

Small Group Ministries

Christian Formation
through Mutual Accountability



G U I D E L I N E S

Small-Group Ministries

Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability

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with thanks to previous authors,
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Discipleship Ministries

SMALL-GROUP MINISTRIES

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Contents

“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”	5
Intentional Discipleship Systems	6
A Biblical/Theological Foundation	7
Understanding Grace	
The Means of Grace	
Behaving, Belonging, Believing	
Ministry and Small Groups	9
Holiness	
Contextual	
Historical Foundation	11
A Wesleyan Model	
A Contemporary Model	13
Rule of Life	
Grace Groups	
Getting Started	16
Understand Your Role	
The Small-Group Ministries Council	
Center the Small-Group Ministry	
Take an Inventory of Existing Small Groups	
Leadership	19
Group Leaders	
Identify Potential Leaders	
Leadership Training	
Forming and Organizing Small Groups	22
Becoming a Group	
Establish a Healthy Group Culture	
Additional Considerations	26
Overcoming Loneliness: Finding Belonging in Small Groups	

Inclusiveness

 Creating a Welcoming Space for All

 Offering Seasonal and Topical Small Groups

 Leveraging Online Resources and Social Media

Evaluation28

 Goals

 Measurement

Conclusion31

Resources.....32

 Small-Group Ministry

 Biblical and Theological Foundations

 Cited in This Guideline

 Websites

 UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

Thank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world.

Intentional Discipleship Systems

As we look out across our churches, the problem is not a lack of people, the problem is the church's inability to see and reach them. As leaders in the church our role is to find clarity in the who & what of discipleship, the how of discipleship formation, but most importantly, the why for being disciples and making disciples. This describes the work of intentional discipleship systems or pathways.

John Wesley said it best in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*: “There is a real, as well as relative, change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel ‘the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ producing love to all humankind.”

This love for all humankind is what drives discipleship. A basic desire to love God, love neighbor, love self, and repeat. To go deeper and deeper into the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to offer what we have found to those that we meet.

How do we get back to a movement of a deep love for people that drives everything we do? How do we get back to seeing all the people that God calls us to reach?

The world, now more than ever, needs disciples of Jesus, growing in faith, growing closer to Christ, with a clear vision of the world and people as God sees them. Disciples who seek to use their God-given gifts to transform their communities and the world.

Early Methodists started a movement that was focused on growing as disciples, inviting others into a life following Jesus and helping those in their communities who were hurting. At Discipleship Ministries, we believe that we need to get back to these basic understandings of church and discipleship, and back to a concern for improving systems that work for all God's children, moving us toward what God intends for all.

We invite you to explore the SeeAllThePeople (www.seeallthepeople.org/) suite of resources designed to equip you and your church for intentional discipleship and community engagement. Although the forms and strategies change, the main goal of the church remains: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It will always be about discipleship!

A Biblical/Theological Foundation

The baptismal covenant tells us that salvation and our place in the church are gifts from God. They are freely given because God made us. There is nothing you or I could ever do or say to earn or deserve these gifts. God gives them because “God is love” (see 1 John 4:7-21). The word that best describes God’s love is *grace*. This understanding grounds our identity as United Methodists as people who can help to build up beloved communities, where all belong.

Understanding Grace

Grace is the presence and power of God working in the world. It is unlimited and free. Jesus Christ is grace embodied in human flesh and blood. His life, death, and resurrection reveal the nature and power of grace as God’s love active in, with, and for the world. Through him, God enters human life and history, saying: “Come to me, all you that are struggling hard and are carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I’m gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).

The way of salvation is grace working through faith to form us into the people God created us to be and equipping us to join Christ and his mission in the world. *Prevenient grace* prepares us to receive God’s acceptance and love. *Justifying* (or *convincing*) *grace* restores our relationship with God and those whom God loves by giving us the gifts of repentance and faith (outward, relational change). *Sanctifying grace* gives new birth and sustains us in the new life of holiness with Jesus in the world (inward, real change). God supplies the grace we need to accept the gift of divine love and then to live as a channel of that love in the world. When we live the way of Jesus, we become fully the people God created us to be, in the image of Christ.

The Means of Grace

As we consider the *why* and *how* of small-group ministry, we begin with Jesus’ promise: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I’m there with them” (Matt 18:20). It’s because of Jesus’ promise that John Wesley believed small groups to be a “means of grace” he called *Christian conferencing*.

When two or more Christians regularly meet in Jesus’ name to pray, sing, serve, and watch over one another in love, grace opens their hearts to God and to the world God loves. Small groups are where people receive the support and accountability they need to follow Jesus in the world. Through relationships of love and trust, people learn the spiritual

disciplines (acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion) that Wesley called the *means of grace*. They form new habits and attitudes that reflect the character of Christ. Those are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23. To learn more, read Wesley's Sermon 43: "The Scripture Way of Salvation.")

The relationships of mutual support and accountability experienced in small groups are how the church keeps the promises it makes in the baptismal covenant.

Behaving, Belonging, Believing

Wesley understood that disciple making requires intention and discipline. Discipline, for Wesley, is simply a habitual practice of the means of grace shaped by a rule of life (the General Rules; see the *Discipline*, ¶104) and supported by weekly accountability with fellow Christians in a small group. Christian discipline is summarized by three words: *behaving*, *belonging*, and *believing*.

Behaving and belonging shape belief. John Wesley understood that people are much more likely to behave their way into believing than they are to believe their way into behaving as Christians. That is why he created a *rule of life* known as the General Rules and required all Methodists to participate in the weekly small groups known as *class meetings*. "A *rule of life* is a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. It fosters gifts of the Spirit in personal life and human community, helping to form us into the people God intends us to be" (Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995], 138; italics added).

The General Rules shape the Christian life for Methodists.

Learning and practicing the means of grace in their class meetings is how most Methodists received the gift of faith. They behaved their way into believing within the love and acceptance (belonging) of their small group.

Behave, believe, and belong are all entry points into the way of Jesus. They are inter-related parts of the process of disciple formation that build upon the relational nature of human beings. "You become what you love." If the goal of Christian formation is for people to become more and more like Christ, then we need to know him as a living Savior.

Ministry and Small Groups

Why are small groups important for disciple making? Why did John Wesley place so much confidence in them as a dependable means of grace for developing faith and holiness?

Wesley's pastoral experience told him that when Christians meet in small groups for prayer, study, fellowship, and service, they form relationships of love and trust. Christ is encountered in the relationships that small groups make possible (see Matt 18:20). Certainly, Sunday morning worship and general congregational activities play an essential role in Christian formation; but on their own, they are not adequate substitutes for the relationships formed in small groups. This is why an integrated network of small groups is essential to the church's mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. One of the most influential legacies of the Methodist movement on the Christian family is the adoption of smaller group meetings and practices across many denominations and nondenominational churches.

A small group is three to fifteen people who meet regularly (weekly, biweekly, or monthly) to help one another grow in holiness of heart and life and equip the congregation to participate in God's mission in the world. Group members attend to the ways that God is at work in their lives and do all in their power to help one another grow in faith, hope, and love.

Holiness

Holiness is the way of life described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) and summarized in Matthew 22:37–40. John Wesley described holiness as “universal love filling the heart, and governing the life” (“Advice to the People Called Methodists”).

Holiness of heart is the inward love of God with all your heart, soul, and mind through practicing the works of piety (the public worship of God, the ministry of the word, the Lord's Supper, personal and family prayer, searching the Scriptures, and fasting or abstinence (see “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies,” ¶104, the *Discipline*). *Holiness of life* is the outward love of your neighbor as yourself. We practice holiness of life by doing no harm, by avoiding evil and by doing good, to all, to their bodies and souls. Jesus describes holiness of life in Matthew 25:35–40. If you say you love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, then Jesus tells us you must love whom God loves, as God loves them. Wesley believed holiness is the means to the goal of “having the mind which was in Christ, and walking as he walked” (*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, §15; also see Phil 2:5; 1 John 2:6).

Growth in holiness requires intentionality and a community organized to help its members keep the promises made in the baptismal covenant (see *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 35). In the Commendation and Welcome (p. 38), the congregation promises to “Do all in your power to increase their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love.” This means congregations must order their lives in ways that cooperate with the dynamic of grace that makes holiness of heart and life possible.

Contextual

Historically, the Methodist small-group system was pastoral and contextual. It emerged from the pastoral commitment of the Methodist society to do all in its power to increase faith, confirm hope in Christ, and perfect one another in love. Wesley did not find the system in a book or a program. It emerged from his study of Scripture, the way of salvation, and his knowledge of human nature. The groups described in this Guideline are the result of ideas that worked. The system that will work best for your congregation will not come from a “one-size-fits-all” program. It will emerge from the pastoral needs of the congregation. The questions to ask as you evaluate are:

- How does this system/group help this congregation cooperate with the Holy Spirit and the way of salvation?
- How does the system/group help people grow in holiness of heart and life?
- How does the system/group equip the people to participate in Christ’s mission in the world?

The Wesleyan tradition teaches us that several types of groups are essential. We need groups that initiate seekers into the Christian life. Other groups promote continuing growth in faith, hope, and love through developing deeper intimacy and trust with one another and with Christ. Finally, people who provide leadership at all levels need a group for continuing accountability and support for growth in holiness of heart and life.

Historical Foundation

In the Wesleyan tradition, disciple making happens in an integrated network of small groups, shaped by a rule of life that enables people to receive and participate in the grace that formed them as disciples of Jesus Christ.

A Wesleyan Model

A good example of a system of small groups designed to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and the dynamic of grace is found in the early Methodist societies. John Wesley developed a system of groups, each with a different theological/pastoral emphasis. The system met people where they were and helped them to grow in holiness of heart and life. The Wesleyan system was composed of three distinctive types of groups:

1. The Class Meeting (for everyone)
2. The Band (for the deeply committed disciples)
3. The Select Society (for the leaders)

All the groups were guided by the General Rules:

- First: Do no harm by avoiding evil of every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced.
- Second: Do good as often as you can to all people.
- Third: Attend upon all the ordinances of God, such are:
 - ♦ The public worship of God
 - ♦ The ministry of the Word, whether read or expounded
 - ♦ The Lord's Supper
 - ♦ Private and family prayer
 - ♦ Searching the Scriptures
 - ♦ Fasting or abstinence

The Class Meeting

When a person joined a Methodist society, he or she was assigned to a “class,” a small group of 12 to 15 women and men. Participation in a class was required for all Methodists. Class leaders were laypeople who demonstrated Christian maturity and pastoral sense.

Classes met weekly, either in the leader's home or in the local Methodist meeting house. Meetings were typically an hour and consisted of prayer, hymn singing, and accountability for discipleship guided by the General Rules. The class meeting initiated Methodists into the life of discipleship. The theological emphases were prevenient and convincing grace;

that is, recognizing that God invites and leads us to receive God's acceptance in Jesus Christ and adoption as beloved children in God's household.

The Band

The "band" was for Methodists who faithfully attended their class meeting and were ready to go deeper in holiness. Membership was limited to no more than eight men or women. Bands were organized according to gender and marital status: single men together, single women in a different band, and so on.

Bands met weekly for one hour with shared leadership. The weekly agenda included prayer and confession of sins to one another (see Jas 5:16). The theological emphasis of the band meeting was justification and justifying grace; that is, making a decision, with God's help, toward repentance and a changed life in faith.

The Select Society

Leaders were the disciples who made disciples and who led the Methodist society in its service with Christ in the world. In early Methodism, members of the select society served in some leadership role in the society and also in their parish church.

The theological emphasis of the select society was sanctification; that is, with God's help, devoting themselves to loving God with all their heart, soul, and mind. They loved their neighbors as themselves, and they loved one another as Christ loved them. They knew that the world would know they were disciples of Jesus Christ by the way they loved one another (see John 13:34-35).

A Contemporary Model

We recognize that Methodist societies were not congregations. They were religious communities of clear expectations, loving discipline, and a mission to “reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread Scriptural holiness over the land” (John Wesley in “The Large Minutes”). That is why participation in a small group was required of all Methodists.

Obviously, 18th-century Methodist societies were very different from today’s congregations, so we should not try to replicate that system exactly. Nevertheless, Wesley’s theological and practical understanding of disciple making is both valid and timeless:

- Making disciples requires a community that cooperates with the Holy Spirit and the way of salvation.
- Making disciples requires the relationships formed in small groups.
- Disciple making congregations develop an integrated network of small groups that meet people where they are and help them grow in holiness of heart and life.
- Disciple-making happens in the community and is not tied to a specific building. The journey to Christian perfection, or furthering holiness, happens during daily life.

This Guideline is not a one-size-fits-all program. You will find here a guide for developing a small-group network that fits your local context. We know from the Wesleyan tradition that developing and sustaining small-group ministry is a process of trial and error. When an idea falls flat, learn from it and try again. Eventually, you will find the system that works best in your context. This, of course, assumes the work is guided by the Holy Spirit through prayer and openness to grace.

Rule of Life

In her book, *Soul Feast*, Marjorie Thompson writes, “A rule of life is a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness. . . . It fosters gifts of the Spirit in personal life and human community, helping to form us into the persons God intends us to be” (Thompson, 138). Congregations striving to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world will adopt a congregational rule of life. The General Rules found in ¶104 of *The Book of Discipline* constitute the historic Methodist rule of life. A contemporary alternative, derived from the General Rules, is the General Rule of Discipleship: “To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (the *Discipline*, ¶1109.8).

A congregation's rule of life gives shape to and informs the disciple-making process. It also provides a guide for small-group accountability.

Grace Groups

Every congregation has small groups. They are more commonly known as the Church Council, the Pastor/Staff-Parish Relations Committee, the Trustees, the Finance Committee, the Choir, Sunday school classes, fellowship or affinity groups, United Women in Faith, United Methodist Men, mission/service groups, and so on. All can be places of faith formation and discipleship. Disciple-making congregations develop a network of interrelated groups designed to cooperate with the way of salvation (see John Wesley's Sermon 43: "The Scripture Way of Salvation"). Such a network is how the congregation keeps its promise to do all in its power to increase faith, confirm hope, and perfect one another in love (see *UMH*, "Baptismal Covenant I," 38). We describe the network of small groups as *grace groups*.

Some contexts spend *a lot* of time trying to determine appropriate and welcoming names for their small groups. Regardless of the naming convention you and your leadership team settle on, ensure that the names are clear, welcoming, and require minimal explanation for interested and new members. Newer Christians or people just getting connected to your church may have many questions or feel intimidated by the expectation of small group participation. Ensure you have excellent outreach and support as you connect people to your network of small groups.

Examine the existing groups in your congregation and determine where they fit in a system of "grace groups," described more fully in the sample below. Though these are presented in a linear structure, they are not so tidy, and they overlap. The goal is to organize the groups to help the congregation cooperate with the way of salvation, remembering that different activities and experiences may fit in more than one place. If the church has an intentional discipleship system (see *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius B. Dotson), small groups should play a vital and strategic part. Within this system of grace groups, lives are transformed as people grow in love of God, neighbors, and one another. The chart on page 15 is suggestive, and you will want to order it in a way that makes sense in your context. (See the Resources section for more information.)

Grace Groups I

Grace Groups are needed for new Christians or people seeking to become Christians. These people may be new to the church, new to United Methodism, and/or new to Christianity. These groups are led by mature disciples. Their mission is to initiate members into the Christian life. These entry-level groups emphasize Christian formation shaped by the congregation's rule of life.

Grace Groups II

As people grow in faith and begin to mature in holiness through support and accountability, they will reach a point where they need a group that nurtures continued growth as they attune themselves more closely to hearing and doing what they perceive is God's will for them.

Grace Groups I Prevenient and Convincing Grace	Grace Groups II Justifying and Sanctifying Grace	Grace Groups III Sanctifying Grace
Class Meeting	Covenant Discipleship groups	Covenant Discipleship groups
New Member/New Disciple classes	Emmaus Reunion groups	Emmaus Reunion groups
Wesley Fellowship groups	Renovaré groups	Academy of Spiritual Formation covenant groups
Bible Study groups	Administrative & Ministry committees	Accountability groups
Prayer groups	Inspire Fellowship Bands	Leadership groups
Book study groups		
Choirs		
Fellowship/Affinity groups		
Mission/service groups		
Alpha		

Congregations need to provide groups that help people who are ready to go deeper in loving God and neighbors. The theological emphasis in such groups will be justifying and sanctifying grace. This means that they will emphasize the development of relationships shaped by trust, sharing, and confession.

The agenda for Grace Groups II is discipleship. At this stage, people will be ready to take responsibility for their own discipleship. The goal of these groups is to form disciples who disciple others. Some will serve as leaders for groups in Grace Groups I.

Grace Groups III

Grace Groups III is for leaders in discipleship. Their focus is upon earnestly striving after perfection in love. These groups are for people who have experienced justification by grace through faith and are pursuing Christian maturity. These leaders need to be equipped, empowered, and supported in their ministry of discipling others in Grace Groups I and II. The examples of groups here include those that have a deeper dimension of discipleship. Ideally, each ministry group in your church tends not simply to the tasks for which it is responsible, but also takes care to shape and form the people in the groups as deeply committed Christians. These group members not only follow God's call in all aspects of their lives, but also identify the gifts in others and cultivate them in faith and leadership.

Participants in any level of Grace Groups may be appropriate to invite into leadership opportunities throughout the church. Encourage group leaders to pay attention to natural giftedness and areas of interest for the members of grace groups.

Getting Started

Small-group ministry is not a program, it can be part of an intentional discipleship system or discipleship pathway. It is how the church has historically made disciples of Jesus Christ. The system of small-group ministry must reflect the personalities and needs of the people and the place. An intentional discipleship system can be a helpful guide for evaluation and for next steps.

The easiest way to begin with small-group ministry is to build upon existing groups. If the congregation is making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, then all the administrative and ministry committees can be places of disciple making. The following are some basic guidelines that will help build a small-group ministry that emerges from your context and helps the congregation fulfill its mission.

Understand Your Role

Your task as a leader is to develop a system of small groups that emerges from and works with the congregation's context and culture. (This is rarely tidy.)

Do not try to do all this alone! If you are in a larger membership church, you will probably share this responsibility with a member of the staff. If there is no staff other than the pastor, it will be all the more helpful to create a core team to work with you and the Small-Group Ministries Council—as partners in this ministry. The Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development may suggest team members. While the system of small groups may be vastly different among churches of different sizes, there are some basic leadership responsibilities. You and your team should expect to:

- participate in the Church Council (you) and consult with the pastor;
- make sure small-group ministry is part of the culture of discipleship and/or an intentional discipleship system;
- coordinate ministry with the leaders of existing groups;
- pray about and look for the gifts and graces in others that will identify them as potential group leaders;
- provide training for others who lead small groups;
- work with leaders to cultivate within them recognition and understanding of themselves as spiritual leaders;
- work with the working groups/leaders to help them understand that their group is a place of faith formation and discipleship;
- identify needed new groups, help to start new groups, and assist in the refreshment or retirement of faltering groups.

The Small-Group Ministries Council

Small groups require significant intentional support. The danger of failing to provide leadership and support is that small groups may become self-centered cliques with little connection to the church's mission. A Small-Group Ministries Council can help prevent this from happening. If you have a staff person responsible for small-group ministry, then that person leads the council. Leaders of the various classes, teams, ministry groups, and other small groups will serve as members of this council. (Some of them—as will you—will also be members of the Church Council, whose function is different.)

If you are forming a Small-Group Ministries Council for the first time, your members may not expect to have this responsibility. Your first task will be to explain and interpret to them, singly or together, what the purpose of the council is, why their presence will benefit them and the church, and what the council will do.

The task of this council is to:

- provide a place of covenant for the leaders of other groups, for their continued spiritual growth, accountability, and support;
- “take the temperature” of each group without going into details of anything shared by members of any group;
- assess the plans, goals, and accomplishments in the faith-formation system of small groups (along with the Church Council);
- provide a place for ongoing training in small-group leadership.

Convene this council at least each quarter for 60–90 minutes. Include prayer or another means of grace, a brief training time, and time for each council member to report briefly on the faith-formation issues of her or his group, within the bounds of the confidentiality agreements of the groups. The practice of regular reporting about each group's progress and struggles ensures that small-group ministry plays a critical role in the congregation's mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The work of the Small-Group Ministries Council will overlap the Church Council in membership but should not duplicate the work of the Church Council. The principal focus of the *Church Council* will be the plans and strategies for the church's (intentional) discipleship system. The primary focus of the Small-Group Ministries Council will be on the spiritual growth and skill building of the small-group leaders, particularly as it pertains to the church's and groups' plans.

Center the Small-Group Ministry

Allow God to open your eyes, ears, heart, and mind to your context and the culture of the congregation. Test your ideas with a small group of trusted friends, both inside and outside the church. Pray, listen, and fast as you seek God's will for this ministry.

We strongly recommend that the small-group ministry core team be organized as a Covenant Discipleship (CD) group. CD groups focus on mutual accountability and support for discipleship shaped by the General Rule of Discipleship: “To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship

and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit” (the *Discipline*, ¶1109.8). The group writes a covenant that states how the members of the group will obey the teachings of Jesus Christ, summarized in Matthew 22:37-40 and John 13:34-35. Writing a covenant and practicing weekly accountability for discipleship provides a strong foundation for developing and sustaining small-group ministry that helps the congregation live out its mission with Christ in the world. A bundle of resources to support Covenant Discipleship with all ages is available from Discipleship Resources: <https://store.upperroom.org/product/covenant-discipleship-bundle>.

Take an Inventory of Existing Small Groups

Create a table with three columns, each with a header for a different depth of discipleship. For example, the Grace Groups I, Grace Groups II, and Grace Groups III listed earlier. (See the description on page 15 or use an organizing structure that better fits your context.) Place each existing group in the column where it seems most appropriate. Include all the various administrative committees, ministry areas, task groups or teams, choirs, classes or study groups, fellowship groups, affinity groups, service/mission groups, self-help groups, and any other small group that meets as a part of your overall ministry. The leaders of all these groups must be invited to the Small-Group Ministries Council and included in the small-group ministry planning. Remember, you will likely need to do some teaching and interpretation to those leaders who do not see discipleship as necessarily part of their purpose. Help them to see that they play an important role in helping the congregation make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

When you have finished, look for any holes in the small-group system. You should have at least one group in each column. If the congregation lacks groups in any of the columns, then that indicates a weakness in the small-group system that needs to be acknowledged and changed. Ideally, your small-group system will serve the entire age span of the church. At least, begin with the groups for older youth and all adults.

It is natural for more advanced, or deeper discipleship, small groups to be smaller in participants and quantity of groups. It is also natural for entry-level small groups to have a percentage of attrition and transience. For those who stop attending small groups, equip group leaders with training to reconnect and learn why that is the case. Likewise, if all entry-level small groups are full, perhaps it is time to introduce a new small group, or invite long-time participants to consider joining a deeper level of commitment.

Leadership

The pastor plays a critical role in small-group ministry. He or she must be actively involved in planning, implementing, supporting, and participating in small groups. Pastors are not always the persons most gifted and available to lead or facilitate small groups. They can, however, serve as the best champions of the importance small groups play in disciple making.

Ideally, the pastor participates in a Covenant Discipleship group. This helps the pastor with his or her own discipleship and models for laity that the pastor is a disciple who needs support and accountability just like everyone else. The pastor's participation in a small group and giving testimony through sermons sends the message to the congregation that this is important. Good leaders never ask followers to do anything they are not willing to do themselves.

Laypeople whose discipleship has formed in small groups provide the leadership of small groups. The role of pastors is to share pastoral power and work in partnership with the lay leadership.

Group Leaders

Small-group leaders are leaders in discipleship. They habitually witness to Jesus Christ and follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion. These holy habits are essential marks of discipleship. If the mission of small groups is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, then leaders must be experienced, seasoned disciples who understand that they also need support and accountability.

Small-group leaders are people who are familiar with grace. They are self-confident, yet humble, acknowledging freely that they do not have all the answers or need to know everything. They are good listeners who embody empathy and grace. They pay attention to the people in the group and encourage everyone to participate. Group leaders are aware of the gifts God has given them and look for gifts in others.

Small-group leaders collaborate and cooperate with fellow leaders and the pastor(s). They work together as a team to focus on their ministries and to be clear that the group is an extension of the congregation and its mission with Christ in the world. Whether the group meets for Bible study, prayer, accountability, service, or ministry within the church, the leader helps the group to maintain its attention to the stated purpose. This is important because groups can easily slip into gripe or gossip sessions or be so intent on the task that they forget about discipleship. Good leaders will keep groups focused on the mission.

Identify Potential Leaders

The Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development will have a primary responsibility for selecting leaders for the various ministry groups. Your team or council will generally focus on the leaders of new groups for some aspect of spiritual formation, pastoral care, weekday study, or other gathering that is not directly related to the work of the Church Council.

You may approach decisions for new leadership in at least two ways: a new group is needed to meet some ministry need, or new people are ready to enter into a leadership position.

You and your core team, working with the leaders of existing groups, will cultivate relationships with many of the laity participants in those groups whom God may raise up as new leaders. You and the Small-Group Ministries Council members are in a perfect place to observe the spiritual growth and gifts of these people and to name, encourage, and call forth those gifts. Many people do not realize (or admit to) the abilities they have, and it is gratifying to know that someone else recognizes their gifts and potential.

Through personal contact by telephone/text/email/social media and face-to-face conversation, invite them to a small-group leader exploratory meeting. The agenda for this meeting is to put before the potential leaders the small-group ministry leadership team's vision for the congregation's small-group ministry. Invite participants to ask questions and discuss how the system will take shape and how they might play a role in its development. Conclude the meeting with an invitation to fast and pray and seek the Holy Spirit's guidance in how each of them should respond to the invitation to serve as a small-group leader. Consider pairing a new leader with a seasoned one, allowing them to gain firsthand leadership experience and insights. This provides invaluable mentorship as they learn practices like cultivating group dynamics, planning agendas, navigating conflict, establishing covenants and norms, and keeping Christ-centered purpose.

Leaders can also be invited to serve on the Small-Group Ministries Council. They would need to be oriented to that council, with information about its purpose, when it meets, and tasks.

Leadership Training

You and your team have a responsibility for leadership training. You do not have to do this training yourself; but under your guidance and direction, others may be recruited, either from the congregation or elsewhere, to provide occasional training.

Your group leaders will have different skills and abilities, and the gifts needed for leading the various groups may also be different. The Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development can be a partner in developing training opportunities. The annual conference and district may host training events about the various ministry areas. Your training may be more general, focused on group leadership, for example:

- group dynamics and group relationships;
- understanding the difference between facilitating, teaching, and directing meetings;

- agenda setting, planning, and achieving timely follow-through from group members;
- dealing with and healing from conflict;
- establishing good communication;
- dealing with under- and over-participation;
- starting, nurturing, and ending groups;
- understanding the lifecycle of groups and how to keep them healthy;
- establishing a group covenant, including dealing with confidentiality;
- offering hospitality and welcoming new members;
- understanding group culture and group norms;
- abuse prevention and risk reduction strategies, including Safer Sanctuaries®.

Other ideas and priorities will come from the group leaders themselves as they run into obstacles or new situations. As group leaders meet as a council, they may realize that others are struggling with a similar issue or problem that could be resolved or alleviated with some added training.

Forming and Organizing Small Groups

New groups may arise from a personal need, a new ministry area, or a specific task. Whatever the new group is, it should fill a needed place in your intentional discipleship system. Just because something can be done does not necessarily mean that it should be. If the church is to be the church and do what only the church can do, all your groups should be oriented in some way to accomplishing the mission of the church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. To that end, each new group has to have a clear vision of why it is being formed, what its mission is, and how it fits into the overall mission of the church. Each small group should also be consistent with the culture of discipleship that you and other leaders at the church intentionally cultivate.

Becoming a Group

Any group (or the church, for that matter) has a lifespan, which has been described in the shorthand of “form, storm, norm, perform, and reform.” People come together for some reason (*form*); they get to know one another and figure out the stated work of the group (*storm*); develop the stronger relationships and sense of mutual purpose that allows them to become an entity with common goals, values, and ways of working and being (*norm*), start achieving the work, ministry, tasks they were designed to do (*perform*), and will reevaluate, adjust, morph, regroup, and end if needed (*reform*).

The Healthy Group Lifespan

A longer description focuses more on functionality: “birth, formation, stability, decline, death.” *Birth* and *formation* are essentially the same as *form* and *storm*. *Stability* may be misleading, because *vitality*, not *stability*, is what the group needs. Vitality allows for the group to adapt, change, look ahead, evaluate honestly what it is and what it’s doing, and create. Perhaps a better way to think about *stability* is by understanding that *instability* is what leads to decline and perhaps death. Many things will destabilize a group: the presence of new members, the absence or loss of members, competing tasks, time pressures, change of leadership, change or loss of vision or purpose, change of the space, lack of trust, and discouragement, to name a few.

For a group to remain vital, the group leader must *always* attend to both the group’s life and the group’s vision. A healthy group stays in a “formation—stability” loop. When circumstances change, the whole group “regroups” or “reforms.” It revisits its purpose, orients new people into the group vision and culture, reaffirms its covenant and vision, maintains

effective communication within and outside the group as necessary, and makes intelligent adjustments to its plans and strategies. When a group slips away from this healthy way of functioning, it begins to decline.

Some signs of decline are obvious; for example, people “vote with their feet” and go elsewhere; withhold their time, money, or commitment; get cantankerous with one another; or create winners and losers by voting instead of working by consensus. Some signs are less obvious, but can be equally deadly: becoming too consumed with *doing* to pay attention to *being*, getting lax about maintaining the means of grace that mark the group as ministry, failing to welcome or properly orient new people, wishing for different circumstances rather than dealing with current reality, and so on.

The Death of a Group

A strong leader will act to keep the group stable and vital and may intervene at the point of decline. When the pattern of decline is not attended to, the group will eventually die, though that could take a very long time. We have all seen sad examples of a group that has dwindled in size to just a few people who most often have no real sense of mission or purpose anymore; they hang on because of their relationships or simply out of habit.

Even at the point of death, a creative intervention may breathe new life and purpose into a faltering group, though its members may have to agree to a change that seems radical to them. Dying, however, for a “Resurrection people,” can be liberating and should be handled with dignity. No one need feel as if his or her participation and the strong relationships have been wasted, but sometimes people don’t know how to come to a graceful end. As the small-group ministry leader, you may be the one who steps in to end a group.

Always remember the personal touch, and never underestimate the power of grief and ritual. If you step in, visit each of the remaining group members, one at a time, with a member of your core team, if you can. (Witnesses to this conversation are important, as feelings may run hot and deep.) Having that personal attention, in which you invite the person to reflect on what the group has been and might yet become through a rebirthing process with others, sends the appropriate message that the individual and the group are valued. Invite remaining group members to be mentors or advisors or “seed members” of a new group. Celebrate their life as a group in worship or with some other recognition. Find a way to keep their group story—their contributions to the church’s story—alive.

In some cases, the life of a small group may extend beyond the membership of all members belonging to the same church. There have been instances where the bonds of support and relationships developed keep a person attending small-group meetings even if their membership at the church which birthed the small group ends. An effective leader can maintain the balance of that continued relationship with outreach, effectively reaching someone for whom the church or even their faith has become irrelevant.

Establish a Healthy Group Culture

It is far easier in a new group to establish a culture—which we might call a rule of life—than to try to change it. Disciple making in the Wesleyan tradition is guided by a rule

of life, noted in the *Discipline*, that shapes the life and work of every group at every level of the congregation.

A Rule of Life

The General Rules are the United Methodist rule of life. The General Rule of Discipleship is a contemporary restatement (see the *Discipline*, ¶1109.8). The purpose is to help Christians orient their lives toward Christ and his mission in the world. It is like a compass that keeps us on course to our destination of holiness of heart and life.

Covenant

If your church does not use The General Rules, and whether or not your church has an intentional discipleship system, you will find that small-group covenants can help create a healthy small-group culture. Covenants help participants have ownership of the group. Additionally, covenants help all participants to set appropriate expectations. Small-group leaders can use the covenant to help reinforce behaviors such as listening and active participation. Covenants also have the added benefit of depersonalizing conflict. Covenants should be renewed by groups at least yearly.

Accountability

Accountability in small groups is simply sharing what you have done, or not done, as you live the way of Jesus. This way of giving account is guided by the congregation's rule of life. The purpose is to support members' growth in holiness.

Accountability in small groups may take many forms, depending upon the nature of each group. For example, administrative ministries (finance, trustees, staff/pastor parish relations, church council) and discipleship ministries (education, mission, evangelism, membership care, and so on) may set aside time once a quarter to evaluate their work in light of the General Rule of Discipleship or their intentional discipleship system. They may ask how they have contributed to the church's mission through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion. Such corporate accountability would serve to focus the group's work on serving Christ in the world and contributing to the congregation's disciple-making mission. The key is to work together to keep Christ at the center of all they do.

The same model of accountability applies to the more traditional small groups, such as prayer, Bible study, support, nurture, call, and accountability. These have a more explicit goal of Christian formation for their members.

Other groups, such as fellowship and service groups, could incorporate accountability for discipleship by forming groups of three who meet monthly. Each person takes five to ten minutes to share how he or she is applying the General Rule of Discipleship to his or her daily life. A prayer could be said following each person's account. Each time the whole group meets, it could set aside time for members to pair off and share with each other how they have followed Jesus Christ in the world since their last meeting. This is a powerful witness to vocation as discipleship, as explored in resources like *Disciples in the Marketplace*, from Discipleship Ministries.

We must be clear that accountability in small groups is simply each person sharing with the group what he or she has done, or not done, guided by the congregation's rule of life. The challenge is to share in ways that build up the group and help other group members with their discipleship. This practice is very important because it builds trust and intimacy within the group. As members grow closer to one another, they will also grow closer to God.

Support for All Small-Group Participants

Small-group ministry that is integral to the mission of the church requires regular, intentional support. One way to do so is to plan quarterly or yearly gatherings for everyone participating in a small group, not just the leaders. These gatherings will ideally include sharing a meal, a brief time of small-group training, informal conversation, and worship. These gatherings are important because they will build connections among all the various groups and provide ongoing training. They are an opportunity for groups to learn from one another.

Finally, the recommended order of worship for the conclusion of these meetings is the Love Feast found in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (p. 581 or online at www.umcdiscipleship.org/book-of-worship). The Love Feast is an important part of Methodist spirituality. It is a powerful time of informal worship that includes hymn singing, Scripture reading, prayer, testimony, sharing bread and water, and a collection to support ministry with people who live in poverty. One of its important features is that it is intended to be led entirely by laity. The Love Feast empowers people and builds community among people who share the common experience of participation in a small group.

Additional Considerations

Overcoming Loneliness: Finding Belonging in Small Groups

The long-lasting pandemic has made many people feel more alone and isolated, highlighting how important small groups are for bringing people back together and helping them deal with feelings and spiritual needs. Making an extra effort to reach out, like inviting people directly, sharing stories, and spreading the word, is key to getting those who stopped participating involved again.

Cultivating intentional hospitality through practices like personal introductions, shared meals, and intentional follow-up can help integrate new participants and foster belongingness. The friendship and spiritual support from being in a small group can really help fight the loneliness. It is important for the church to make strategic investments in outreach, re-engagement efforts, and a culture of warm hospitality vital as the church walks alongside those carrying heavy emotional burdens. Remember, these groups can meet in virtually any location and at any time, so learn the rhythms of life in your community and encourage small groups to form around places where people already spend their time.

Inclusiveness

Consider the following questions if you think you may need to start new small groups. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, then the time may be ripe to act on your inclination.

- Do fewer than 50 percent of your adult members attend Sunday school or participate in other small groups?
- Do you have at least six to eight people who might be interested in looking at a particular topic or issue?
- What recent members have not been incorporated into existing classes or groups?
- Do you have several people who are not able to attend current small-group offerings because the meeting times conflict with work or other obligations? Might there be a way to use online settings to facilitate conversations to meet their needs? Might there be a way for groups to meet online to supplement times when they meet in person so as to not meet in person as much (which can save on babysitting and costs for the church)?
- Are several people currently going through similar life transitions (e.g., divorce, death of a spouse, birth of a child, job loss) who may need support or idea sharing?

Creating a Welcoming Space for All

It's important to remember that participants may come from varying spiritual backgrounds and cultures. For some, this could be their first exposure to Christian community or biblical teachings. When using the Bible or other Christian resources, avoid assumptions about prior knowledge or familiarity with content or theological perspectives. Provide context and explanations as needed. If asking participants to reference a specific passage of the Bible, state the book, chapter, and verse numbers clearly, and share the page of the Bible if you are using the same version of the Bible. (Having extra Bibles or access to Bible apps available is a great idea.) Be mindful that communication norms differ across cultures. In some contexts, individuals may be hesitant to speak up unless directly invited to share. As the facilitator, create opportunities for everyone to participate by posing questions to the whole group. If English is a second language for some members, simplify vocabulary and sentence structure when possible. Pause frequently to allow for comprehension and invite clarifying questions. Above all, lead with patience, empathy, and a posture of learning from one another. The small group should be a place where all feel welcomed, valued, and mutually encouraged in their unique journeys of faith exploration. Many of these considerations can be worked into the group covenant as you develop the group culture.

Offering Seasonal and Topical Small Groups

To facilitate ongoing discipleship while accommodating varying commitments, consider seasonal or topical small groups of 6-8 weeks. This allows exploration of specific themes, providing a clear start and end date for newcomers. Afterward, members can choose to continue together or explore other group options, catering to diverse schedules and preferences. While maintaining permanent groups for deeper discipleship, short-term groups act as an inviting entry point, striking a balance that nurtures long-term relationships and welcomes new participants, thus supporting a dynamic, transformative small-group ministry. Lent offers an good opportunity to invite individuals to participate in new activities, as many are more open to embracing special commitments during this reflective period.

Leveraging Online Resources and Social Media

The pandemic has accelerated digital literacy across generations, presenting opportunities for small groups to leverage online platforms and social media as supplemental avenues for continued learning, nurture, and expanded outreach. Leaders can maintain engagement between gatherings through messaging or social media: sharing daily Scripture, reflections, or prayer points; circulating edifying resources through emails or cloud folders; establishing secure online communities for sharing testimonies, prayer requests, and encouragement. While in-person gatherings remain invaluable, thoughtfully integrating digital tools can enrich the small-group experience by expanding opportunities for connection, growth and outreach beyond constraints of time and location. As the church navigates cultural shifts, embracing innovative methods and equipping leaders to harness technology will be essential for enhancing discipleship within and beyond group contexts.

Evaluation

Regular evaluation is crucial for faithfulness in any ministry. But what do we evaluate? How do we know when we have the results we want? If the ultimate goal is making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, how do we recognize a “disciple,” and how do we measure transformation? Having an intentional discipleship system with a clearly stated understanding of a mature disciple can give guidance to how groups help form participants toward this goal.

Goals

There is not much point in evaluating if you don’t know what you want to accomplish, or if there has been no goal setting. Start with the mission or purpose of the group. If it is a Bible study group, a probable desired result is that you want group members who are moved by their study of Scripture to pursue growth in holiness of heart and life.

Envision what a successful and faithful result will be, given the purpose of the group, and then set three or four goals, with strategies that will help you get there. Goal setting begins with the stated mission or purpose of the group. Goals should be SMART—**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**easonable, and **T**imely. Goals should be specific; challenging, but not impossible; and doable over a designated short- and long-term. Accomplishing short-term goals encourages group members to keep going, and long-term goals help keep the group members’ eyes on the “main thing.” One easy question for your core team and each small group to consider is this: “If we continue on our current trajectory—keeping the same attitudes, ideas, plans, and activities without change—will we be likely to achieve the results we want?” If you’re not so sure the answer is yes, reexamine and rework your current direction.

To return to the example above, goals for that Bible study group might include teaching how to navigate the Scriptures; introducing the major themes and key biblical figures; and issuing a weekly challenge to group members that relates to a person, theme, or biblical value. Once those goals are set and strategies to achieve them implemented, you can measure the results. Remember—if you are not getting the results you want, then change your goals and strategies. Your goals and outcomes should always be consistent with the intentional discipleship system or pathway in place in your church. Work with pastoral leadership to identify shared outcomes and language.

Measurement

There are two fundamental measurement criteria used to evaluate any process, project, or performance: *quantitative* and *qualitative*. Quantitative metrics measure in numbers

and amounts. For example, a worship service achieves an attendance goal of exceeding 100 worshippers weekly; a children's Vacation Bible School (VBS) sets a goal of 50 children a day; or a church sets a membership goal of five new members a month. Quantitative measures are easy to apply—just count. Qualitative measures are a bit more difficult. Following the earlier examples, how well did worship connect the 100 people to a sense of God's holiness? What did the 50 children learn about God, faith, and their Christian behavior each day they attended VBS? How well do the five new members this month grow in their discipleship, and how are they living their faith in the world? These are qualitative measures.

Measurement of small groups begins with missional counting. We begin with the obvious:

- How many small groups that fit the definition cited in the introduction are currently active?
- How many people are participating in small groups?
- What percentage of the congregation's membership is participating in at least one small group?
- What is the percentage change (increase or decrease) of small-group participation from the previous year?

We can also combine quantitative and qualitative measurements. Another way to think about metrics is to identify the standards that illustrate faithful and effective discipleship. This helps remind us of the results we want through small-group ministries and how we know we have achieved them; for example:

- How many small-group participants are serving as leaders in discipleship for the first time this year?
- How many members served in mission in the community (i.e., served at a soup kitchen, visited the sick, visited a jail or prison, helped build homes for low-income families, visited the homebound, and so on)?
- How many members are serving in worship leadership for the first time (reading Scripture, serving as an usher, singing in choir, playing a musical instrument, serving Holy Communion, etc.)?
- How many people are certified lay servants for the first time? How many have completed advanced lay servant training?
- How many members are habitually practicing the means of grace through weekly worship, daily prayer (private and with friends/family), the Lord's Supper, Bible reading and study, fasting or abstinence, or engaging in a service or justice ministry?
- How do the personal stories of the participants reveal that lives are being changed and becoming more like the image of Christ?
- How have small groups positively impacted our connection to our surrounding community, or shared in the work of evangelism, outreach, mission, and so on?
- How are small groups affecting the intergenerational relationships in our church?

The success or failure of small-group ministries cannot be stated in numbers alone: the number of small groups, the number of people involved, how often they meet, or how many new groups get launched. Beyond these measures, it is important to understand how people's lives are being changed and how they are growing in holiness of heart and life. Remember, a group of 10 people who reorient their lives to be full-time disciples has much more impact than 500 people who sit in circles in small groups talking about what fun activities they would like to do together.

One simple, periodic process to follow is to work with the Church Council to evaluate the intentional discipleship system and/or to answer the following questions with the whole leadership of the congregation:

- What is our mission and purpose as a congregation?
- What roles do small groups play in helping us fulfill our mission and reach our goals as a congregation?
- What do we want small groups to provide for participants?
- How well are our existing small groups meeting these needs?
- How can we improve existing groups to offer more to participants?
- What other groups could we offer to enable more people to grow in holiness of heart and life and to help this congregation fulfill its mission?

These questions cannot be answered quantitatively. Assessing the role of small groups in spiritual formation and helping the congregation fulfill its mission are only possible when we include qualitative metrics in our evaluation. By establishing the standards that you want to live up to and grow toward, and which you evaluate regularly, you have a strong base on which to build your ministries, groups, and members. For more helps on measurement, planning, and evaluation, check out Disciple Dashboard, a congregational data dashboard that provides an opportunity to set goals, collect essential data, and reflect on ministry (<http://umcdiscipleship.org/Disciple-Dashboard>).

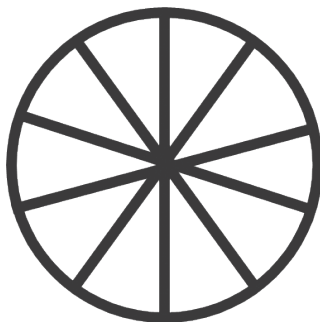
Conclusion

Discipleship is a process of growth in holiness of heart and life. It is a way of living that draws us closer to Christ and conforms our lives to his. A helpful way of visualizing this life comes from a sixth-century monk, Dorotheus of Gaza. He describes the Christian life with the illustration of a circle with lines radiating inward to a central point.

Suppose we were to take a compass and insert the point and draw the outline of a circle. The center point is the same distance from any point on the circumference. Let us suppose that this circle is the world and that God himself is the center: the straight lines drawn from the circumference to the center are the lives of human beings. Let us assume for the sake of analogy that to move toward God, then, human beings move from the circumference along the various radii of the circle to the center. But at the same time, the closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God. (Roberta C. Bondi, *To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church* [Fortress Press, 1987], 18)

Discipleship is how we move from the circumference of the circle closer and closer to the center.

In the process, we grow in holiness of heart and life and are drawn closer and closer to our neighbors and to God, growing into a beloved community. Pursuing this holiness within relationships of mutual accountability and support in small groups empowers and equips women, men, youth, and children to grow up and grow toward the One who is creating, redeeming, and sustaining them in love. Providing the means for adults, youth, and children to live out the baptismal covenant and grow in faith, hope, and love requires a system of small groups. Regardless of size, location, language, or ethnicity, small groups are the most effective means of inviting people into a relationship with Jesus Christ and equipping them to become fully the persons God created them to be as they join Christ and his mission in the world.



Resources

**Indicates our top picks

Small-Group Ministry

***Biblical Foundations for Small-Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach*, Gareth Weldon Icenogle (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), ISBN: 0830817719.

***The Big Book on Small Groups*, Jeffrey Arnold (Grand Rapids: IVP Connect, 2004), ISBN: 9780830823703.

Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone, Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), ISBN: 9780310267102.

***Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*, Julie A. Gorman (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993, 2002), ISBN: 9780801091452.

***Disciples Making Disciples: Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups and Class Leaders*, Steven W. Manskar (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2016), ISBN: 978-0881777741.

***Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship for Youth*, Chris Wilterdink (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2016), ISBN: 9780881777932.

Gather Us In: Leading Transformational Small Groups, Angela D. Schaffner (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2020).

***Growing Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Children*, Melanie C. Gordon, Susan Groseclose, and Gayle Quay (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2016), ISBN: 9780881776959.

Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know, Henry Cloud and John Townsend (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), ISBN: 9780310250289.

***Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community That Makes a Difference in the World*, M. Scott Boren (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), ISBN: 9780801072307.

Biblical and Theological Foundations

***Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household*, Steven W. Manskar (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), ISBN: 9780881773392.

***Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living*, Kevin M. Watson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009), ISBN: 9780881775563.

Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People, Junius B. Dotson (Discipleship Ministries).

Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith, Steve Harper (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2022). DVD & Streaming Video with leader's guide.

Five Means of Grace: Experience God's Love the Wesleyan Way, Elaine A. Heath (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2022). DVD & Streaming Video with leader's guide.

Grace to Lead: Practicing Leadership in the Wesleyan Tradition, Kenneth L. Carder and Lacey C. Warner (Nashville: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2010), ISBN: 9780938162766.

*******Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780881775082. CD with study guide.

Reclaiming the Wesleyan Tradition: John Wesley's Sermons for Today, Douglas M. Strong et al. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780881775198.

Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living, Bishop Rueben Job (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). DVD with leader's guide.

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Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations, Junius B. Dotson (Discipleship Ministries).

The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance, David Lowes Watson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), ISBN: 9781579109394.

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), ISBN: 978-0664255480. Also available in a newly revised version, published in 2014.

To Love as God Loves: Conversations with the Early Church, Roberta C. Bondi (Fortress Press, 1987), ISBN: 9780800620417.

Websites

Discipleship Ministries Teaching Website: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/teaching>

Discipleship Ministries "How to choose curriculum resources": <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/choosing-curriculum-resources>

Podcast, Small Groups in the Wesleyan Way (Archived): bit.ly/umcsmallgroups

The Upper Room—Small Groups: <https://upperroombooks.com/>

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcuh.org, Madison, NJ,
973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, www.umbcjustice.org, Washington, DC,
202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, www.resourceumc.org/communications,
www.umns.org, Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, www.umbcdiscipleship.org, Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780;
Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; The Upper Room,
<http://www.upperroom.org>.

General Board of Finance and Administration, www.gbfa.org, Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umbcmission.org, Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, www.gcorr.org, Washington, DC,
202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, Chicago, IL,
1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcummm.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, www.abingdonpress.com,
www.cokesbury.com, www.ministrymatters.org, Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, www.uwfaith.org, New York, NY, 212-682-3633

Wespath (retirement/benefits), www.wespath.org, Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.