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THE FOUNDATION OF LIFE GROUPS

THE VISION

What would it have been like to be a part of the first century church? It must have been pretty inspiring and electrifying for the early Christians. They witnessed God working in powerful ways in their lives as well as in their community. All we know is that the first church in history transformed the world! As we look into the book of Acts, we get a glimpse of what the early church community must have been like:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47, ESV).

What would it be like to be a part of a community and church that lived out the principles and ideals of the 1st century church? Let's dream a little and try to envision the possibilities:

1. What would it be like to be a part of a **worshiping community**, where a strong sense of God's presence is manifested every time people are gathered together? A place where people are drawing closer to God, as they are now able to draw closer to each other. This is a church that is experiencing, exalting, and expanding God's glory.
2. What would it be like to be a part of an **accepting community**, where people are able to see beyond other people's weaknesses and faults? A place where people are giving grace to one another, as they are now able to see that they themselves are recipients of God's grace. This is a church that is passionate, purposeful, and principled in life.
3. What would it be like to be a part of a **loving community**, where people are sharing Christ's love with one another because they have experienced it first-hand for themselves? A place where people are becoming more selfless and sacrificial, as they are now able to see that people matter to God. This is a church that is developing, demonstrating, and discipling Christ-like character.
4. What would it be like to be a part of a **healing community**, where people are opening themselves up to the healing touch of God? A place where people are ministering to one another, as they are now able to use their brokenness to heal others. This is a church that is restoring, renewing, and revitalizing the Body of Christ.
5. What would it be like to be a part of a **learning community**, where people are growing in their intimacy with God, as they are hungering for the things of God through the Word of God? A place where people are



reading, studying, and memorizing God's Word, as they are now able to see the life-changing power of knowing God's Word. This is a church that is educating, equipping, and empowering its members for ministry.

6. What would it be like to be a part of an **encouraging community**, where people are becoming God's agents to lift up and inspire others to persevere in the Christian journey? A place where people are open to share about their struggles, as they are now able to understand that the Christian life is more similar to a marathon than a sprint. This is a church that is responding, relating, and reaching the lost world.
7. What would it be like to be a part of a **serving community**, where people are willingly and joyfully sharing God's blessings with others? A place where people are finding pleasure in being used by God to meet the needs of others, as they are now able to understand the principle of "It is more blessed to give, than to receive". This is a church that is influencing, impacting, and inspiring the nations.

This is the kind of community that we all yearn for; a community of faith worth all the sacrifice and commitment. It is through this vision of biblical community that we will be able to see the greater mission of "*transforming lost people into Christ's disciples who will then transform the world*" being accomplished in our generation.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS

Our Life Group ministry is based on strong biblical foundations. It can be traced back to the Old Testament, New testament, and the first century Church. We will look at the different aspects:

In the Old Testament

- I. The Trinity
 - A. Genesis 1:1 - We are told that God (Elohim) is the Creator.
 - B. The word Elohim is plural, which implies that there is more than one person.
 - C. It shows the concept of the Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They share together the same nature and majesty of God.
 - D. God himself has a "community" of loving relationship within the members of the Trinity.
- II. The Israelites
 - A. Groups were a pivotal part of the Israelites' individuality and their corporate identities.
 - B. The small group mentality existed in the Jewish culture from the entire nation down to the smallest family unit.
 1. Nation (Deuteronomy 7:6-8; Exodus 40:38) - The Israelites were a chosen people who formed a great family known as the "house of israel." It was from this family identity in which the nation was organized.



2. Tribe (Genesis 49; Joshua 13:22) - From the twelve sons of Israel/Jacob, the nation was divided into twelve tribes. The tribal system was established when the land of Canaan was divided among the Israelites according to their descent.
3. Clan (Numbers 26:21-49) - The tribes were further broken down into groups known as clans.
4. Household (Genesis 50:8; Deuteronomy 6:22) - The different clans were divided into family/relative subgroups. It represents several generations of relatives and servants.

In the New Testament

I. The Example of Jesus

- A. Jesus began His ministry by selecting His small group: the disciples (Matthew 4:18-22; Luke 6:13-16).
- B. Jesus did not just do large group ministry, He also met in small groups in different places.
- C. Jesus' ministry to the large group came out of His small group context. Oftentimes, Jesus withdrew from the crowds to spend time with His disciples (Mark 3:7).
- D. Jesus spent most of His time with His small group of disciples. They did everything together.
- E. Jesus was focused on relationships, not organizations- people, not programs.
- F. Jesus used the small group context to teach and model spiritual things - the small group was a lab.
- G. Jesus used the small group to train future leaders.

II. The Early Church

- A. Small groups were a vital part of the church's growth in the first century.
- B. Since many of the Christians were Jewish, they carried on the small group concept.
- C. The home played an important role in the family and community activities (Acts 2:42-47).
- D. They began to see lives change and the power of God evident as He was at work in their midst.

III. Church life in the Epistles

- A. All throughout the New Testament, there are references to building up the community of believers.
- B. It is interesting to note that it is given in the context of relationships, especially with the phrase, "one another".
- C. There are well over 50 references to the "one another's."
 1. Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10).
 2. Accept one another (Romans 15:7).
 3. Care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25).
 4. Bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).
 5. Forgive each other (Ephesians 4:32).
 6. Encourage and build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
 7. Spur one another on towards love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).
 8. Confess your sins to and pray for one another (James 5:16).
 9. Serving one another (1 Peter 4:10).
 10. Love one another (1 John 4:11).
- D. It is in the context of small groups that these biblical commands can best be experienced.



We can clearly see that the theme of community is a significant one found in Scripture. God himself exists in community and creates humanity to be in community. Even though sin caused damage to relationships - introducing conflict, anger, hurt, and division - God restores the hope of God-honoring community, seen partially through promises in the Old Testament (Gen 12; Ex 19:5-6) and more fully through Christ forming his *ekklesia* (church community) with a future hope of perfectly restored community (Rev 7:9, 21).

We also notice that communities such as in Acts 2:42-47, were characterized by mutuality, accountability, servanthood, love and evangelism. It was a place where people used their spiritual gifts to serve one another. It was a place where people were able to find fellowship and mutual support so that the church could impact the society around them. It was also a place where leaders were being developed who would be able to shepherd and disciple others in the faith.

THE MISSION

Our Context

A vision without a clearly laid out mission will not amount to much. In order to see the vision become a reality, we must have a clear mission. One important aspect of having a mission is to understand the context and the environment in which we are trying to make the vision a reality. Since we are on a university campus, it is important to understand the uniqueness of our situation.

The universities in the United States play an important role in history today because of several reasons. First, it is important to realize that future leaders of our world will pass through our universities. God, in his sovereignty, uses the universities to raise up future world leaders. The possibilities of reaching millions of people with the Gospel are endless. As the world is coming to us, we have a tremendous responsibility of introducing them to the life-changing message of Christ. We will be able to transform the world as we reach the campus, one student at a time.

Second, the universities in America are shaping many of our society's political, economical, philosophical, and moral values. People with influences in all these different spheres are found in our universities. What would happen if people, with the capacity of this kind of world influence, get radically transformed by the message of the cross? There would be a world revolution. Kingdom principles would be implemented and societies would be completely changed. The need for reaching the university campus becomes that much more urgent.

Third, many people establish their philosophy of life and their determined lifestyle while they are in college. College life is a transition period. It is a time when people begin to discover who they are and also learn how to be more independent. Every decision they make in college will have consequences in the future, whether good or bad. What people experience in college can change their life for eternity. This is an enormous responsibility for churches that are on university campuses.

For these reasons we must conclude that we, as a church located strategically on a college campus, have an important role to play to transform the future generations.



Our Influences

Not only must we know our context, but we must also know the different circumstances that are influencing our target group. There are three major influences in our society today that have infiltrated the college campus. These three are known as the "3-izations": secularization, pluralization, and privatization. They are having a profound effect on campuses all over the United States.

Secularization is the trend in which most of the parts of our society are disconnected from the influences of religious ideas and institutions. Therefore, the world becomes a place where people have to turn to themselves for meaning and purpose. It is simply a life without God. Over the last decade, we have seen the rapid pace of secularization hitting our society. This process will eventually lead to a realm devoid of hope.

Pluralization is the accelerated intensification of choices. More than ever, in our society, we are bombarded with so many choices. We have choices in what restaurants to go to, in the different media to consume, in which religion to believe, and the list goes on and on. It is these choices that cause us to become uncertain about what is genuine and what is counterfeit. We don't know what is true because all absolute truth has been thrown out. Everything becomes relative to the individual. Since all objective truth is eliminated, we tend to diminish our commitment to anything or anyone. If secularization and pluralization are present in a society, it will almost inevitably lead to privatization.

Privatization is the propensity of people who turn to themselves in self-dependence and self-sufficiency. This always leads to the abandonment of connecting with people to find security and significance. We begin to depend on ourselves and on our material possessions. Selfishness and materialism quickly follow because of the privatization of the self. Traits such as love for people and having a heart of commitment to others are non-existent. Rather, we get too self-focused which leads to selfishness and isolation.

What will combat some of these influences? The only thing that will break through these influences is for someone to experience the love of God in a community committed to them. It will have to be in a place where the message of the Gospel is being radically lived out - somewhere in which people are encouraged to focus on God rather than on the influences of the world, somewhere in which we will begin to look to the needs of others rather than only having our needs met, somewhere to live out the greatest commandments that Jesus gives in Scripture: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:30-31)

Our Mission Statement

In our Life Group ministry, we want to create an environment where both believers and pre-Christians can experience the love of God. This can only be accomplished as we learn how to be like Christ to one another. We want people to encounter a biblical community that will completely transform them. Once people get a glimpse and a taste of the Gospel message being lived out in the biblical community, we are confident that



they will be ready to transform the world. Therefore our overall goal of our Life Group ministry can be stated in this mission statement:

Life Groups exist to create community where lives can be transformed by the gospel.

We, as a biblical community, have an extraordinary responsibility of helping people experience the benefits of being part of God's family. We can accomplish this through a strong and unwavering commitment to build up a community where love, acceptance, healing, encouragement, and service are the foundations.

As a result, the Gospel message will be gradually lived out. The Gospel message is simply the fact that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). As we try to grasp the magnitude of God's undeserving grace and love, it should motivate us to reciprocate that love to others. In 1 John 4:11-12, the Apostle John writes, "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." Living out this verse will validate the Gospel message and it will prove to people that Jesus really can transform the world.

Our Aim

In Ezekiel 47, Ezekiel describes a vision of a river flowing from the temple. Without any help - no tributaries feeding it, no other rivers joining it, no other sources of water pouring into it - the river becomes deeper and wider the further it goes, and as it does, there are more signs of life: fish swarming the waters, trees flourishing and bearing fruit along its banks, people able to fish and find sustenance.

This is the aim that we have as a campus ministry: we are not striving for numbers or size, nor to have some claim as the most "successful" campus ministry. Instead, our aim is that lives would be deeply transformed by the gospel, particularly in the context of loving Christ-centered community. And as the majority of our students leave Ann Arbor, our hope is that they will bring gospel-life with them to the ends of the earth.

THE VALUES

When HMCC began, God gave us the mission of:

"Transforming lost people into Christ's disciples who will then transform the world."

Inherent in this mission is the call to bring the work of transformation beyond our local churches to the people and places that are in need of the gospel. Over the years we have seen our church extend the love of Christ to the community around us through works of service and to the nations through various short-term mission projects. As our ministry continues to multiply, however, we are realizing that God wants us to take further steps by planting churches that will spread the gospel and the ministry He has entrusted to us so that the work of discipleship and transformation can continue to grow.



If we are going to replicate and multiply our ministry and do more missions work and church plants, we are left with the question, "What are the distinguishing marks of HMCC's ministry?" In other words, if you walked into a church, what characteristics would you need to see to convince you that it is an HMCC church? Even though no two churches can be exactly alike, we believe that there are clear distinguishing marks that are like a thread that is woven together to unify everything together. As we consider the cultural and local context of each location, we are convinced that we cannot compromise on reproducing healthy biblical churches that will transform the world.

We have identified seven core characteristics that are foundational to our churches and our ministries. These traits are the core of our ministry that must be developed in our lives, discipled in our Life Groups and ministry teams, and deployed in our churches. The traits can be remembered as, "SLT CMMD" or "salt command." In Matthew 5:13 Jesus says that we are "the salt of the earth." The seven distinctives of an HMCC church are:

1. Spirit-led Ministry – Our ministry is led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. This is often expressed in prayer, worship, and preaching, but extends to every area of our lives as we depend upon the Lord. We are committed to listening to, waiting for, and obeying the Holy Spirit as he guides us to build up the church.

2. Leadership Development – Good and effective leadership is crucial for the health of any organization. We want to see the training and development of servant-leaders who will provide Christ-centered leadership for our churches, families, and every sector of society. We are committed to producing a strong leadership culture in our church so that we can be a pipeline for many more people to be trained and sent out to the nations.

3. Transculturalism – If the gospel is meant for all nations, then we must be a people who can interact with, care for, and move between the myriad of cultures in this world. More than trying to build a multi-ethnic or multi-cultural church, we want to raise people who are able to transcend their own comfort-culture and relate with people from any cultural background. This will require people who have the heart of God, who are willing to incarnate the love of God so much so that they are willing to overcome their own desire for comfort and safety.

4. Community – Church is not just experienced through corporate worship services; it is best lived out through biblical community – groups of people who love and serve one another and challenge each other to grow as followers of Jesus Christ.

5. Ministry Inside and Outside – God has provided all believers with spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ and reach out to the world around us. The process of discovering, developing, and deploying these gifts is integral to HMCC's ministry. The gifts are not only used within the church walls but God has called us to utilize them to transform every sphere of society, whether it is in the commerce, healthcare, arts and media, government, education, or domestic sector.

6. Missions through Church Planting – Missions and church planting are not only goals to achieve - they are values to embody. Missions cannot be accomplished with only verbal evangelism. We need to help new believers to be discipled and start serving the purposes of God. This can be best accomplished as people are



part of a local church, hence churches must be planted. If we are going to send people out to do this gospel work, we must be committed to raising up and developing more people who will be sent into the world.

7. Discipleship – Above all, we must be a people who follow and submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This process of growth and development is not just learned knowledge; it is gained through life-on-life discipleship and experience. We are committed to raising up radical Christ-followers who take up the challenge of Jesus when he said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35)

SECTION TWO: THE FRAMEWORK

THE CONCEPT

At HMCC, our goal is to “transform lost people into Christ's disciples who will then transform the world.” In order to experience this transformation, we must go beyond traditions and cultural biases and be rooted in the timeless truths of Scripture applied in relevant ways. Carl F. George, in his book “Prepare Your Church for the Future,” mentions some patterns found in traditional models of ministry:

1. The most important weekly event is a worship service in which a professional minister “provides” and the lay people “take.”
2. Outsiders, too often, view church as socially irrelevant to their personal needs.
3. Newcomers experience a struggle with being accepted - feeling like a part of the group.
4. Those who quit the church tend to complain about a lack of caring by members and leaders.
5. The church's lay leaders seem to have lost touch with the heartbeat of the vision and mission of the church.

In contrast, when we look at Scripture, we notice an emphasis on God interacting with communities of people. In the Old Testament, we see God dealing with Israel as a nation, the Old Testament covenant community. God also addresses individual tribes of Israel, smaller communities of faith based on birth and calling. When we look into the New Testament, we see Jesus living life with his community of faith (the twelve disciples). When the early church began later in the New Testament, the believers met in communities of faith that were better known as “house churches” as they met in their homes. They practiced their faith within the context of small groups, while occasionally gathering in larger group settings. It is the pattern of what the early church did in Acts 2:42-47.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous

hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

(Acts 2:42-47)

It is our prayer that we will see the Spirit build up the church of Jesus Christ. We want the privilege of experiencing a biblical community similar to the first century church, which transformed the world. Specifically, Life Groups in HMCC are considered the basic units of “doing church.” It is our sincere desire at HMCC to biblically do “whatever it takes” to develop mature disciples of Christ who will make an impact in the world. We believe that it will be accomplished through the ministry of Life Groups - our form of “communities of faith.”

Our communities of faith, **Life Groups**, should reflect the heart and principles behind the overall [mission](#) of the church. There are **five core values** that drive our Life Group ministry:

1. EVANGELISM - We value God's desire for all people to have a personal and life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, we believe that every Christian is called to invest in the process of sharing the Gospel to those in their spheres of influence, their community, and to the nations.
2. EDUCATION - We value cultivating disciples who know God intimately and reflect Christ's character. Therefore, we believe that God's Word and its practical life application are foundational for our spiritual growth and journey with God.
3. EDIFICATION - We value Biblical community that encourages deeper relationships with God and one another. Therefore, we believe in creating an environment that fosters authenticity, accountability, and opportunities to minister to one another.
4. EXTENSION - We value building up a healthy, dynamic, and vibrant church. Therefore, we believe in equipping and training people for ministry so that they would impact the community and influence the nations in such a way the world cannot ignore.
5. EXALTATION - We value passionately glorifying God in and above all things. Therefore, we believe in wholeheartedly giving our best in *every* aspect of our lives, both public and private, in order to exemplify the worthiness of God.

These five core values must be the engine that drives Life Groups. Our church's mission and vision will only be carried when these core values are effectively carried out in our communities of faith. Therefore, these five components of experiencing church have to be evident and practiced.

THE STRUCTURE

In order to transform lives and help believers grow as disciples, the early church in Acts 2:42-47 practiced their faith in the context of small groups (“communities of faith”) and large groups (“local church”).

First, there is the community of faith level.

In the context of HMCC, this is what we call Life Group. These groups, typically made of 10-15 people, can be great environments for supporting people's deeply-felt needs as well as spaces to discover the call to be a disciple of Christ with others. Life Groups are also contexts where people can explore discipleship relationships through [Life Change Groups](#) or other intentional relationships of care, commitment and challenge for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission.

The goal of Life Group ministry is life transformation, and that life transformation should ripple out to impact the world as we obey Christ's command to make disciple-making disciples. Therefore, focused and purposeful leadership will be absolutely essential for the following reasons:

1. There will be a need to establish and pass along Jesus' teachings and values.
2. There will be a need to raise and train up more Christ-like leaders who can help others know and become like Christ.
3. There will be a need to be missional, bring people to Christ, and disciple them.

Second, there is the local church level.

At HMCC, this includes our Sunday Celebration and Friday Night Encounter gatherings. There is a greater joy when an individual Life Group joins with the greater local church in celebration and worship. It is like a University of Michigan football game. The stadium might be packed with a giant crowd of 109,000 people that is made up of smaller groups of friends, families and relatives. Separately, their celebration of a victory is nothing compared to the electrifying excitement of the whole crowd all together, cheering after a touchdown. Similarly, as people from different Life Groups come together to praise God for what he has done and is doing, there is another dimension of excitement. People will begin to see that God is accomplishing something bigger than their smaller community of faith and sense that God is doing something that is worthy of their involvement and investment.

THE FRUIT

A Life Group that is living out the 5 E's should bear the following fruits:

Biblical Fellowship

The word "fellowship" in Acts 2:42 is the Greek word *koinonia*, a far richer word than "hanging out" or "friend group." There is a deep communion marked by generosity, unity, and sharing in all of life. For the Christian, this fellowship includes a communal participation in faith - people who share a deeply held belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ - and is built on and empowered by God's unconditional love that leads us to love one another deeply from the heart (1 Peter 1:22). Life Group members consistently look to the Bible to better



understand what their fellowship should be, and leaders set the example in seeking and contributing to true biblical fellowship (e.g. “This Life Group time is as much for me as it is for them”), marked by the [5 E's above](#). Bible studies, times of worship, and intercessory prayer should be integral hallmarks of Life Group.

Team Ministry

Although the Twelve played a significant role in the early church, the writers of Scripture make it clear that everyone was involved in the ministry. All of the believers were involved in sacrificial giving and hospitality (Acts 2:42-47); Paul calls the church to be a body with every believer using their gifts to serve others (1 Cor 12); and Peter notes that instead of human priests, there is now a “priesthood of all believers” (1 Peter 2:9). Every member should be encouraged to take ownership of their Life Group. Whether members are empowered to take on specific responsibilities (e.g. refreshments, activities, birthdays, announcements) or are encouraged to find unique service opportunities, this should be rooted in God’s call to this spiritual family and to love the members of it.

Investment in Evangelism

The Christian faith, being built on Good News, by nature is not reserved for private or insular activity but designed for public proclamation. In other words, Life Groups as “communities of faith” should be witnessing communities, whether by encouraging one another to build genuine relationships with pre-Christians, inviting others into their Life Group community, or being hospitable to all who come to a Life Group gathering. Specific members may be more evangelistically gifted, but the whole community can work together to see people come to know Christ and rejoice in that together.

Discipleship Relationships

At HMCC, we define a disciple of Jesus as someone who believes his Gospel and obeys his teachings. A healthy Life Group should serve as a context for church members to foster **intentional life-on-life discipling relationships of care, commitment and challenge for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission**. While leaders should champion disciple-making in their Life Groups, the Great Commission was not given to a few but to all, and every Life Group member should be involved in discipling each other as well.

Life Groups, then, should be environments where people are lovingly challenged to grow as a disciple of Jesus and, as they are experiencing authentic loving relationships with others, find relationships where they can intentionally receive and invest in discipleship.



SECTION THREE: THE FUNCTIONS

Acts 6:1-4 (ESV): Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Ephesians 4:11-14 (ESV): 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

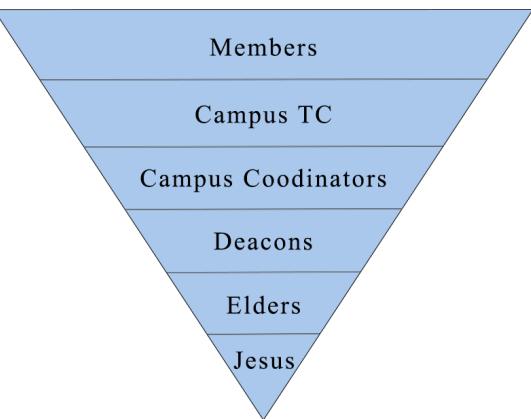
God gives leaders to his people. We see this pattern in the Old Testament with kings, prophets, and priests; we see this in the New Testament as well. As the early church grew rapidly in number, there was a need for the leadership of the church to expand and develop. The need was valid: believers were willing to give generously to meet each others' needs, but the resources were not fairly reaching the people that needed them. While the default solution was to have the Twelve, as the existing leaders of the church, directly take on this new responsibility, they instead chose to share leadership and responsibility of the church with others who were filled with the Spirit.

Paul builds on this idea in Ephesians 4, highlighting that it is God who gives leaders to the church, this time focusing not on the different responsibilities or needs, but rather the different giftings that leaders have. He also notes the reason: not for selfish gain or ambition (1 Peter 5:2-3) but to help every believer grow in the “fullness of Christ.”

At HMCC, we believe that God gives leaders to his people, each of whom have unique spiritual gifts, to take on different functions and roles. There are a few offices (roles) that are specifically mentioned in the Bible, which we will describe below, but it also seems like there is a degree of freedom that churches can have to structure things as long as the leaders are people of character, filled with the Holy Spirit, and do all to help their members grow into spiritual maturity. Here, we will explain how we as HMCC of Ann Arbor organize our leadership and what each role entails.



THE ORGANIZATION



The upside-down pyramid serves as a helpful reminder that the leadership of the church begins with Christ: not only is He our head from whom we find our direction and provision, but He is also our foundation and our cornerstone (Eph 2:20). We are built as a church community on the finished work of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and we continue to find our direction from Him.

This also helps us visualize and remember the purpose: leaders in our church are not here to push forward our own agendas or lord our positions over others (Matt 20:25-26), but as we find direction from Christ, we humbly serve those above us.

Elders & Pastors

Elders are those entrusted with the authority and responsibility to shepherd and lead the church. While modern church culture ascribes various definitions and job descriptions to words such as pastor (*poimen*), elder (*presbuteros*), or bishop/overseer (*episkopos*), the New Testament uses these words interchangeably to refer to the group of men who lead the church. For example:

*"So I exhort the elders (*presbuteros*) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd (*poimanate*) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (*episkopountes*), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly"* (1 Peter 5:1-2 ESV; cf. Acts 20:28, Titus 1:5-7)

The elders lead the church as servant-leaders in the model of Christ and generally think through five areas of leadership:

- **Devotion:** As described in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3, an elder must be devoted to the Lord, to his family, and to a lifestyle of Christlikeness. He should be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2) in all areas of life and relationship.
- **Doctrine:** Elders are charged with "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). This is a sacred responsibility that must be taken seriously. Elders must be sound in theology, capable to interpret God's word, and faithful in communicating the Gospel.
- **Direction:** Elders give direction and vision to the church as its shepherds. We communicate vision publicly through preaching and teaching, and also embody the vision, mission, and values of the church through our example. We are not distant visionaries; "a shepherd should smell like sheep."



- **Discipline:** Elders are responsible for exercising discipline in the church as instructed by the New Testament (Galatians 6:1-2, Matthew 18:15-17), and for ordering and organizing the ministries of the church.
- **Development:** Elders develop the leaders around them, raising up the next generation of servants who will lead in Life Groups, ministry teams, and as deacons and elders (Titus 1:5, 2 Timothy 2:2).

Because it is sometimes practically useful to distinguish between vocational vs. lay church leaders, HMCC will refer to those serving vocationally as “pastor”, and those serving as laypersons as “elder”. While the different vocabulary is useful in conversation, we acknowledge that the biblical calling of pastors and elders is synonymous.

Deacons

The word deacon (*diakonos*) means “servant”, and deacons are called to a role of servant-leadership for the church. From passages like Acts 6, we understand the role of deacon as follows:

- **Biblically Qualified:** Deacons should be those the church looks to as spiritually healthy and mature people of faith, filled with the Spirit, and trusted to lead.
- **Relationally Connected:** Deacons should be connected to the leaders and members of our church as mentors, disciple-makers, mediators, and unifiers.
- **Christ-like Servants:** Deacons should demonstrate a Christ-like heart to serve God and His people by meeting the needs of the church.
- **Collaborative Mobilizers:** Deacons should serve together as a team that mobilizes our church members to pursue our mission, vision, and values.
- **Examples to Follow:** Deacons should demonstrate to the church what a life of following Christ entails through their lifestyle, humility, devotion, vulnerability, and dependence on God.
- **Empowered Implementers:** Deacons should implement the direction given by the elders into the life of the church with initiative, boldness, and creativity.

Campus Coordinators (CC)

From its inception, HMCC has had a heart for the University of Michigan and its students. As such, we have been blessed to have a significant portion of our church be from the campus, which has required an extra layer of leadership to help the elders and deacons oversee the campus ministry.

The role of the Campus Coordinators is to help realize the mission and vision of HMCC in the context of our campus ministry. They do this through developing our Campus TC leaders, and planning and organizing campus-wide gatherings. Although Campus Deacons and Coordinators have similar functions, deacons have been tested longer in terms of character and faithfulness and will have some more authority in regards to financial stewardship as well as helping the coordinators grow in faith.



Staff

Biblically speaking, there is no office of “staff” mentioned. However, in different seasons of our church, we have offered full- or part-time employment to trusted leaders so that they would have the availability to serve our church in different ways. We have also had volunteer staff members as well.

Staff members have served different functions based on the needs of our church, such as meeting administrative needs, leadership development, and planning events for our church. Additionally, staff members have come from all levels of our church leadership, such as deacons and campus coordinators.

TEAM Community

TEAM Community (TC) is our church's leadership team consisting of Life Group and ministry team leaders. They are currently split into the following groupings: 1) campus, 2) city (Covenant, Focus, and Impact), and 3) ministry team leaders. Each group within TC will primarily meet separately as unique contexts benefit from different training. There will be regular times, however, when the entire TC will meet together.

Not only are the campus, city and ministry team leaders getting support and care from their overseeing elders and deacons, but they also receive training and proper skills needed in order to effectively minister. This is primarily accomplished through the weekly TEAM Community meetings.

The acronym for TEAM is: Teaching, Equipping, Accountability, and Mentoring. These four things must occur as the leadership team gets together. This is also the time for the pastor to recast the vision and to strengthen the excitement of making the vision a reality. We are committed to the training and producing of Kingdom workers.

Leadership Support and Accountability

One consistent concern that we have for our leaders is the issue of accountability and support. There should not be any "lone-rangers" in ministry. We emphasize the importance of getting connected with another person to share and pray with one another. We also emphasize the necessity of ministering together. We are not in competition with one another. When it comes to building the Kingdom of God, our only enemy is Satan. It is imperative that we get away from the “my Life Group” mentality. If one group in our church is doing well, then all of us should be able to rejoice with the brothers and sisters. If one group is struggling, then we should all feel the heartaches with them.

Because we deeply value accountability, each Campus TC member will be assigned an accountability partner. We expect that Campus TC members will make it a priority to regularly meet with their accountability partner(s) to support each other in the struggles that are unique to serving in a leadership role. These relationships should exemplify care, commitment and challenge for one another.



SECTION FOUR: THE FOCUS

BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

Leadership, at its most basic level, is all about influence. Who are those people in your life that you are influencing for the Kingdom of God? Jesus mastered influence by His words as well as by His actions. He made an impact on the lives of the people He met. In the same way, as we take on the responsibility of being leaders of Life Groups, we must make the same significant impact on people's lives. Biblical leadership can be defined as:

"Leading and influencing God's people towards fulfilling God's purpose of building up the body of Christ and impacting the world."

In order to make this a reality, leaders must exhibit the following traits that will help accomplish the task of impacting the lives around us.

1. Leaders need to have a growing and maturing relationship with God (John 15:5).
2. Leaders need a sense of calling or passion from God to lead people (Exodus 3:1-10).
3. Leaders need to have a shepherding heart for believers in the Lord (1 Peter 5:1-4).
4. Leaders need to have a vision for building up future leaders (2 Timothy 2:2).

Christ-like Leadership

Jesus Christ is our ultimate model of leadership because of his vision and his example. He had a vision of people becoming His disciples and then going to the ends of the world to preach the good news of the kingdom of God (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). This vision was shared with the disciples in Matthew 9:36-38. He saw a great number of people who were lost and realized that they needed a shepherd. Since Jesus knew that His disciples were soon going to minister to these people, He told them to pray and ask God to raise up workers for the harvest field.

Not only did Jesus have a strong vision, but he also embodied the vision by becoming a living example for His disciples. Perhaps the most memorable example occurred in the upper room, where Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13). He wanted to teach the disciples that leaders lead by example. Jesus reiterated this principle in Mark 10:42-45 when He said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

One of the greatest metaphors given in Scripture was that of Jesus as the good shepherd. In John 10, it states that the good shepherd always calls His own sheep by name and leads them. The good shepherd even lays down His life for His sheep. In the same way, we are like shepherds to our Life Groups because we must care for our members. The love and care must be like that of a parent to their own children. There is an underlying

theme of leaders modeling Christ-likeness to their members. The Apostle Paul had such a life of integrity that he was able to say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). We must keep in mind that the members in our Life Group will not exceed our spiritual growth. Jesus made this point clear in Matthew 10:24-25 when He said, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master."

A key principle to remember: true biblical leadership is a direct result of a life devoted to Christ. This is why our character and spiritual maturity are essential to biblical leadership. The more we experience God, the more we can give to people. We, as leaders, cannot give what we have not received. It is more about the heart attitude than our ability to do things.

Key principles for biblical leaders are:

1. We lead by serving.
2. We multiply our ministry by investing our lives in others.
3. We must be found faithful until the end.

Character Traits of a Leader

1. Christ-follower
 - We must forsake a life of sin (Romans 6:6).
 - We must deepen our relationship with God through Scripture reading and prayer (Colossians 3:16).
 - We must be filled with the Spirit so that we can walk in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).
2. Character
 - We must become more like Christ and less like the world (Romans 12:1-2).
 - We must regularly examine our heart condition (Psalms 86:11).
 - We must bear the fruit of a changed heart (Titus 1:5-9).
3. Calling
 - We must have a burden for God's people (Matthew 9:36-38).
 - We must be convicted about the ministry of shepherding others (Philippians 1:8).
 - We must be willing in our hearts to serve and lead God's people (1 Peter 5:14).
4. Commitment
 - We must be committed to the vision and mission of the ministry.
 - We must be committed to giving our tithes and offerings.
 - We must show commitment to our calling through the way we steward our time, treasure, and talents.
 - We must be committed to developing the members of our group.
5. Captivated
 - We must never lose our awe and amazement of God's grace in our lives.
 - We must not be content with where we are but always desiring to learn more about God (Philippians 3:10).
 - We must be teachable (Psalms 86:11).
6. Candor
 - We must be honest with God, ourselves, and others (Psalms 139:23-24).
 - We must be authentic (James 5:16).



- We must be willing to be vulnerable.
7. Consistency
- We must have integrity in all that we do.
 - We must persevere in the midst of adversity (Hebrews 10:36).
 - We must be faithful until the end (Matthew 25:21).

Qualifications of Life Group Leadership

We at Harvest Mission Community Church believe that anyone taking on the responsibility of leadership in the church must reflect Christ-likeness in everything that they do. Having a good grasp of the Lordship of Christ, one must display qualities that will bring glory and honor to Christ as they serve. There are six major categories that a person must conform to in order to serve with integrity at HMCC:

1. Spiritual Qualifications

- One must have an intimate, personal relationship with God.
- One must be a self-feeder – consistent time in the word & prayer.
- One must be teachable and eager to learn.
- One must be growing in maturity as a disciple of Christ (A.L.I.V.E.).

2. Foundational Qualifications

- One must have taken the Experiencing Membership class. Also, one must commit to taking Experiencing Ministry, if you have not done so already.
- One must agree completely with and live out the mission, vision, strategy and values of HMCC. (<http://annarbor.hmcc.net/about/who-we-are>)
- One must adhere to the doctrinal statements of HMCC. (<http://annarbor.hmcc.net/about/beliefs>)
- One must commit to a life of integrity through signing the TEAM Community Way of Life (details to be reviewed at the TC Summit)
- One must agree to not teach against HMCC's theological distinctives. (hmcc.tech/td)

3. Devotional Qualifications

- One must make every effort to attend all weekly or biweekly meetings listed below.
 - Sunday Celebration
 - TEAM Community meetings
 - Friday Night Encounter
 - Church-wide Prayer Gatherings
- One must make every effort to attend all the major and special events in the church.
- One must exhibit the characteristics of a growing disciple
- One must be willing to make the time commitment to collaborate with co-leaders (e.g. planning meetings) and invest in members (e.g. LG meetings and hangouts, individual meet-ups)
- If there is a potential conflict with participating in any church gathering, one must communicate with their mentors to find the best win-win situation.

4. Emotional Qualifications



- One must be growing in emotional maturity.
- One must be willing to deal with deeper issues of the heart.
- One must be able to respond well to confrontation, rebuke, correction, and discipline.
- One must be willing to go through character development.

5. Relational Qualifications

- One must have respect and honor for parents.
- One must display the ability for loving & growing relationships with people.
- One must seek accountability from fellow believers.
- One must value being discipled, as well as raising up disciple-makers.
- One must have a burden for the lost and be mission-minded.

6. Educational/Vocational Qualifications

- One must have academic integrity (students).
 - There must be a serious effort to attend all classes.
 - Study diligently and complete assignments on time.
- One must meet the minimum G.P.A. requirement of 2.8.¹
- One must represent Christ well in the workplace.
- One must perform their specific job description with integrity and faithfulness.

¹ No one on school probation will serve as a leader with the Life group ministry. Anyone with a cumulative GPA below 2.8 will be placed on church probation. One must improve each semester until a 2.8 is maintained or be considered for disqualification.

LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

Listed below are general guidelines of the responsibilities that a Campus TC leader has at HMCC. We need to keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list of responsibilities. As servants of God, there will be times when we are asked to do things beyond our call of duty. When we are asked, we should do them with a grateful heart. Remember, God does not need us. We serve with joy and fervor because of what Christ did for us on the cross. It is truly a privilege to serve in this ministry that God has established.

- A. Build the leadership team
 - a. Helping the leadership team to grow spiritually
 - b. Accountability within the leadership team
 - c. Receive training at TEAM Community
- B. Conduct Life Group meetings
 - a. Plan and implement
 - b. Assemble the group and lead it
- C. Shepherd the members
 - a. Pray for and build relationships with your members
 - b. Be an example of Christ-likeness to your members
- D. Multiply the ministry
 - a. Invite others to your group
 - b. Encourage the members to get involved in evangelism
 - c. Develop future leaders – training people to internalize the ministry



- E. Support the ministry of the church
 - a. Share the philosophy of ministry at HMCC
 - i. Promoting the mission, vision and values of the church
 - b. Teach members to grow in devotion and love for the local church
 - c. Be willing to do whatever it takes to make HMCC a God-honoring church

Specific Role Descriptions for the Leadership Team

Each individual leadership team will include 1 lead-leader and 1 or more co-leaders. During your first year on TC, you will be a co-leader.

While there are some responsibilities specific to each role, both the lead-leaders (LL) and co-leaders (CL) share much of the same responsibilities for shepherding their LG, and listed below are clear role descriptions for each role. These are helpful because: (1) It clarifies our role, (2) It monitors our progress and, (3) It avoids unstated expectations. At HMCC, we want to avoid confusion in the specific roles we must take. Also, we firmly believe in evaluation because it helps us become better ministers for the Kingdom of God.

There are some things we must keep in mind as we go over the role descriptions. First, we must remember that ultimately, God looks at the heart. There could be a situation in which a leader performs every single one of the role descriptions but is not pleasing to the Lord. It is so easy for us to merely complete tasks rather than serve out of a heart of true biblical servanthood. Fulfilling our role as leaders is not about checklists.

Second, we must understand that the needs of members and the church sometimes go beyond our role descriptions. Jesus made the principle clear in Matthew 5:40-42 when he emphasized that the needs of others come before our convenience. We must learn to go that "extra mile" for the Kingdom of God. There is a good possibility that many situations and circumstances will arise in which we need to meet prayerfully.

Lastly, being a leader is more than just about fulfilling our role descriptions. Being a leader requires an attitude of incarnation. In Philippians 2, the Apostle Paul describes the incarnation of Christ. Jesus descended into greatness by becoming a man, serving His own creation, and eventually dying on the cross. For Jesus, it was not a mere checklist of things He had to do, but rather it was his very life mission He took upon. In the same way, we must "become" the principles behind the role description. As we begin to take steps in that direction, we will see the fruits of our labor and the Lord will be glorified.

Specific Role Description for Leaders (shared by LL and CL)

1. Pray for members and potential leaders.
2. Shepherd the members of the group.
3. Develop and empower disciples and disciple makers.
4. Faithfully attend all TEAM Community meetings.
5. Meet regularly with your leadership team for prayer, to discuss the group's progress, development, and to brainstorm.
6. Give encouragement and constructive criticism to fellow leader(s) and members.



7. Contact members to encourage them and remind them of important gatherings.
8. Think of edifying activities for the Life Group.
9. Guard the unity of your leadership team.

Specific Role Description for the Lead Leader

1. Build and sustain the vision and culture of your Life Group through weekly meetings.
2. Leadership development of co-leader(s) and members.
3. Take initiative in addressing problems, resolving conflicts, clarifying goals, and evaluating purpose.

Specific Role Description for the Co-leader

1. Leadership development of members.
2. Aid and support the Lead Leader in building, sustaining, and evaluating the vision and culture.
3. Carry out the tasks assigned by the Lead Leader.
4. Observe and help the Life Group dynamics through bringing up potential problems or conflicts that may be arising, and brainstorming solutions with the Lead Leader.
5. Check in on the health of the Lead Leader and find ways to support them.

SECTION FIVE: THE FUNDAMENTALS

LIFE GROUP STAGES

Every Life Group goes through systematic phases of development. No two Life Groups are alike. As the group goes through the stages over a period of time, it begins to form its unique identity and personality. Human growth stages are often used to describe the life cycle of a Life Group. Human beings go through the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, and then old age. In the same way, each year a Life Group starts off in the infancy stage and begins to slowly mature. Your Life Group will go through these four major stages:

1. Formation
2. Participation
3. Maturation
4. Conclusion

The time duration given for each stage are only suggestions, therefore, we need to be sensitive to our specific group. Some groups might spend more time in one phase than in another. However, as leaders, we must navigate our group through the challenges and opportunities that each of these stages.



Formation Stage

This stage should last for about 10-15% of the season, so about 4-5 weeks in the school year and 1-2 weeks in the spring/summer.

This is the beginning stage of all Life Groups. Initiation and tentative actions usually characterize this stage. Every experience within this stage sets the tone for future actions or responses from the members. **It is important for the leadership team to provide clear vision and mission statements because people like to know where they are going.** Not only giving the members direction, but it is crucial to provide informational issues such as format, agenda, benefits and other details at this time. This is when the Life Group covenant could be introduced (most likely towards the end of this phase).

We have to remember that there is a level of hesitancy and awkwardness on the part of the members during the first few meetings. This is more so for those people who have never participated in a Life Group before. Some of the things that the members will be thinking about are: "Will I fit in?", "Who else is in the group?", "Do I feel comfortable with these people?", "What is the group going to do?", "What is going to be expected of me?", "Can I trust these people?" As the group begins to learn names and some specifics of one another, it helps the members to assess their own comfort level within the group. Don't forget, first impressions have a powerful effect on people!

During this first phase, there needs to be a lot of initiation from the leaders, because the group will be highly dependent on us. There might be some people who will drop out of the group in this early stage due to discomfort and lack of interest. Don't let this discourage you. Continue to clarify the goals so that you will have members who are really interested in the group.

Here are some key principles to remember:

1. This is the time in which group members form relationships and begin to develop community.
 - a. Do as many activities (i.e. potluck dinners, bowling, etc.) as possible.
 - b. Begin Life Change Groups (LCG)
2. A sense of group identity develops as members share their lives with one another.
 - a. Provide avenues for members to share about their lives (hobbies and interests, salvation testimony, etc).
 - b. Provide interactive activities during the Life Groups, so that they can connect with one another.
3. The leader is key during this phase.
 - a. Clarify the purpose(s) of the group.
 - b. Set the tone for honest interaction and loving care in your first few meetings.
 - c. Establish the culture in the Life Group by constantly reiterating important key traits that are exhibited and experienced in the Life Group.
4. Help each member feel like they belong
 - a. Do icebreaker exercises.
 - b. Define needs in the group.
 - c. Make covenants if desired.



- d. Meet with your committed members to share expectations (both ways).
- e. Identify “dynamics” people - Who naturally brings unity to your Life Group? Fun? Care? Welcome and hospitality?

Participation Stage

This stage should last for about 25-30% of the Season, so about 8-10 weeks in the school year and 4-5 weeks in the spring/summer.

In this phase, the members are feeling more comfortable with one another. There is more of a willingness to open up and share. It is important that the leader develops a climate of trust and care. When people begin to feel like their opinions matter, they will be more willing to make the commitment to the group. **A sense of ownership of the Life Group should start to develop at this point.** As the group begins to study the Bible, there should be times of honest sharing and good discussion. Leaders must remember to affirm every question that is raised by the members.

Here are some key principles:

1. The group begins to care for one another.
 - a. Encourage LCGs.
 - b. Reinforce values highlighted in your covenant if applicable.
2. The leader invites others to share in the group process
 - a. Identify members who are eager to serve and grow (invest and entrust).
 - b. Begin delegating various tasks to members.
3. The members deepen in trust and ownership of the group.
4. Affirm group involvement and establishment of culture, both formally and informally

Maturation Stage

This stage should last for about 35-50% of the season, so about 12-16 weeks in the school year and 6-8 weeks in the spring/summer.

This third phase displays the maturation process of becoming Christ’s disciple. This phase should be the longest of all the phases because maturity takes time. By this time, the group is making significant progress toward building community. Some of the goals, which were set in the beginning, are slowly becoming a reality.

In this phase, maintaining interpersonal relationships and fulfilling the commitments made in the covenant should be a priority. Every member of the group is beginning to take personal responsibility for the maturation process. But, we need to be cautious in this phase because obstacles will begin to surface. **The sense of routine, unresolved conflicts, dissatisfaction, schedule conflicts, lack of commitment, etc. will all bring about a crisis to the group. We, as leaders, must be quick to diagnose the problem and find resolutions.** Oftentimes, adjustments have to be made in this phase.

Here are some key principles:



1. Maintain group relationships, procedures, and details.
2. Help the group to be responsible for itself.
3. Assist the group to deal with fluctuations in their spiritual life.
4. Make necessary adjustments.
5. Members should grow in interdependence.
6. Members should be trained to do ministry.
 - a. Training through serving the Life Group
 - b. Training as the group gets involved with mission and evangelism.

Conclusion Stage

This stage should last for about 10-15% of the season, so about 4-5 weeks in the school year and 1-2 weeks in the spring/summer.

As the season comes to a close, the group will begin to feel a sense of closure. This is rarely a straightforward and easy process, especially when important relationships have been built. It is important to help people deal with the process of separating. **As a leader, you must share with your members that God desires for us to share the experience of joy with other people.** Regardless, this stage of termination must have a time of reflection and celebration. Reflection on the faithfulness of God and all that He has done in our lives is vital to this process. It should be a time of reminiscing. Laugh and cry together as you go over the past Life Group experience. Then spend some time in celebration, in praising God and in giving thanks.

Here are some key principles:

1. Assist the group to understand and prepare for either continuing, reproducing, or ceasing.
2. Focus on reflection and celebration.
3. Complete any final administrative tasks.
4. Reinforce principles that can be carried to their next Life Group experience.

THE BIBLE STUDY

Preparing the Study

Many times we find ourselves superficially studying the Bible. This is how we gain head-knowledge and no real life-change. There needs to be depth in our study of Scripture. One way to achieve this is by thoroughly studying a specific passage over and over again. In a given week, there are so many biblical applications and principles to follow that many people feel overwhelmed. Instead of digesting one principle and applying it well in our lives, we end up artificially obeying God. It is always better to do one thing well, than to do many things in a mediocre way. The Bible is the main source of life transformation. Therefore, Bible study is the central component of our Life Group gatherings.

The two major parts of our Life Group Bible studies are:



1. Discussion: Helping each other discover and learn the truths of the Bible together and sharing from each other's lives.
2. Application: Helping each other see the relevance of the Bible to our lives and encouraging one another to obey its lessons and commands.

Different Components of a Study

There are different components to a successful Bible study. We need to make sure that these three components are present:

- I. OBSERVATION: Looks into the text and asks the question, "What does it say?"
 - A. Translation: Try to get several different translations of the Bible. It will help you to get a fresh perspective on the passage.
 - B. Context: Answer the following questions.
 1. Who is writing/speaking and to whom?
 2. What is happening?
 3. Why does the speaker say what they do?
 4. How does this passage fit into the context?
 - C. Structure
 1. How is the passage organized?
 2. What are some key or repeated words?
 - D. Questions
 1. What are the commands to obey?
 2. What are the promises I can trust God to keep?
- II. INTERPRETATION: Looks into the message and asks the question, "What does it mean?"
 - A. Develop principles
 1. What are some specific principles from this passage?
 2. What is the opposite of this truth?
 3. When should this be applied?
 - B. Theme
 1. Summarize the main idea or point in one sentence.
 - C. Commentaries
 1. Consult any commentaries and write down some things you might have missed.
- III. APPLICATION: Looks into our lives and asks the question, "What does this imply for me?" (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - A. Teaching
 1. How does this truth apply to my life? My church? My family? My work?
 - B. Reproof
 1. Where and why do I fall short?
 2. How can we evaluate ourselves as a group?
 - C. Correction
 1. What will I do about it?
 2. What will I correct?



3. How will others help me to do this?
- D. Training in Righteousness
1. What specific things can I do to make this principle a part of my life?
 2. In what relationships will I apply this?

Asking the Right Questions

Part of conducting a good Bible study is in the time of discussion. Discussion is the method by which ideas, opinions, and feelings are exchanged. As we begin to ask the right questions, it enables us to lead good discussions. The questions we write and ask must be clear, relevant, and stimulating. There are three types of questions that help the Life Group discussions:

1. Launching questions
2. Understanding questions
3. Applying questions

Launching questions

The launching questions get the discussions started. It usually poses a dilemma, asks an opinion, or seeks information. Everyone should be able to give an answer to a launching question. Within the Bible study, it discusses who, what, when, and where. The answer to a launching question should be directly from the text or from the person's experience.

Here are some examples:

- What is the situation of the story?
- Why does man have a hard time trusting in God?
- How would you describe the person's behavior?

Understanding questions

The main purpose of these questions is to pull out the principles from the passage or the topic under discussion. These questions usually help the members comprehend the author's meaning. It goes beyond the initial observations made and illuminates deeper truths for us to ponder upon.

Here are some examples:

- What is Paul trying to say by his statement in this passage?
- Why should we live obedient lives?
- What principles can be drawn from John 10?

Applying questions

It is crucial that all Bible studies have application questions. It brings out the biblical principles and makes it a reality to the members' lives. As members begin to notice that the Word of God is applicable in every situation of their lives, they will be more committed to the process of studying the Word.

Here are some examples:



- What can we do this week to show patience to one person?
- What steps do you need to take in order to be more pure in your thoughts?
- How can you share your faith with someone this week?

PLANNING PROCESS

Planning for Life Group

We must do our best to prepare ahead of time. When our members see the quality of work, they will be encouraged and be more willing to trust the leadership. There will be a sense of direction in the leadership. Preparation also allows you to change the course of the meeting as the Spirit leads, because you have different choices available.

Here are some helpful steps:

1. Prayer - This causes you to depend on God for everything.
 - a. It is crucial to the effectiveness and to the success of the Life Group.
 - b. Pray for wisdom and understanding to lead the Bible study discussion. There will be many things that will come up unexpectedly, therefore, if you are connected to the Vine, He will provide for you.
 - c. Also, pray for the members in your group. Ask the Lord to open their hearts and to speak to them
 - d. Pray that life-change will begin to happen
2. Logistics - As leaders, make sure to take care of any administrative tasks as you prepare for Life Group.
 - a. Such tasks include: making sure everyone knows where and when the meeting takes place, knowing who will be there and who will not, making sure that the helper is ready with the refreshments, making sure the place where you are meeting is clean, and etc.
3. Activities - In this step, you are mentally going over what will happen during the actual meeting.
 - a. Whoever is leading Life Group for that day should communicate with the rest of the leadership team about the direction you are taking. Going over the format of the whole night will even be helpful.
 - b. Make sure there are extra Bibles & pens, and that distractions are eliminated (ie. phone, people walking in & out, etc).
4. Needs - As you head into the Life Group meeting, prayerfully consider where your sheep are at and what needs may need to be addressed during the Life Group meeting.
 - a. Prayerfully consider some of the needs of your group. There might be unresolved conflicts between members, financial needs, family issues and much more.
 - b. If the group is ready, you can plan to address them.

Planning Meeting

You will be meeting with your leader/co-leader weekly prior to your Life Group meeting.

- Try to limit the time of this meeting to 2 hours.
- Be sensitive and flexible in your planning meetings, there will be occasions that you will have to spend more time on one part and won't need to cover other parts as thoroughly.



- Sending an agenda beforehand to your leadership team will help your leadership to prepare for the meeting and cut down on meeting time. The whole leadership team can be invited to help populate the agenda.

Here are the major components of your planning meetings:

1. Evaluation: Allot some time to evaluate your previous Life Group gathering, any previous Life Group activities, and the overall direction of the Life Group. Also spend some time discussing how individual members are doing.
 - a. Things to ask during your evaluation are:
 - i. What are the positive aspects to praise God for?
 - ii. What are the aspects we need to improve on?
 - iii. How is our group doing overall? How are our members doing?
2. Short-range planning: Plan out the details of the next Life Group gathering and any activities coming up in the next week or two. Discuss goals and expectations for the week.
3. Long-range planning: Taking into account the church calendar and where your Life Group is (in its Life Group cycle), formulate long-term goals and strategically plan activities.
4. Sharing/Prayer: Make sure you balance your planning meeting with ministry to one another as leader and co-leader(s).
 - a. Spend time sharing personal concerns and prayer needs.
 - b. Allot time to pray together for the Life Group and for one another. If there is not enough time during your planning meeting, or if your location is not conducive, try to meet at another time to pray.

LIFE GROUP FORMAT

As a leader you should know your group better than anyone else. Oftentimes, you begin to realize that some things work and other things do not, just by trial and error. Therefore, do not get discouraged if something that you planned out does not work out the way you wanted. But, as you notice things that do make a life-changing impact, do a little more of them.

The following is a general format for a Life Group meeting. You can give it a try and cut out the things that do not work well for your group. Continue to do the things which are a blessing; you can even extend the time for it.

1. WELCOME
 - a. There must be an atmosphere of warmth and love.
 - b. You have to keep in mind that people have just finished work or school and they are in need of some encouragement.
 - c. You might even want to start off with a game or a light ice-breaker.
2. WORSHIP
 - a. This helps to clear our minds and to focus on God.
 - b. Make sure that the person leading the praise time is prepared (i.e. songbooks, tuned guitar, etc.).



- c. Worship does not necessarily have to be singing, it can be a time of silent meditation, verbal praise statements, written expressions of worship, reading a Scripture passage, & etc.
 - i. Also, remember to be sensitive to the seeker and newcomers.

3. BIBLE STUDY & DISCUSSION

- a. Remember some of the key principles of asking good discussion questions. You are facilitating discussion, not preaching.
- b. Look over [the handbook section on preparing the Bible Study](#)
- c. Stress the importance of application.

4. SHARING

- a. Sharing is a good time to open our lives to one another. You can choose to share in smaller groups or as a whole group based on factors such as time constraints and the needs of your members.
- b. There must be a sense of acceptance and love as people are sharing.
- c. This can be integrated into the Bible study or done separately. If you are integrating it into the Bible study, you can share life applications and keep each other accountable.

5. PRAYER

- a. As a leader you are responsible for helping your members understand the biblical importance of prayer and begin practicing it regularly.
- b. Help the members to see it as a privilege and a responsibility.
- c. Take different routes to God:
 - i. Share prayer requests one at a time and then pray in one voice (loud enough for each person to hear themselves) for that person.
 - ii. Break up into small huddle groups and pray.
 - iii. Write out their prayers to God.
 - iv. Pray for the person on the right and the left.
 - v. Pray silently.
- d. Remember not to make any of the seekers and newcomers feel uncomfortable
 - i. Don't force them to pray.
 - ii. Explain what prayer is, how it is done, and why you are doing it.
- e. During prayer, we should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

6. ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a. Remember not to make this too long.
- b. Highlight some key events of the church as well as things pertinent to the Life Group.
- c. If there are important announcements, sometimes you might want to make them at the beginning of the gathering.

7. COMMUNITY

- a. Refreshments time is a great way to build community once LG is over. Try to set the refreshments in such a way that it will be conducive for fellowship (i.e. in the center of the room or around a table).
- b. During Life Group, try to not just spend the majority of your time with members you already meet with regularly. Instead, spend the time connecting with the rest of your members. Talk to some people that are not regulars or people who may be struggling.

Life Group Gathering Worksheet

Below is a worksheet you can use to help plan your Life Group gatherings. As previously stated, preparation allows you to be flexible to how the Holy Spirit leads. It also helps create anticipation and faith to see what God will do every single week you meet. Depending on your preference, you can follow this as you'd like:

Date: 5/20/2024

Tonight's Goals:

1. To learn to have a high view of God the Father and Jesus Christ and rearrange our motivations for missions.
2. To tangibly participate in missions by praying for the world: Bambi going to Peru, summer mission project, international students
3. To continue to incorporate and expose Cruella de Vil and Lilo (pre-Christian friends) to our community of faith.

Tentative Flow:

7:00	Gather together, opening worship
7:15	Icebreaker
7:30	Bible study discussion
8:20	Talk about prayer needs and pray together
8:45	Announcements
9:00	End Life Group

Task	Person Responsible	Notes
Hosting	Gaston	Make sure his apartment is clean!
Rides	Aladdin	Tell group rides available at the Union at 6:45pm.
Praise	Pocahontas	Make sure Pocohontas brings guitar.
Icebreaker	Mufasa	Just in case there are new people, visitors, etc.
Bible Study	Mickey	Split into groups of 3 ideally.
Refreshments + Birthdays	Ariel	Celebrate Dumbo's birthday.

Announcements:

- Friday Night Worship Gathering
- Sunday Celebration at 10am
- Sign up for Experiencing Membership!
- Monday Night Outreach Hangout



LIFE CHANGE GROUPS

Ecclesiastes 4:12 (ESV), “And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

Galatians 6:1-5 (ESV), “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. For each will have to bear his own load.”

When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, he wasn't inviting them to a destination; he was inviting them into a journey of imitating him and being formed into his likeness. This is the journey of sanctification that God calls his followers to be part of, and an important element of that journey is **accountability relationships**. God never meant for us to go through life alone, and through accountability relationships we can encourage one another, lovingly speak truth, and demonstrate God's love to one another.

At HMCC, one of the main avenues to experience accountability relationships is **Life Change Groups (LCGs)**. Sometime within the first 1-2 months of Life Groups, leaders will introduce the concept of LCGs to their Life Group members, and invite members to sign up.

The primary goal of LCGs is for Christ-centered accountability. It is not meant to be an avenue just for building casual friendships, hanging out, or getting to know others. When inviting members to sign up, it is important to vision-cast for LCGs properly. Members should only sign up when they are ready to make the time commitment and understand that the principal purpose behind it is accountability.

The 1-1-1 Principle

Since accountability happens best in a small, consistent group that is committed to one another, LCGs are formed according to the 1-1-1 format.



Meet with one other person (no more than two)

If the group grows to more than three people, it will be difficult for everyone to have sufficient time for sharing and prayer.



Meet for one hour

Having a defined meeting length helps keep the group on track and manageable.



Meet once per week

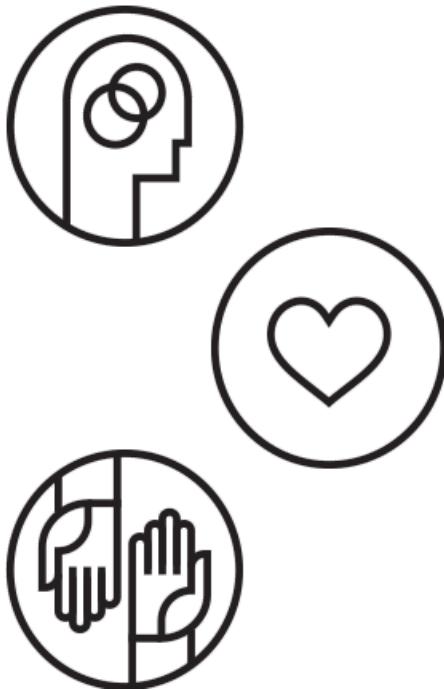
Consistency is key – if you can't meet at least once every two weeks, you probably won't have good accountability.



Guidelines for LCG meetings

The goal of LCG relationships

Since the primary goal of LCGs is **Christ-like accountability**, members who are in LCG relationships should help each other to grow to become more like Jesus. A lot can be said about who Jesus is – there are four entire Gospel accounts in scripture to tell us about his life, death, and resurrection!



Jesus' life was marked by...

- **Head: Thoughts of Humility**: (Philippians 2:5-6). Even though he is the Creator God of the universe, Jesus had a humble attitude toward others, and opposed those who demonstrated pride and self-sufficiency.
- **Head: Words of Truth** (John 14:6). Jesus was radically committed to the truth, and spoke the truth even when it was difficult.
- **Heart: Love & Holiness** (John 15:9 & Hebrews 4:15). God's character is Holy Love, and this was perfectly demonstrated through His Son. Jesus loved others and lived in perfect purity.
- **Hands: Servanthood & Grace** (John 13:14-15 & Luke 7:48-50). One of Jesus' defining characteristics was the way he served others, and he consistently built relationships of grace and forgiveness.

What should LCG meetings look like?

When you meet for LCG the first time, it will be helpful to spend some time establishing the relationship and getting to know one another. This isn't like any other casual friendship, so you will need to be intentional in how you approach it.

1. First, decide where and when you will meet on a regular basis. Again, if you cannot commit to meeting at least every two weeks (preferably every week), you will not be able to have effective accountability. If necessary, consider using a video chat or a phone call – this is much better than not meeting at all.
2. Next, spend a little time getting to know one another and sharing about important relationships and areas of life. While it's important that LCG be intentional, it also shouldn't be overly mechanical, and you will need to know one another in order to provide effective accountability.
3. Finally, it's helpful to explicitly define what kind of relationship this is. At HMCC, we often talk about relationships of *care, commitment, and challenge* – these are necessary traits of a relationship in which quality accountability and discipleship can happen. You will need to make a decision to see your LCG this way.
 - a. Express empathy for the struggles the other person is going through, and also invite the other person into the struggles in your life (take the courage to be the first person to share vulnerably! This often allows the other person to feel safe enough to reciprocate back).



- b. Make an effort to remember what your LCG shared with you each meeting. One way to do this can be to write down prayer requests as your LCG shares them. If you do not feel comfortable writing them down in the moment, try to do it as soon as the meeting is over
- c. Prioritize your LCG meetings. Life can get busy, and there will always be a need to balance school, work and other priorities, but your LCG relationship will not be able to gain depth without a commitment to prioritize the relationship.
- d. Share areas of your life where you want accountability. By doing this, you are inviting your LCG to challenge you and hold you accountable. One way to do this is to agree on [a list of questions \(see below\)](#) for you to ask each other every time you meet.
 - i. When speaking truth into the other person's life, remember that Jesus always encourages us to speak truth in love and humility (Matthew 7:3-5, Ephesians 4:15-16), with the aim of building the other person up and pointing them back to the Gospel.

This is what a typical 1-hour LCG meeting could look like:

15 Minutes	Catch up on life. Ask each other how things are going, what recent events have happened, etc. Don't let this kind of sharing take up the whole meeting, or you'll never actually keep each other accountable!
30 Minutes	Follow up on areas of struggle and accountability. If you agreed on accountability questions, be sure to ask every single question you agreed to. If you are too casual about the questions you ask, you'll probably overlook something that needs to be asked! It's your responsibility to open the door for your LCG partner to be honest and share. You will probably end up focusing on 1-2 questions for discussion that are most immediately relevant to each of you, and that's fine.
10 Minutes	Pray for one another. We can't change and grow on our own strength, so ask for God's help in becoming more like Jesus.
5 Minutes	Write down commitments and prayer requests. To help you remember what is being shared, you should keep track of areas of struggle and ways you're each committed to growing so that you can follow up, pray, and provide accountability. This can be done by writing down what your LCG shared.

Especially as you get started with your LCG, it's incredibly important that you be intentional about the questions and format described here. Nobody wants a friendship that feels artificial, but in order to build an effective accountability relationship, it's important to learn to be intentional, ask uncomfortable questions, and make sure you're providing the prayer and accountability that one another need!

Example Accountability Questions

The following accountability questions could be asked at each LCG meeting to ensure that we keep each other accountable holistically.

1. **Head**
 - a. Are you abiding in and believing the truth about God, yourself, and others?
 - b. Are you allowing tempting or sinful thoughts to take root in your mind?
2. **Heart**
 - a. Are you loving God and others with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength?



- b. Is your heart devoted to any idol or distraction?
3. **Hands**
- a. Are you engaging in any sinful behavior?
 - b. Are you following Jesus with humility, generosity, and servanthood?
4. One more question is helpful to ask after all of these: *Have you been completely honest with me, and is there anything else you need to confess?*

In addition to the above list, you can also come up with your own accountability questions. Here are some guidelines to keep in mind if you would like to come up with your own:

1. In what general area of your life, not already covered by the questions, do you struggle with most consistently (i.e. thought life, time management, communication, confrontation, etc.)?
2. In that general area, what issue is the most repetitive and specific behavioral problem?
3. Draft a question that would address your specific area of weakness.
4. Evaluate your question's first draft with the following criteria:
 - a. Does it directly address a specific behavioral weakness?
 - b. Does it have accountability for the last week inherent within it?
 - c. Is it specific? Concise? Memorable? A measurable behavior?
5. Rewrite the question with any needed corrections and keep it in your journal or Bible.

Other lists of possible accountability questions can be found in the appendix.