group care (meals or hospital visits, etc.)
- Have a point person for service opportunities.

As you live life with your group, you will naturally begin to develop relationships. As a leader, you want to make sure you are there for your group members, and that you encourage the group to do the same. *Be sure to maintain your spiritual life and exercise self-care; good leaders create more leaders.*

Build relationships that help people feel comfortable sharing about themselves. Groups need the security of **confidentiality** - make this clear in your group. When someone makes a self-revealing statement, there are four types of responses one can use: advice-giving (*implies you have all the answers*), reassuring (*implies you have insight into the problem*), understanding (*expresses a desire to understand through questions*), and self-revealing (*I am human too. Promotes trust and validity. Leader shares own humanness*). No response is right or wrong for every situation, but a **self-revealing response** can open up the lines for healthy communication and ministry. Self-revealing responses are confident that Jesus Christ is the hope of everything that is to come in this life and eternity. They get into the canoe with a person who is going over the falls, but brings a paddle.

5. THE ART OF FACILITATION

Questions play a major role in small group discussion. When studying a passage or using a resource, some questions may need to be re-worked to suit your needs. Below are some types of questions you may or may not want to use.

KNOWLEDGE

Recalling information. *What was the name of the first human?*

COMPREHENSION

Understanding the information. *Why were Adam and Eve thrown out of the garden?*

APPLICATION

Applies the information to a new situation. *What are some other possible reasons for God covering Adam and Eve with animal skins?*

ANALYSIS

Seeing similarities and differences. *Compare and contrast the offerings of Cain and Abel.*

SYNTHESIS

Create something with the information. *Write a poem about Cain and Abel's jealousy.*

EVALUATION

Draw a conclusion. *If you were God, how would you have dealt with the sin of Adam and Eve?*

Ask yourself: are my questions clear? Do they achieve the objective of the lesson? Do I ask one question at a time? Do I ask each question only once? Do I include open-ended questions? Do I use wait time effectively?

It's important to think about your questions and questioning style, but try not to stress out over it. Your group will form a style that will help you know what types of questions to ask, and eventually, where your group needs growth. You will want to allow people to feel comfortable in your group, but don't be afraid to stretch people - stretching out of your comfort zone is where growth really happens! For example, don't force people to share or pray. These things come with time.

KNOW YOUR ROLE

Facilitate. Don't control or lead the discussion where you want it to go. Re-direct, but don't push an agenda. Let people know that you are not an expert on all things - you are growing together.

Do your homework. You are not a teacher, but should be able to give a little background or a "take-away" point at the end. Maybe an ice-breaker that illustrates the topic or gets the discussion going.

Understand the group dynamics. You are a disciplinarian and a diplomat. Some people may need to be asked gently to be brief. Promote dialogue over debate. Invite quiet people to be a part of the discussion.

Briefly debrief. Highlight important points. Ask about their "take-away" or their weekly challenge.

6. THE LIFEGROUP MEETING

Your group will be unique. So how your actual meetings look and play out will be up to you and the context of your group. But as you plan your first meeting, you can keep these things in mind.

CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE OF COMMUNITY

- Create a warm, caring atmosphere where people can be real and genuine friendships can grow. Help your group members love and respect each other, and look out for each other's needs.
- Arrange the chairs so that all members can participate equally.
- If you are the host, you may wish to provide refreshments. Decide with the group how to do this.
- Include friendship building, discussion (Bible or resource) time, and prayer.
- Guide the evening to include the above parts and to end on time.
- Have fun! Plan ways to deepen relationships inside and outside of the regular meeting time.

FACILITATE THE DISCUSSION

- Don't teach. Facilitate! Your goal should be to help your group verbalize what they are thinking and learning. Try not to talk too much, and allow others to speak. Prepare good questions to get people thinking, and include questions that go deeper than knowledge and comprehension. Select questions that fit your group dynamic.
- Help your group get a balanced view of what the Bible teaches. Use studies by a variety of people. If a passage only gives one facet of a truth, suggest parallel passages for your group to look at together. You can find these in the margins of some bibles, a concordance, or a topical bible.
- Guide the discussion so no one person dominates. Give everyone an opportunity to share, but don't force it. Protect the dignity of each person, and help the group be gentle with one another. Keep the focus on the Bible teaching, and not too heavily on one person's opinion.

FACILITATE A TIME OF PRAYER

- Establish a rule of confidentiality before sharing requests.
- Guide the sharing. Be sensitive to people's need to share concerns that are important to them, but don't let it become a counseling session.
- Pray for your group members throughout the week and encourage them to pray for each other. Consider using a prayer journal.
- If the group desires, you may split into a male and female group for a time of sharing and prayer. This can be helpful for sharing more intimate information.

7. A LIFEGROUP CHECKLIST

Ready to facilitate your first meeting? Use this checklist or create your own to help you prepare for each meeting.

PREPARATION

- HAVE I PRAYED FOR THE GROUP?
- DID I LOOK AT THE STUDY?
- IS THE ROOM SET UP TO MEET THE GROUP'S NEEDS?
- DO I NEED ANY SUPPLIES/RESOURCES FOR THE DISCUSSION?

DISCUSSION

- WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THE SESSION?
- DO I HAVE A STARTER QUESTION?
- DO I NEED TO MAKE EDITS TO THE QUESTIONS TO FIT THE GROUP?
- WHAT ARE THE MAIN DISCUSSION POINTS TO STRESS?
- HOW WILL I CHALLENGE THE GROUP? DO I HAVE A "TAKE-AWAY"?
- HOW CAN WE PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER?