

A few FAQ's about LifeGroups...

1. WHY LIFEGROUPS?

We firmly believe that LifeGroups are the primary place through which sustained life change & transformation occur. LifeGroups give you an opportunity to express and grow in your love for others and “live life together.” Our process for developing disciples is to create an environment where people can “Love God, Love Others, and Serve the World.” LifeGroups become the primary vehicle where people can ‘Love Others’ and be loved in return.

2. WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

LifeGroups exist to help us grow together as disciples. The purpose of LifeGroups is to promote healthy relationships, Bible study, and authentic Christian community. We believe that significant relationships are essential for a Christian for both growth and discipleship. As our church grows larger, we must grow smaller. We're committed to the ABC's of LifeGroups:

◆ Accountability ◆ Belonging ◆ Care ◆ Discipleship

3. OK, SO WHAT IS A LIFEGROUP?

A LifeGroup is a small group of six married couples or 8-10 individuals (mixed group of married and individuals or 8-10 individuals of the same gender). Groups will be encouraged to meet weekly in someone's home for fellowship, Bible study, prayer & accountability. Each group will sign a covenant agreement after understanding our “LifeGroup DNA,” the foundational principles we want to foster within every LifeGroup @ Bethany. We plan to pursue LifeGroups for adults of all ages, stages of life, and spiritual maturity.

4. WHAT KINDS OF LIFEGROUPS ARE THERE?

In the sign-up process, we will have options that you can choose regarding the type of group you're interested in. Some of those options include:

- **Married Couples** - LifeGroups comprised of married couples in the same stage of life (couples without children, with children, and empty nesters) and area of town. Proximity for each group will vary, but our desire is to see groups develop where life can be shared. We realize that the closer the proximity, the better chance of that happening. Some may prefer to be in an inter-generational mix of people, so we hope to accommodate that option as well.
- **Mixed Groups** - LifeGroups that have both married couples and single adults.
- **Gender Based** - LifeGroups comprised of single adults, or married adults where only one spouse is involved in the group. Focused areas include:
 - Ladies' Link - Comprised of women of all ages and stages of life (ex: single, married, moms of preschoolers, divorced, widowed, etc)
 - Men's Ministry - Comprised of men of all ages & stages of life.

5. IS CHILDCARE PROVIDED FOR LIFEGROUPS?

We assume that many parents are most comfortable leaving their children with familiar childcare providers at their home, assuring homework gets done and bedtime is honored; however, many groups may offer childcare for a fee during LifeGroup time. We assume that those needing childcare will assist our group facilitators in finding childcare providers. If childcare is needed, be sure to confirm with the group facilitator that they have childcare before signing on with their group. We also recognize that bringing kids to the LifeGroup gathering is an option that each group should decide for themselves. We hope to develop a Childcare Contact page with names of HS & College students who are available for hire.

6. WHAT REALLY HAPPENS IN A LIFEGROUP?

Most groups will have their own look & feel, but there are some similar attributes we hope can be woven into the fabric of each LifeGroup. As part of the LifeGroup Covenant, each group will familiarize itself with the LifeGroup DNA (a separate document), and work to hold the group accountable to those common purposes. Similar components include Bible or topical study, fellowship, prayer, discussion of how what you're learning applies to your life, accountability, and, of course, food! We also want your group to have fun...after all, 'living life together' can and should be a good time, too!

7. HOW DO I JOIN A LIFEGROUP?

We hope to have ongoing efforts to form groups. We do plan to utilize the campaign system to help launch groups (40 Days, etc). The plan is to have 2 times of emphasis each year to get people into groups, launch them as Starter Groups, and transition them into ongoing LifeGroups. We hope to work with everyone involved to get people into the right group from the get-go. There won't be any "random" assignment of people into groups.

There are two ways to get involved in a Life Group:

- **Personal Invite** - Someone who is leading a Starter Group may personally invite you to participate in their group, leading up to the main group start-up months of January and August.
- **LifeGroup Central** - You can sign up at LifeGroup Central in the Atrium during the months of January and August, the two key group formation & launching times each year. The LifeGroup leadership team will work with you to get you connected with a LifeGroup.

8. HOW OFTEN (and where) DO GROUPS MEET?

We will encourage LifeGroups to meet weekly, but some groups may choose to meet 3 times a month and take one week off or use the 4th week as a social activity together or a service project. Groups will usually meet year round, but each LifeGroup can determine periodic breaks in the schedule during busy times of the year. The summer months are tricky to negotiate for some groups, but easy to be consistent for others. So there is flexibility that each group must take into account. As for group location, our *preference* is that most groups would have their regular meetings take place in a home. The home setting is much more relaxed and conducive to the "environment creation" that we hope we can foster with LifeGroups. We do understand that there are extenuating circumstances that may make it easier for a group to meet in the church building. We plan to work with each group as they formulate that plan for their group, and help

accommodate however possible.

9. HOW LONG SHOULD LIFEGROUP MEETINGS LAST?

It varies, but we think 1 ½ to 2 hours should be appropriate for most groups. Longer is fine, assuming group members agree to go longer, childcare is considered, etc.

10. DO LIFEGROUPS LAST...FOR LIFE?

Good question. LifeGroups commit to meet for eight weeks as a Starter Group. After those first eight weeks, the group members decide if they want to continue meeting together for an additional 16-22 months, and will then multiply. So a typical duration for a LifeGroup is between one and a half to two years. During the term of the group, the group leader will train an apprentice to be the leader of the next group. At the end of the group, the leader will take half the current group, and the apprentice (after becoming an approved leader) will take the other half of the group. They will both add more members to their respective new groups, allowing others to join groups with seasoned leaders.

11. IF “LIVING LIFE TOGETHER” IS PART OF THE LIFEGROUP OVERALL PURPOSE, WHY LIMIT THE GROUPS TO ONLY 18-24 MONTHS?

Good question! We don't expect those relationships to just end and dissipate at the end of the LifeGroup cycle. There are three major reasons we feel this is important:

- We plan to have an ongoing cycle of new groups being formed, normally in January and September of each year. New people will be signing up for groups, and new LifeGroups will be launched at these two key start times. It's important that those who have experienced authentic Christian community are woven together with new LifeGroup members to model what a LifeGroup is all about and how it can and should function. We're called to be Salt & Light (Matthew 5:13-16), and this is a significant way that we can be influencers to those new to the LifeGroup relationship (many of whom may be new believers or new Bethany members).
- Our main leadership development will take place in existing LifeGroups. At the end of a group's cycle, when multiplication should take place, it's important that we get these newly developed leaders together with new LifeGroup members.
- One of the key issues that many small groups deal with is stagnation. We want a culture of growing, thriving Christians in LifeGroups, and want to avoid creating an atmosphere where complacency in a group can keep individuals from growth.

12. WHAT SORT OF STUDY WILL LIFEGROUPS UNDERTAKE?

Groups and their facilitators will have some freedom to pursue study guides, books, etc., with help and direction from the Life Group Leadership Team. All resources need the stamp of approval from the LG Leadership Team. We will encourage the use of the resources in the LifeGroup Resource Center, which will be stocked with curriculum and discussion guides that

will be assembled by the LifeGroup Leadership Team and the staff. There will be occasions throughout the year when a study will be provided (ex: during a preaching series on grace, we might use a supplemental study guide for LifeGroups). We have a variety of LifeGroup resources from which to choose, and a plethora of resources is available to purchase on numerous topics. Many topics will be video driven, meaning there will be a short video teacher segment and then a discussion-based curriculum led by the facilitator.

13. HOW DO WE SELECT LEADERS?

Initially, leaders will be recruited from within the congregation and led through a training process before assuming the role of group leader. We also know that LifeGroups themselves can be an “incubator” of sorts for group leaders. Group leaders, working in tandem with the LG Leadership Team, should identify an apprentice to assist with the group. This is part of the natural mentoring process in which the co-leader grows into the role of group leader and eventually, when the group multiplies some 18-24 months after the initial group began, a new group forms. Leader training will be offered periodically by the LifeGroup Leadership Team. Leaders will be church members who have gone through an interview process with a staff member, elder, or member of the LifeGroup Leadership Team.

14. WHAT IF I TRY A GROUP AND IT’S NOT REALLY FOR ME?

We’re aware that you may land in a group that may not mesh just right for you. We’re simply asking that you get involved in a Starter Group. We’re asking you to commit to at least 8 weeks, after which your group will covenant together to keep meeting together for 16 to 22 months. At the end of the 8 weeks, if it’s just not a good fit, you can go back into the pool and try another LifeGroup. The LG Leadership Team will assist in trying to help anyone get into a group as new leaders are available.

15. WHAT DOES ‘GROUP CONSENSUS’ MEAN, ANYWAY?

We feel that once groups are set in motion, they are largely closed groups. Why? Because the relationships you’re developing are important enough to protect from distraction. Bringing new people into your group will always take the group back to square one, and new levels of intimacy and accountability will constantly need to be re-established. *If, however, the entire group has a person or couple in mind to recruit for their group, and as a group there is consensus, then adding that couple or person is acceptable and encouraged.* But be sensitive to the group size that we’re recommending. If a group gets too large, it’s easy for some people to shut down (not to mention that living rooms are only so large, anyway!)

16. IS THERE AN EXPECTATION THAT THESE GROUPS WILL HAVE A SERVICE COMPONENT?

In many cases, no. We do hope that we can get all in our sphere of influence to “*Love God, Love Others, and Serve the World.*” We also know that many will already be serving, and many others will find areas in which to serve before even joining a LifeGroup. So we’re not holding that up as an expectation for each group; however, if the group does decide to serve together, do a project, etc., we’ll applaud and cheer and get out of your way! We do expect groups in the Starter Group phase to do some sort of service project together as a way to continue to build camaraderie within the group.

17. WHAT IS HAPPENING TO BETHANY UNIVERSITY AND OTHER WEDNESDAY NIGHT PROGRAMMING?

In order for the LifeGroup concept to flourish, we feel the need to leave Wednesday night open for groups to meet. LifeGroups are not just another add-on program - we see them as critical to your growth as a Christian and our health as a church. The periodic topical studies that we covered in Bethany University will be integrated into the LifeGroup formula. From time to time, we plan to encourage all LifeGroups to even study the same provided topic. Essentially, we are replacing our Wednesday night adult programming with the LifeGroup format.

18. ARE THERE CHANGES TO THE CURRENT SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAM?

We value the role that Sunday School has played in the history of our church, particularly the instructional role it has played in the lives of countless hundreds since our launch as a church back in 1898! We are certainly respectful of that heritage. We also recognize that Sunday School has its limitations. For many SS classes, the time permitted leaves little opportunity for relationships and Biblical community to blossom. Conversations may get no deeper than “great weather we’re having,” etc. Granted, we know that several SS classes have managed to take those relationships out of the SS context and have developed close-knit relationships where individuals really do “live life together.” So we plan to continue to work with SS teachers to help them redefine their roles and the culture of their class.

We do, however, want to cast a vision to each class and, ultimately, each individual; we hope they’ll consider jumping head-first into a LifeGroup. Some classes may want to develop several LifeGroups from within their class, and Sunday becomes a sort of rallying spot for the whole group. Some classes may wish to transition exclusively to a LifeGroup format, with the occasional social gathering of the groups coming together. Those and other options can be explored, and ultimately it’s a choice that each class has the freedom to make.

Our process of discipleship involves the need for a tremendous team of volunteers. What we’re doing here is too important to do halfway, or without a high level of excellence. We have many opportunities, both current and under development, to “Serve the World” on Sunday morning. These opportunities are critical to this process of discipling people. We will encourage people to consider spending their Sunday morning doing one hour of service and one hour of worship. We realize this may not be for every person, and in no means is it being “mandated from on high,” but it’s a vision we’re casting, and it is for each SS class and, ultimately, for each individual to decide.