

LIFE Groups at CCC



Building authentic Christian community through...

Loving

Including

Fellowshipping

Equipping

Coweta Community Church

LIFE Groups

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have **life**, and have it to the full.—John 10:10*

Love one another **so that the world will know** we are followers of Jesus Christ (John 13:34).

Include others **as we have been included** in the *gospel* (Eph. 1:13).

Fellowship with one another so that we **share ALL the blessings** of Christian community (Acts 4:32).

Equip one another **through active participation** in ministry (John 13:17).

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is presented to describe the philosophy behind the operation of the LIFE Group ministry at Coweta Community Church (CCC). The following information will inform you of the *what, where, when* and *how* of LIFE Group ministry at CCC. After reading this handbook, you will have the necessary information to organize, implement, and maintain a successful LIFE Group.

OUR CHALLENGE

Putting Community in “Community Church”

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they **shared** everything they had.— Acts 4:32*

As we read through the book of Acts, we are amazed at the relationship between the believers in the early church (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-36). However, we find our selves in the midst of a post-modern, fast paced, individualistic American culture which stands in contrast to this call for each of us to be in intentional, faithful, Christian community.

OUR RESPONSE: LIFE Group Ministry

Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. – Hebrews 10:24-25

Our response to this cultural challenge is to create small groups of community where relationships are built, where believers truly invest in one another's lives, and where we encourage one another as we follow Christ together. We call such groups, LIFE Groups. Therefore, even as we grow larger as a church, we can grow smaller—more relational—at the same time through LIFE Groups. Our prayer is for all believers to be connected to a LIFE Group where they can grow in the Lord in the context of Christian community.

THE PURPOSE AND THE “WHO” OF LIFE GROUPS

The purpose of each LIFE Group is simply this: community. By community, we mean a group of believers who gather together and intentionally invest in one another's lives. This occurs as the group prays together, studies the Bible together, fellowships together, and walks together with one another through joy and trial. These are also the key elements of true discipleship. Therefore, it is our belief that the greatest discipleship any believer will ever experience will be found within small groups of Christian community.

Who can attend LIFE Groups? LIFE Groups are geared toward all Christians, regardless of their spiritual maturity or how long they have been following Christ.

HOW LONG DO LIFE GROUPS MEET?

LIFE Groups meet at different times throughout the week and are scheduled to last about an hour and a half. These meetings normally meet in a ðhostö home. The reason host homes are so important is that they help create an informal environment where people feel the liberty to become more transparent. LIFE Groups are discouraged from meeting at the Church since the purpose of meeting in a home setting would be missed. It is recommended that LIFE Groups rotate the location among the families in the group occasionally to relieve the usual host family. LIFE Groups also are encouraged to meet at parks, lakes, restaurants and other places as part of a special activity.

Each LIFE Group will contain a fall, winter and spring quarter, each lasting between ten to twelve weeks. Some groups will continue throughout the summer, while others will choose to take the summer off. This decision will be up to each group.

Running LIFE Groups in quarters allows easy entry to a group, knowing that the group ðbegins againö each quarter. The beginning of a quarter is a great time to reach out to new church members or attendees to see if they would like to connect to your LIFE Group.

At the end of each quarter, each member of the group will be asked to fill out an evaluation, which will include a place for them to state whether they will return to the LIFE Group, try a new LIFE Group, or take a break. This allows an easy exit if a member of the group needs one.

Though this is not set in stone, we believe that the optimal number for a LIFE Group is ten to sixteen people. Once a LIFE Group is over sixteen regular attendees, the dynamic of the group tends to change, and becomes less relational. It is at this point that a couple or two from the LIFE Group may begin a new LIFE Group. However, this will be up to the discretion of each group.

LIFE GROUP ORGANIZATION

LIFE Groups are organized in the following manner:

Oversight

The pastoral staff, along with one of our elders, will offer oversight for the LIFE Groups. They will offer support and encouragement to the LIFE Group Leaders, as well as being available to help answer any questions or in helping navigate any difficult situations the leaders may have.

LIFE Group Leader(s)

Specific oversight at the LIFE Group level is handled by a LIFE Group Leader who functions as a shepherd of the group. As a shepherd he/she will help care for, lead, and feed those within the group. They will carry the responsibility to plan and conduct meetings, ensure organizational tasks are assigned, and coordinate as needed with the leadership of CCC. We also ask that either they or one of the Assistant Leaders call any family or individual who miss a week to simply check in with them. The leader may or may not host the meeting in his or her home.

wards to the LIFE Group, while helping the leader coordinate with the other key LIFE Group members to ensure effective on-going ministry. The Assistant Leader must be ready to fill in for the LIFE Group Leader whenever necessary. Some Assistant Leaders, though not all, will be preparing to one day serve as the primary LIFE Group Leader. Therefore, this is an opportunity to observe and learn the basic skills of overseeing a LIFE Group.

Hospitality

One group member should have specific responsibility for arranging refreshments. This person should rotate the provision of refreshments among all the members of the group or allow all the members to share the responsibility each meeting. Regardless of how it is handled, the task of providing hospitality for the meeting should not be carried by the leader, but rather a specific person who carries the burden of making sure refreshments are available. This person also coordinates details involving food at any special LIFE Group events.

Child Care

Successful LIFE Groups always have a plan for the children. In fact, the lack of attention can be a group killer. Whether the LIFE Group provides child care or each family within the group is asked to make arrangements for their children, each LIFE Group must make a decision within the first couple of meetings of how they will handle child care.

CONTENT OF THE LIFE GROUP MEETING (ACTS 2:42)

The following is the format or agenda of a typical LIFE Group meeting. The order of these activities may differ from meeting to meeting, depending on the flow of the meeting. Also, some of these activities may not occur at every meeting. However, these elements have proven to be the most common factors present in LIFE Groups that are successful over the long run.

Welcome & Introduction

Having drinks and light refreshments several minutes before the meeting is a helpful beginning to a LIFE Group. This refreshment time needs to be kept brief. Meetings should start on time in deference to the host family. Before starting the meeting, visitors should be introduced and made to feel comfortable. Whenever visitors are present, a short explanation of the meeting content and schedule should be shared by the Leader.

Praise (Optional)

A short time of praising the Lord in song can be a great start for any meeting, however this is optional. Simply singing one song can allow people to focus on the Lord after a hectic day. LIFE Groups can offer a great place for people to develop skill with a musical instrument, such as a guitar or piano, outside of participation in the worship team. However, please keep in mind that the primary purpose of the meeting is community, therefore the praise and worship should not be the focal point each meeting.

Members are encouraged to share any prayer requests, update one another on what has been going on in their lives, as well as share testimonies of victories they have experienced. As a LIFE Group first begins, this time of sharing may be shallower than the leader would like. However, give it time, and as the group jells, the time will become deeper as people become more transparent with one another. Though prayer requests have been shared, it is preferable to wait and pray after study and discussion. However, there will be certain circumstances where a person or family needs prayer immediately, and the Leader will need to be sensitive to this.

Study & Discussion

This is a time during the meeting when the group grows in the Word together. This may be a Bible study, video teaching, movie, or some other activity. What happens during this time depends upon what direction the LIFE Group has decided to take. Examples of some of the studies are:

- Bible Studies: Everything from discipleship programs for new believers to book-by-book lessons with homework.
- Apologetics: Training resources that teach Christians how to respond to false religions and cults.
- Cultural Issues: Studying what does the Bible say about all the hot issues facing our society such as abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, evolution, separation of Church and state, etc.
- Marriage and Family Training: Discover God's perspective on marriage and family topics from the many resources available. Topics such as Godly parenting, the purpose of marriage, divorce prevention, and many more are available.
- Sermon Based Studies: One activity can be reviewing with the group the LIFE Group Action Sheet located in the back of this handbook (Appendix A). This activity encourages members to discuss and commit to applying the message from the Sunday morning service.

Praying

At this time, pray for any prayer requests that were shared. This can be a very special time when those with needs might have hands laid upon them for prayer or receive an encouraging/prophetic word from another person in the meeting.

Fellowship Time

This is a time of fellowship around food and refreshments at the end of the meeting. Please make time for this each meeting if possible as this is a great opportunity for people to build relationships.

ELEMENTS OF HEALTHY LIFE GROUPS (ACTS 4:32)

Below are five elements which will cause a LIFE Group to be healthy:

Focus on Relationship Building

At all times within the LIFE Group, community and relationship building are kept in focus as the primary purpose of the LIFE Group. These groups provide an opportunity for people to develop relationships that go far beyond the "Hello, how's the weather?". Often accountability and discipleship networks are established that produce fruit for a lifetime.

Love and Respect For One Another

LIFE Groups are to be safe environments where people feel free to be themselves and know they will be loved without condemnation. A key for every LIFE Group is to abide by the following, "What is said in LIFE Group stays in LIFE Group." Confidentiality is of the utmost importance and must be upheld for the sake of the group.

Caring Beyond the Meeting

LIFE Groups ensure that the "caring needs" of the Church family are being addressed. Typical of the practical needs often met for individuals and families are:

- **Meals:** Meals are supplied by the LIFE Group to families within the group who are overwhelmed by events such as childbirth, illness, or loss.
- **Transportation:** Rides should be arranged to and from important appointments and other events when a family is having difficulties in this area.
- **Visitation:** Hospital or home visits are provided whenever someone is in need of such ministry. This is a great opportunity for the LIFE Group Leaders to really minister and shepherd those within the group.
- **Child Care:** Child Care is provided by the LIFE Group members when an unforeseen circumstance arises.
- **Financial Assistance:** Sometimes it is necessary to offer financial aid to members of the group. Collection of money for benevolence purposes at the LIFE Group level should be done discreetly to not bring embarrassing attention to the recipient. If a financial need is too much for one LIFE group to address, the pastoral staff should be notified.
- **Special Activities:** The LIFE Group coordinates special events for their members such as baby and wedding showers, retirement parties, birthdays, etc.

Serving in the Church

We will be asking LIFE Groups to serve their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ at CCC through servant actions such as setting up and/or cleaning up after a fellowship meal, program, or seminar we host at CCC. This is a tangible way to serve the wider local church body.

at least one service project they will do together as a LIFE Group outside of the church. This can be working one Saturday at a local soup kitchen or food pantry, helping Habitat for Humanity, handing out clothes in Downtown Atlanta, or any one of other various service projects. Two or more LIFE Groups may even want to consider combining together for such a project.

WHAT ABOUT EVANGELISM?

We again state that the primary purpose of each LIFE Group is creating authentic Christian community. Therefore, we do not want to place an undue burden or yoke on any leader or LIFE Group to feel like they have to make their small group highly evangelistic or have to see a certain number of people saved in their small group each quarter. Of course, members within a LIFE Group are welcome to bring friends, neighbors, or coworkers to the LIFE Group. We also highly encourage the invitation of new members and new attendees of CCC to LIFE Groups as well.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF LIFE GROUP LEADERS

There are two qualities which will help each LIFE Group Leader be the best leader they can be:

Spiritual Warmth

This is a leader who has a vibrant, growing relationship with the Lord. People recognize the leader's intimacy with God and the way in which the leader trusts God and walks daily after Him. This causes the leader to have God's heart for people, and in turn have a true compassion for those within his or her group. This will be the key for a leader to be a shepherd of the LIFE Group.

Relational Warmth

Relational warmth is evidenced in those who are simply likeable and who enjoy being with people. This does not mean every leader has to be an extrovert. Rather, each leader should be likeable - people should enjoy being with them. They are kind and polite, welcoming, and are not afraid to introduce themselves and talk with those who are new to the group.

SUMMARY

In summary, LIFE Groups are small groups of believers, no matter how far along they are in the Lord, whose purpose is to be engaged in authentic Christian community where healthy discipleship naturally flows from praying together, worshipping together, studying the Bible together, and intentionally investing in one another's lives.

Appendix A

LIFE GROUP ACTION SHEET

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.—John 13:17

I. PURPOSE: This resource is provided as a tool to be used within the LIFE group setting to stimulate discussion about and encourage application of the weekend messages given at CCC. The discussion leader and the participants should have notes from the message to be discussed.

II. DISCUSSION STARTERS (Breaking the Ice)

A. What were the main scripture references used in the message?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. What were the main points of the message?

III. APPLICATION

A. How are you **ALREADY** applying the message to your life?

B. How do you plan to apply the message to **YOUR** life?

A. What Questions do you have about the message?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

B. What is keeping you from applying the message to your life?

V. WHERE TO NOW?

A. What NEW issues has this message caused you to think about?

B. Name some people who you think really needed to hear the message

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

IV. CLOSE

A. Pray for the grace to be a doer of the Word.

B. Pray for those who are not here but need to be.
