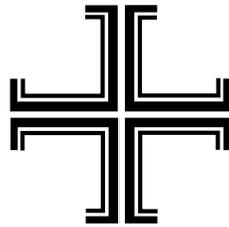




Connecting in Grace™

Radical Gifts, Radical Grace



LEADER GUIDE

Introduction



Introduction

We're glad that you've chosen to lead a small group. We hope that it will be a rewarding and enriching experience for you and for the members of your group. Everything that you need to prepare for and lead a session is included in this leader guide. Before you begin to prepare for your first session, we suggest that you read this introduction carefully. It includes the following information:

- Welcome to Small Group Leadership
- Sample Agenda and Timeline
- Reflection Topics for *Radical Gifts, Radical Grace*
- The Role of the Small Group Leader
- Building Community in Small Groups
- Hospitality in Small Groups
- The Role of the Host
- Developing Your Group Covenant
- Planning and Conducting the Service Project
- Suggestions for Praying in Small Groups
- Additional Resources

Connecting in Grace: Radical Gifts, Radical Grace

Writer: Lynda Thompson

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Welcome to Small Group Leadership

Dear Friends,

“How is God poking around in your life?” It’s a question I’ve heard around Incarnation asked again and again. How **is** God poking around in your life? Do you know? Have you been paying attention? This faith study is a chance to open up your senses—to listen, watch, and discover how God is already present in your life each and every day.

Most of us move pretty quickly through the day—too often, we’re simply on auto-pilot. But if you stop to reflect, stop to listen to other people, stop to think about what brings you joy, stop to notice surprises, stop to pray or simply to be quiet, you can begin to sense how God might be moving in your own life. Does it sound unlikely or extraordinary? God’s presence is definitely an extraordinary gift—it’s a radical gift and radical grace!

Connecting in Grace: Radical Gifts, Radical Grace provides a chance to talk about some of these questions: What does God want for my life? How can I watch and listen for God’s presence in ordinary days and in days that are significant marking points? How do other people reveal God’s presence to me? How do I point to God for them? What do I do with my time and energy? How can I be God’s hands and heart in the world? How is God with me in the tough days of challenges, sadness, or loss? How is God with me in days that seem like the best of times? These are all questions about the radical gifts, the radical grace of God.

Your small group is a place to pay attention to how God might be moving in your life. Sometimes it’s a simple comment or a question from another group member that opens up something you hadn’t realized before. Sometimes the written reflections or the questions can bring a new insight or a new discovery about your life or your faith. Your group is a chance to practice listening and watching for how God might be poking around in your life!

Your small group is a chance to connect with others while connecting with God. Your conversations will follow an outline of easy, informal, open-ended questions to give you a chance to gradually grow together as a group. You can share your thoughts or simply listen. By discovering things you share in common, you’ll find another person on a similar journey in life and faith. Through the diversity of the group, you’ll have a chance to learn from others. Whether you simply get to know a few new people or you meet lifelong friends, small groups are a chance to connect with others.

We’re thankful that you’ve chosen to be part of this small group! We know that you may be juggling a full, busy life. We’ve designed these groups to be easy for people with busy schedules—there is no preparation needed and the groups meet only once a month. Because your comments and questions might be just what someone else needs to hear, we hope you’ll make this small group a priority in your life and make a commitment to attend. You’ll want to stay up-to-date with the group’s conversation, and the other group members won’t want to miss seeing you and hearing from you.

Watching for signs of God’s grace and living lives filled with God’s grace are central themes in this faith study. You’ll find that the faith study is rooted in the radical gift of God’s grace as understood in the Lutheran faith. Each session includes a reflection written at Incarnation Lutheran Church by one of the pastors or staff members. You will find these groups to be different than a Bible study in some ways. While learning from the Bible and reflecting on what the Bible has to say, much of your time will be spent talking with one another and making connections between the Bible and your life today.

Many thanks to the Incarnation community for the opportunity to design and develop the *Connecting in Grace* series. Special thanks to Lynda Thompson, who served as the chief writer and co-coordinator of this project. Many thanks also to Pastor Gary Medin for his encouragement, commitment, and expertise in small group ministry. My gratitude also goes out to the small group leaders at Incarnation who nurture and build a sense of Christian community and create opportunities for people to listen and watch for God.

In Christ,



Denise Floe
 Small Group Ministry
 Incarnation Lutheran Church

Sample Agenda and Timeline

This information is provided as an example of how your time together might be spent. As you lead sessions, it will be helpful to note target beginning and ending times in the margins of the leader guide for each session. This will ensure that you can cover each of the areas in a way that will be meaningful for your group members. Each session is designed to give you more than enough material for the time available.

Don't worry if you don't cover everything in a session—you're not supposed to! Most groups don't use all of the questions or may use only one of the reflections. This approach gives you the opportunity to select the questions most meaningful and appropriate for the group. If the group has a special focus, you may want to reframe or reword some of the questions to apply to your group. For example, a question on resources for a small group of mothers of young adults might be rephrased as "How do we tell our kids about Jesus Christ?"

A sample timeline is provided below. Feel free to change it to fit your group's schedule.

<i>Time</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
10 minutes	Gathering In	Allows people to gather, greet each other, catch up, grab some treats, and converse.
1-2 minutes	Life Issue & Theme	Introduces the session topic.
20 minutes	Opening Question	The Opening Question helps group members get to know each other and start thinking about the session topic.
1-2 minutes	Opening Prayer	Sets a tone for the faith study and reminds us of God's presence in the group.
25 minutes	What does the Bible say?	Provides an opportunity to read Bible verses related to the session topic. Questions give group members a structured way to explore their own understanding of what the Bible says about the session topic.
40 minutes	What do others say?	Reflections (one written by an Incarnation pastor or staff member) provide another way of looking at the session topic. Questions help group members focus on how they live these concepts.

- 15 minutes **What's my response?** Provides a list of ways that group members can apply the information from this session to their daily lives.
- 10 minutes **Logistics & Closing Prayer** Allows time for logistical information, prayer requests, and a closing prayer.

Reflection Topics for Radical Gifts – Radical Grace

Session 1: Ordinary Days

Reflection by Pastor Gary Medin, "Signs of Grace" in *Alive Now* by Charles G. Finney

Session 2: Simple Living

Reflection by Becky Benson & Lynda Thompson

Session 3: Adding Value

Reflection by Shawna Berg, "Do We Know What We're Asking?" in *Alive Now* by Thom M. Shuman

Session 4: People

Reflection by Becky Benson, *The Signature of Jesus* by Brennan Manning

Session 5: Servant Living

Responsive reading by Lynda Thompson

Session 6: Holy Nudges

Reflection by Lynda Thompson, "Listening for God's Call" in *Alive Now* by Eli Fisher

Session 7: Suffering

Reflection by Pastor Jeanne Markquart

Session 8: Rituals and Faith Practices

Reflection by Lynda Thompson, Editor's Note in *Alive Now* by Melissa Tidwell, "Ways of Prayer: Designing a Personal Rule of Life" in *Weavings* by William O. Paulsell

For more information see the list of additional resources at the end of the leader guide introduction.

Role of the Small Group Leader

Timeline for Leaders

This section provides complete information on your role as a small group leader. The following timeline may be helpful in your planning.

1-2 months in advance	Send letters and/or call prospective group members.
2-4 weeks in advance	Check on registrations at least once a week. Contact group members to welcome them and tell them about the first session.
2 weeks in advance	Send the welcome letter and Participant Welcome booklet to the group members.
2 weeks in advance	Begin your preparation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at session 1. • Make any copies needed for the folders (list of the group members/directions to location). • Prepare folders.

Inviting Group Members

Along with congregation-wide communications, we've found the best results are obtained when group leaders personally invite others to join their small groups. A realistic goal might be to extend personal invitations with the hope of getting four to six group members. This will ensure that your small group gets "off the ground" while leaving space for some people you may not know yet. You can do this effectively on a Sunday morning or with a phone call at your convenience. Some people that you will want to contact are:

- Friends and neighbors
- Family members
- People you know from other small groups

If the prospect is someone you don't know, it usually works best to send a prospect letter, then follow it up with a phone call. A sample prospect letter appears later in this section. Personalize it and change it to fit your style and personality. If you would like to craft your own prospect letter, you'll want to include the following:

- An enthusiastic greeting and introduction to small groups
- Logistical details that are available, for example:
 - When (any dates set) and times
 - Where the group will meet
 - What group members can expect to happen in the group
 - Number of people who will be included in the small group
 - Number of sessions planned

- Closing
 - Thank them for considering the invitation to join
 - Encourage them to call you if they have questions
 - Assure them that the time will be well spent and meaningful
 - Provide sign-up information
 - Remind them to sign up early because space is limited
 - Include cost information

**** Prospect Letter ****

(Date)

Dear *(Name of Prospect)*,

Would you like to connect your faith with your day-to-day life? Do you long for a chance to step back from the busy pace, to get to know others in a relaxed, schedule-friendly time and place? Are you looking for a chance to add a sense of meaning and purpose to your life?

If so, there is a small group for you! The purpose of my letter is to invite you to join a small group that I will be leading. You have been mentioned as someone who might enjoy this opportunity. I would be delighted to have you join this group. I'm inviting other people, like you, with the hope of having 10 members.

While allowing plenty of time to get to know one another and share informational conversations, we will use a faith study featuring the theme, *Radical Gifts, Radical Grace*. This faith study gives us a chance to explore how God is present in our daily lives, bringing us meaning and hope. As a group, we will discover ways to pay attention to, listen to, and watch for the gifts that God provides for us each day.

We'll meet once a month—perfect for busy schedules! The group will start in October and end in May, with a total of eight sessions. We will get together at *(location)* and, of course, there will be refreshments!

I hope you'll consider this chance to step back from your busy pace, meet some new people, and connect your faith with your life. If you are interested or if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call me *(phone number)* or *(name of congregational contact person)*. Space is limited, so call soon! Thanks for thinking about this opportunity!

If this group doesn't fit into your schedule, I hope you'll take a look at the other small group opportunities in the future.

Sincerely,

(your name)

Sending a Welcome Letter

As the time for the first meeting draws closer, send a welcome letter to your group members. A sample letter appears below. Feel free to personalize it and use it. If you would like to create your own sample letter, you'll want to include some of the following information:

- An enthusiastic greeting and thanks for agreeing to be a part of something that is meaningful and enjoyable. You may also want to add some assurance that participating in a group should be a low effort/time commitment for group members outside of the actual meeting time.
- Logistical details for first meeting
 - When: date and time
 - Where: A map with your meeting room highlighted. If the group will meet in your home, include a map and directions.
 - The Participant Welcome booklet.
 - A schedule of the meeting dates for the entire year, including the time for each meeting
 - Any information about future meetings
- Closing
 - Invitation to call you with questions (don't forget to include your phone number)
 - Another assurance that the time will be well spent and meaningful

**** Sample Welcome Letter ****

(Date)

Dear *(List of all members)*,

Welcome to your *Connecting in Grace* group! I am delighted that you are joining this new group and look forward to the chance to get to know you!

Small groups are informal, conversational, casual, and fun. While getting to know one another, we will also reflect on our faith and consider how our faith connects with day-to-day life using a faith study.

We will get started on *(date)* from *(starting time)* to *(ending time)* at *(location, including room)*. You will find a map enclosed with directions. After this session, we plan to meet the *(first, second, third, fourth)* *(day)* of every month.

This group will be easy to do! You don't need to bring anything or do any preparation. Simply come and enjoy the conversation. Refreshments and materials will be ready for you when you arrive.

At the first session, we will have a chance to meet one another and begin thinking about how we can be more aware of God's presence in our lives. We will also talk about our schedule (be sure to bring your calendar) and a few ground rules, typically called a "covenant," to guide our group.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to give me a call at *(number)* or contact me at *(e-mail address)*. I hope you find this group to be both meaningful and fun.

Take care and I'll see you on *(date of 1st meeting)*.

Sincerely,
(leader's name)

Coordinating Registrations with Incarnation

Since you will be contacting prospective members of the group and people may be calling your congregation's office to sign up for groups, it will be necessary to coordinate efforts. Once registrations begin, you will want to contact the office about once a week to find out who has registered for your group. Also call as soon as you have taken a registration to keep the list up to date.

This is an important time to make a phone call (or send a letter) to welcome these members into your group. They will not know exactly when you plan to meet, so be sure to tell them the start date and let them know that more information will be coming.

This phone conversation may sound something like this:

"Hi! This is *(your name)* from your small group. How has your summer (fall/winter) been going so far? *(Wait for them to answer and respond appropriately.)* I'm so glad that you've decided to be part of the group and I'm looking forward to the chance to meet you. I wanted to let you know about our first session. We plan to get together on *(date and time)*. I'll be sending you more information in a letter with the directions to the meeting place. Do you have any questions about our group? I can't wait to see you."

To help you get to know your group members, please take the time to carry on a short conversation. Ask an open-ended question like, "How's your summer (fall/winter) going?" or "What vacation plans do you have for the summer?" You could also ask them how long they've been attending and what they enjoy about the church, how long they have lived in the area, etc. You don't need to talk for hours, but a few minutes taken to get to know this group member will have big ramifications in terms of integrating each person into the group, introducing group members to each other, etc.

Preparing for the First Session

- Pray for God's guidance as you prepare for your small group.
- Read through this leader guide, focusing specifically on Session 1.
- Read the session theme, Bible verses, reflections, and questions about each.
- You won't have time to use all of the session questions, so choose the questions that you feel will be most meaningful for your small group. Most leaders choose only one to three questions in each section.
- Use the opening question to help members get to know each other. Choose a question that you think will especially appeal to the members of your small group and help them to begin focusing on the topic.
- Decide whether you will read the verses and reflections aloud, have group members read them together, or ask for volunteers to read. It's best to ask for volunteers to read rather than assuming that everyone is comfortable reading. Most of the readings and questions are self-explanatory, but you may want to be sure that you know how to pronounce any words that are used during the session.
- Remember, you're not expected to be an expert, so you don't need to use any additional resources. However, there are a few suggestions for resources at the end of the introduction to the leader guide.
- If you are not hosting the session at your home, get to the site 15 to 30 minutes early the first night to ensure that everything is ready. See "The Role of the Host" section.

- Call group members a week before the small group session. This will allow members to ask any questions that they still have about the group in general. Take this opportunity to get to know something about each person that you may not have known before. This information may come in handy at the first meeting when you want to help people make connections and provide a safe and open space in which group members can meet each other, some for the first time.

Leading the First Session

- You will be the host at the first session. See the section on the “The Role of the Host” that appears in this leader guide.
- Introduce members to each other by pointing out interests they have in common. For instance, if you know that two group members attend the same worship service but don’t seem to know each other, make the connection for them.
- If group members are having a great conversation, be willing to start the session a few minutes late to let them talk. Just give them a “2-minute warning” so they can wrap up in a leisurely fashion.
- Facilitate the session.

Participant Folders

The participants will receive the session materials at the beginning of each session. However, at the first session participants will receive a folder that contains the following:

- Participant’s Welcome to small groups (unless this was sent with the welcome letter)
- Dates and times for all the meetings for the year (prepared by leader)
- Directions to the meeting location (prepared by leader)
- List of the group members (prepared by leader)

You will want to prepare several of the items listed above and place them in each folder.

The participant material for each session will be handed out at the beginning of the appropriate session. One of the “selling points” of *Connecting in Grace* is that preparation for the leaders is minimal and group members have no “homework.” The focus of each session should be the discussion relating faith to life rather than an in depth study of scripture passages. Not having the material in advance promotes a fresher, more spontaneous discussion.

Building Community in Small Groups

As the group leader, you have the opportunity to begin building community even before the first meeting! Your personal invitation, a warm welcome letter, a phone call, or a conversation on a Sunday morning really help group members develop a good feeling about the community aspects of the small group before they meet any of the other group members.

One of the foremost objectives of small groups is to foster relationships between members. One of the easiest ways to do this is to provide time during the course of the session when group members can talk to each other about what's been happening in their lives (this is called "Gathering In" on the sample agenda that appears earlier in this section). Having snacks and treats facilitates this process—it's a natural thing for guests to gather around food! This "catching up" and relationship-building time is essential and helps build a close and cohesive group. It doesn't matter whether it happens at the beginning, middle, or end of the session; just be sure to allow time for it at some point during the session. In addition to the gathering time, we have included the following community-building activities in each session:

- Be ready to go about 10 minutes before the session begins so you have time to greet and welcome members as they arrive. The first evening, introduce members to one another and help them begin a conversation. For example, "Mary, you and Janis both have kids who go to Turtle Lake school."
- The first opening question is a "community building" question. It may not relate directly to the session topic and is included to allow group members the opportunity to share their experiences and life stories. This helps to build an atmosphere of trust and openness that enables members of the group to get to know each other on a more personal level. It also facilitates sharing basic information about their lives that you might otherwise not know about them.
- Don't worry about getting through all of the questions that are provided. The intent of these groups has always been that people have a safe place to talk about their faith journeys and the opportunity to develop deeper relationships with those who share this desire. Spend more time talking on a deeper level about a few questions rather than trying to answer every question included in the session. In other words, if group members are having a rich discussion about a question, don't feel compelled to move on to another question just because it's there.
- Several questions in each session begin with "Tell about a time when..." These questions were written to encourage people to talk about themselves and their experiences on the journey. When those questions come up, encourage people to tell their stories.
- Taking prayer requests is a great way to build rapport in the group. It encourages people to share the "hot topics" in their lives and to receive support from those in the group. More information about prayer requests is included in the "Suggestions for Praying in Small Groups" section of this leader guide.
- As your group develops your covenant, it is important to include a statement that recognizes the importance of confidentiality. Group members need to know that information they share about themselves during discussion or prayer concerns will be kept confidential.

Here are some additional suggestions for ways to foster a sense of community in your small group:

- Create a warm, welcoming environment where people feel free to gather and greet each other. Whether you meet in a home or in the church, it's important to create an environment that makes people feel at home. There are more specific "how tos" in the "Hospitality" and "The Role of the Host" sections of the leader guide.
- Sometimes group members come anticipating a Bible Study rather than a relationship-based small group. Be sure to talk about the value of getting to know one another and sharing stories as a key component of the small group experience. It's also a good opportunity to remind the group members that you are a facilitator but not an expert.
- Encourage members to affirm each other whenever possible.
- Plan one or two informal gatherings during the year. This time together will help you become more comfortable with each other. These gatherings needn't be elaborate. You might try a pot luck meal, a cook-out, meeting at a local restaurant for dinner or dessert, or a movie night.
- Some leaders have suggested beginning and ending your year with an informal event. One thing that many small groups have found works well is to meet at a local family restaurant for a meal or dessert and conversation.
- Encourage members to attend congregation-wide events together.
- Encourage the person who is the host to spend a little time on the phone with each person as calls are made to remind group members of the topic and time of the next meeting. You may want to make a reminder call to the host a few weeks before the session that person is hosting.
- Suggest that each group member call one other group member during the course of the month, just to check in and see how things are going.
- As the leader, make group members aware of their common interests or experiences. For example, if you know that two group members have children who attend the same school, are interested in the same sport, or have vacationed at the same place, be sure to help them make that connection.
- Suggest that group members stay in touch with each other. Some tangible ways to do this are to take a photo of the group that members can take home with them, encouraging members to send holiday or birthday cards or vacation post cards to other group members

There is one caveat that you should be aware of as you seek to build community in your small group. In some cases, no matter what you do as a leader to encourage community, not all members in the group will form strong relationships with every other member of the group. This is a simple fact of human relationships and is not a reflection on your ability as a small group leader.

Hospitality in Small Groups

Relationships are most easily built in an open and trusting environment that invites people to come in and relax. It's important to create this welcoming environment for the group at each and every session. The conversations that happen informally between group members are just as important as the structured conversations that take place during the faith study. At times, you may want to mention this to the group so they also recognize the value of getting to know one another.

The Role of the Leader

The group leader assumes the responsibility of being the host for at least the first session. After the first session, ask group members to assume the role of host for the remaining sessions. Rotating the role of the host helps build ownership among the members and takes some of the pressure off of the leader.

At the first meeting it's important for the leader to create a safe, comfortable, and affirming space for the group to meet. To do this, you'll want to:

- Have the room set up before the first group member arrives. This provides a relaxed setting for the group members and helps them feel as if everything is under control.
- Put out the name tags.
- Encourage group members to visit informally with each other before each session begins.
- Model the behavior that you want the group members to display. Mingle with the group members, talking informally with each one. As the group members get to know each other, encourage them to visit informally with each other before each session begins.

(optional)

- Bring a CD to set the mood (if you're meeting at Incarnation). Some people find that it helps to bring paper plates, napkins or even a table decoration from home to set the stage for a more cozy atmosphere.

The Role of the Host

Each group member will have the opportunity to be the host or co-host for one of the sessions. Hosting a small group doesn't mean that the meeting must be at the host's home. The role of the host is a very important one. The host is responsible for bringing treats and calling members to remind them about the time and place of the next meeting (another chance for community building!).

Before the Session

It's the host's responsibility to:

- Call each member the week before the session to say "hello" and offer any reminders or updates. Hosts should be encouraged to use this time as an opportunity to have a conversation with other group members. For example, if they remember events that were mentioned at the previous meeting, they might ask how the event went. ("At the last session, you mentioned that you were going to tennis camp. What did you enjoy most?" or "I know that you were looking forward to going to the Twins game last Saturday. I saw in the paper that they won that day. How was the game?")
- Bring treats and a beverage to the session.

At the Session

Although the leader creates the space for the group to meet, it's the host's responsibility to:

- Have the room set up before the first group member arrives. This provides a relaxed setting for the group members and helps them feel as if everything is under control.
- Provide the beverage and other refreshments.
- Greet group members as they arrive.

Developing Your Group Covenant

Great small group experiences don't just happen. They are the result of the commitment and involvement of the group members. One way to ensure that everyone has the same idea about how they are to "be with each other" is to develop a group covenant. At the end of the first session, time has been set aside in the schedule for you to introduce the purpose of a covenant and items typically included in a covenant. You'll also have time to discuss what the group would like to include in theirs. You can start with a blank slate and let the group develop the entire covenant or you can provide some suggestions, and discuss additions and revisions. Let the group members think about them and formalize the covenant at the second session.

Why do small groups have a covenant?

Covenants set expectations for the group time, objectives, roles and responsibilities, length of commitment, etc. They create the foundation around which the behaviors of the group members are modeled and are very helpful to come back to if/when you feel that your group is diverging from the original intent.

Your group covenant also helps encourage group members to make attending the group a priority. Everyone in the group has a busy life and sometimes people may over schedule themselves. Missing members changes the dynamic of the group. When the group meets only once a month, if members miss twice in a row, that means you won't see them for three months! It will be important for you to stress this with your group at the first meeting. You may want to say something like, "We realize that everyone has busy lives and we hope that you will make this a priority in yours. If you're not here, we'll miss your insights and getting to know you better. You'll miss being part of our conversation, hearing about the members of our group, and participating in the faith study."

What's included in a covenant?

A covenant is a promise that people in a group make to each other. In the Bible, God made covenants with Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others, including us. Small group covenants typically have four parts:

- **The group purpose or mission statement** explains the desired outcomes of the gathering. Some examples are, "To get to know one another and experience a sense of community." or "To learn about God's grace." There are typically three to five statements of purpose.
- **The group values** state the behaviors that are expected by the members of the small group. Some examples that you may want to include in your group's values are, "We will hold things said in this group in confidence." "We'll make attending the meetings a priority in our lives." "We will value the contributions of each person by listening and not interrupting when another person is talking." There can be as many values as you want; however, if you have 20 statements, you may have trouble remembering them!
- **Group arrangements** simply state when, where, how often, and for how long the small group will meet.
- A list of **group members**, including phone number and e-mail if appropriate.

Here are suggestions for how to discuss and develop your small group's covenant:

- See the small group ministry staff for tip sheets on developing a covenant.
- Ask participants about other types of covenants that they are familiar with (i.e., marriage, employee rules and regulations, personal mission statements/goals, blueprints, etc.).
- Discuss why having a covenant will help a group succeed (i.e., expectations are the same for everyone, group members help develop it, etc.)
- Look through a sample covenant. You can bring some from previous groups that you have led or participated in. There is also a sample small group covenant below and an open template for you to use in developing your own covenant in the Participant Welcome booklet.

Sample Small Group Covenant

Group Mission Statement

- To get to know one another through listening, sharing, praying, and being present for one another.
- To discover meaning in our faith and apply it to our lives.
- To learn about God's grace and to discover how God is present in our daily lives bringing us meaning and hope.

Group Values

- We will begin and end on time.
- We will pray for one another.
- We agree to make our meetings a top priority and attend regularly.
- In order to provide an atmosphere of openness and trust, whatever is said here, stays here.
- We will respect each person, their comments, and the gifts they bring to the group.
- We will model respect and care for others in our conversations and prayer requests, especially for those who are not present in the group.

Group Arrangements

- We will meet each (3rd Monday of the month) for 8 sessions.
- We will begin at (time) and each session will last 2 hours.
- Our meeting place will be (specify).

Group Members

Names and phone numbers or e-mails, if appropriate.

Small Group Covenant

Group Mission Statement

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Group Values

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Group Arrangements

- We will meet once a month on _____ for 8 sessions.
- We will begin at _____ and each session will last 2 hours.

<i>Session</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			

Group Members

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Planning and Conducting the Service Project

Planning the Service Project

One of the sessions of the small group should be conducted as a service project. In past years, members of small groups have found this to be a highlight of their time together. Meeting in a different location and focusing on serving others helps small group members get to know each other in a different way. Some small groups enjoyed their service project so much that they planned a second service project.

Session 5, *Servant Living*, has been set aside for this project. Although doing a service project together is important and expected, it is not necessary to plan your group's service project for the fifth time that you meet. It may be more convenient to do your service project at another session. The date is not the important thing, the activity is.

It pays to plan ahead! Early in your time together (second session), introduce the idea of the service project. Provide options or ask group members for suggestions. Contact the organization and schedule your date to serve to ensure that the date that the organization needs you to serve matches the date when the members of your group are available. Begin pre-planning early.

Obviously, it will be the most convenient to schedule your service project during the same time period that you're meeting. If this works out, fantastic! However, you may have to look for an alternative date to fit into the schedule of the service organization. Be careful to choose a time that the members can make so that you don't leave anyone out of the service project. You may also want to check into whether there is any cost involved in serving (e.g., do you have to provide the food if you're serving lunch at a shelter?).

Conducting Session 5

Session 5 is designed as a devotion that can be used either before the group leaves for the service site, on the way to the site, or immediately after the group arrives at the service site. Here are a few suggestions for how to incorporate the devotion into your service project:

- Use the devotion at a gathering spot before leaving for the service site.
- Use the responsive reading and community building questions as the group travels to the site (obviously, the driver will not be reading along!)
- If you take a break at the service site, briefly discuss the community building questions during the break.
- Read the devotion as a closing at the end of the service project.

Suggestions for Praying in Small Groups

Prayer is the language that draws us closer to God and to each other. As we pray, we expand our ways of experiencing God's grace, love, and guidance. As the small group leader, you are encouraged to pray daily for your group members. Also, you'll probably want to pray before each group session. If you have a co-leader, it would be powerful to pray together before the group arrives.

Opening and closing prayers are included for each session. However, as your group members become used to praying together, encourage them to branch out and try different forms of prayer. These prayers may be a first opportunity for some people toward beginning a practice of prayer. Many people are uncomfortable praying aloud. Go gently and slowly with your group. Prayers are to be experienced rather than judged. Help group members understand that experience is the best teacher. We learn to pray by praying!

Varying the method of group prayer as well as being sensitive to the comfort levels of the members in your group can help foster the notion that it's enjoyable and enriching to pray with your small group. Here are some suggestions for praying in your small group. Vary the routine and expose group members to many of these prayer experiences.

- **Pray in Unison:** Reading printed prayers in unison or asking for a volunteer who will read either the opening or closing prayer is a great way to get your group members used to praying aloud. "Who would like to read the closing prayer that's printed in the participant materials to help us close today?"
- **Silent Prayer:** Suggest topics to pray about and set aside two or three minutes for silent prayer. Let group members know how you will end this time in prayer. "Let's take some time to pray silently for whatever is currently in our hearts. I'll start the group with a short prayer and will then be silent. After a few minutes of silent prayer, I'll close with a short prayer."
- **Circle Prayer:** This one will most likely work best when people in your group know and are comfortable with each other. Before praying, set some guidelines (i.e., each person should contribute only one or two sentences). Stand in a circle and ask the small group members to hold hands. The leader or co-leader should start the prayer, then each person adds his or her sentence(s) and squeezes the hand of the person next to them when he or she is finished. If someone wishes to pass, he or she just squeezes the next person's hand. End with the Lord's Prayer.
- **Alphabet Prayer:** This form of prayer is structured like the circle prayer, but at each person's turn, he or she incorporates the appropriate letter of the alphabet into the sentence prayer ("Lord, thank you for apples," or "Lord, you are an awesome God." "We thank you for the beauty that surrounds us."). The prayer runs A-Z and is suitable for a group of more than 6 people. It's a fun way to get people accustomed to praying in a group and enjoying it!
- **Popcorn Praise Prayer:** In this corporate thanksgiving prayer, people spontaneously say something that they're thankful for in just a few words. The leader starts with, "Lord, today we'd like to thank you for..." or "Lord, today we bring these concerns to you in prayer."

- **Sentence Prayers:** These prayers are easy for people to pray aloud because all they have to do is to complete a sentence that the leader provides at the beginning of the prayer. Begin with a sentence of your own and allow open time for others to repeat the sentence with their own response. Use the following examples or make up your own: “Lord, I thank you for...,” “Lord, help me to be more...,” “Lord today, I’d like to pray for...”
- **Praying with Hymns:** Many hymns have specific prayers in the lyrics. You might simply read them together or pray the hymn responsively. The following are some suggestions: “Beautiful Savior,” *Lutheran Book of Worship* (LBW) #518; “Come Thou Almighty King,” LBW #522; “Now Thank We All Our God,” LBW #534; and “Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee,” LBW #551. Or consider using more contemporary songs, like “Jesus, Name Above All Names” or “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High.” It will be helpful to the members of your group if you print the words to the hymns in advance and hand them out to your group members just before prayer time. If you need a copy of the LBW, borrow one from the Incarnation sanctuary.
- **Prayers from the Sunday Bulletin:** You may hear a prayer during worship that you would like to use in your small group. Feel free to save your copy of the bulletin to use at a future date.
- **Prayer Requests:** After group members get to know each other a little better, you may want to take prayer requests. The easiest way is just to ask, “What would you like us to pray for this month?” or “How can we help you this month in prayer?” Of course, people are always free to pass. Go around the room, allow members to share their responses, and be sure to write down what they say. It works best to simply take the request without the questions and comments of others. Then, you can incorporate these prayer requests into the closing prayer yourself (just add them at the end of the prayer: “Lord, we ask you to keep Janet’s mother in your care as she struggles with maintaining her health.” or “Lord, you’ve heard the prayers we’ve offered today, hold us in your care and guide us to continue to pray for each other in the weeks ahead.”).
- For more suggestions, see pages 119 –120 in *Starting Small Groups—and Keeping Them Going* Augsburg Fortress, 1995.

Additional Resources

This is a comprehensive list of all of the resources listed within each session, plus some additional ones that you may find helpful as you learn about spreading the Good News.

Alive Now, The Upper Room, Nashville, TN, www.upperroom.org/alivenow:

- "The Abundant Life," May/June 2002
- "Amazing Grace," July/August 1998
- "Friendship," January/February 1999
- "God's Call," January/February 2003
- "Household of God," May/June 2003
- "Justice and Righteousness," July/August 2004
- "Mentors," May/June 2000
- "Our Shared Dream," May/June 2005
- "Signs of Grace," March/April 2005
- "Suffering," March/April 2006
- "Visions and Voices," May/June 2004

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- Imathiu, Grace. *Words of Fire, Spirit of Grace*. Porjus, Sweden and Milwaukee, WI: True North, 2003.
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- Jones, Tony. *Pray*. Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 2003.
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- The ONE Campaign is an effort to rally Americans to fight the emergency of global AIDS and extreme poverty. Learn more at <http://www.one.org/>
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