

Growth Group Leader Guidelines - Volunteer Position

Overview

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25)

We need a place to encounter the presence of our living God and to interact with others, encouraging believers and seekers. Small gatherings, that is “Growth Groups”, provides an ideal way of meeting these needs.

Growth groups take many forms with respect to...

- The size of the group (ideally no fewer than 3 and no larger than 12)
- The group members (women, men, couples, adults, families, young adults...etc)
- The primary focus of the group (learning, fellowship, mutual support...)
- Where the group meets (at one or various homes, coffee shops...)
- How often the group meets (weekly, semi-monthly, monthly...)
- When the group meets (time of day, day of week)

The group leader does not necessarily have to “do” everything...but is responsible for overseeing that everything is done to help ensure a positive, successful growth group experience. This involves

- Praying
- Planning
- Welcoming
- Overseeing
- Encouraging
- Administering

Guidelines

Sharing the work of leadership

Your group might include people who would be open to and able to support you either regularly or occasionally in one or more ways. There are different roles that could be supported by different people in your group. For example:

- **Hosting:** Opening ones home to the group, and overseeing beverages and snacks
- **Facilitating:** Planning and leading the discussion
- **Hospitality:** Bringing a snack
- **Administration:** Being the Planning Center user who sets up events, sends and oversees invitations to gatherings, records attendance, and so forth.

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One way to encourage this is by using a sign up form. Being more than just a participant in your group can not only be helpful to you, but also benefits those who contribute in various ways.

Prayer: A Conscious Dependence Upon the Holy Spirit

Prayer is, of course, central to our growth groups. Specifically, as a growth group leader you would:

- Pray for God's leading regarding your group in general
- Pray for each gathering of your group...for God's leading and felt presence
- Pray for your group members
- Encourage your group members to pray for each other
- Include prayer as a key element of your group gatherings

Planning

People's ideas about and needs regarding growth groups vary widely and it is important to be clear about what your particular growth group involves. This means that you:

- Identifying the time, and frequency for your group gatherings
- Decide whether or not your group is open to all or to just adults, women, men, etc.
- If your group is open to children, determine the specifics of their care during your gatherings
- Determine the place for each gathering
- Plan how the gathering is to be structured (time for fellowship, prayer, support, study...etc)
- If the gathering involves a meal or refreshments, plan those details: what, who, when...
- If a book, study materials, or a video is to be used in your gatherings, guide both the selection of those resources and their procurement - and, if a video is used, that the meeting place has video capabilities.
- Determine the maximum number of members your group can support
- Establish and encourage buy-in to a group covenant:
 - Beginning and ending time
 - Attendance
 - Confidentiality
 - Communications

Welcoming

One of ATN's core practices is hospitality. The group leader ensures this is lived out both in relationships with those expressing interest in your group as well as in relationship with your group members. It is important therefore to:

- Recruit, or respond to, individuals who express interest in your group - answering questions, inviting them to the group
- Allow newcomers to "test drive" your group to confirm whether or not it meets their needs.

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- Welcome members as they arrive for each gathering
- At a minimum (for gatherings not in coffee shops/restaurants) provide liquid refreshments and a simple snack.

Overseeing

Each gathering is important for your members and to the success of your group. Provide guidelines and set clear expectations for those taking on specific group responsibilities such as hosting, facilitating, hospitality, administrative work.

To optimize each gathering, you or whoever agrees to serve as:

Host - is to:

- Provide a warm physical space for your gathering (in a home, the church, in any place). Seek to make things as inviting as possible.
- Make sure your meeting location is set up and readied for your group: seating, hospitality...
- Provides liquid refreshments and provides or coordinates snacks with others who agree to provide them.
- As needed provides AV support (*when curriculum includes video resources*)

Facilitator - is to:

- Prepare discussion topics/questions for meeting
- Preview video resource if used
- Help new group members assimilate
- Allow agreed amount of time for fellowship then calls gathering together by opening in prayer
- Encourage Group Participation
 - Be a leader who facilitates and doesn't dominate
 - Invite insights from everyone without demanding
 - Remember for some people, "still waters run deep"
- Don't
 - pressure or call on people (prayer, reading, sharing)...
 - pray or read or share one by one in a circle
 - ask a specific person to share on demand
 - assume a person in the group knows what you know
- Keep the discussion on subject and moving - gently redirecting conversations as needed, stepping in if someone is inappropriately dominating.
- Provide extra Bibles, copies of handouts, study materials as needed
- Provide guidelines and set clear expectations for the gathering including an end time when people can comfortably end their participation even if others continue
- Close discussion per agreed meeting end time commitments

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Encouraging

Living out ATN's core practice of Kinship, building healthy relationships is a key goal of the growth group experience. To achieve this it is essential to know and accept that we have different personality types, we are at different life stages and are experiencing various stages of spiritual growth.

- Authentic relationships foster deep community. Promote an atmosphere of shared joys and sorrows...celebration and struggle.
 - Be transparent yourself
 - Show compassion - *Bear each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2-5)*
 - Find appropriate and reasonable ways to respond to needs (tangible support)
 - Address any challenging group dynamics gracefully
- Encourage your group into shared life, faith, and mission. For example:
 - Contact during the week
 - Send a note, texts, and lift up prayers
 - Social settings: Go out to coffee or lunch
 - Consider ways to serve in some capacity as a group

Administration

Knowing how our church family is involved in growth groups and other aspects of church life helps us better support people on their faith journey. ATN uses a church database (Planning Center) to help know our people and their involvement. Planning Center is also a great tool to assist group leaders in planning and communicating. Group leaders are therefore asked to be trained (*or to designate someone else in your group to be trained*) in how to use the church database to serve your group's needs as follows:

- Make sure your group is set up in Planning Center and that the information about your group and its members is correct and current. ATN provides support for this.
- Keep your group member list current and correct; removing members who opt out, correcting missing or incorrect contact information.
- Communicate with your group and/or with individual members of your group
- Create Events for your gatherings and invite your members to RSVP to each gathering.
- Confirm who plans to participate in each gathering by checking Planning Center's RSVP responses; send reminders as needed.
- Respond to Planning Center's email prompt to take attendance for each gathering

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Notes

Guidelines for Praying in Groups

- Be brief (2-5 sentences) You need to be an example
- Don't advance your own agenda or teach during prayer
- Don't pressure people
- Close when it is right (In Jesus' name, Amen)

The Centrality of God's Word

Scripture is to be a central component of our Growth Groups. Consider how to integrate the use of, and references to, Scripture in planning for your group.

Special Challenges

You might have someone in your group who either has special needs or is especially challenging. If this happens you are encouraged to seek guidance from Pastor Justin. It is important to extend grace and support individuals in your group; it is equally important to maintain focus on the goals and needs of your group.

Group Consensus

Although initially you as the leader will have made decisions about your group, you might consider seeking group input on matters such as what to study next, how much of your meeting time is devoted to prayer vs fellowship vs support vs study, how frequently your meet etc.

Easy off ramps

It is wise to pick certain times at which your group members are given the opportunity to opt out of the group without feeling awkward about it. The times when your group takes breaks - for example, at the end of the year, might be good opportunities for this.

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Ways to think about your Group's plan

Note that each group determines its own plan; these are just things to consider.

Possible Yearly Rhythm

Mid-August → Mid-November: ON
Mid-November → December: OFF
January → May: ON
June → Mid-August: OFF

Where your Group Meets

- Monterey
- Seaside
- Marina
- Salinas
- Carmel
- PG
- Varies

In

- Home(s)
- Coffee Shop(s)
- Restaurant(s)
- Other
- Varies

When your Group Meets

Time of Day

- Morning
- Mid-Day
- Afternoon
- Evening
- Varied

Dates

- Day of week
- Date(s) in month
- other

Your Maximum Group Size

Ideally 10-12 people

The Makeup of your group

- Adults only
- Adults and children
- Women
- Men
- Young Adults
- Etc

Curricula Ideas

- Books of the Bible
- Themes of the Bible
- Christian books (ancient, contemporary, practices, etc)
- Sermon Series questions
- Christian Study Guides/Videos

Ground Rules

Not here to "fix" people

- **4 Things (to be present with people)**
 - Welcome
 - Safe
 - Honor
 - Encourage