

OCC Life Group Basics

Elaine Morse

Director of Life Groups

425.895.2427

elainem@occ.org

Why Life Groups?

Love God. **Love People**. Serve the World.

Life Groups are small gatherings of people usually 4-10, designed to encourage connection care and life transformation of it's members. These groups build relationships in community that encourage growth toward becoming more like Christ. Life groups are more than a Bible study—they are welcoming, authentic, extended families where the Bible is studied so that God's truth can impact our lives, where friends pray for friends, and neighbors support one another in times of challenge and in times of joy.

In Acts 2, the early church not only met in the temple courts, but also house to house. Similarly today, we meet in the church building to worship and receive teaching and inspiration, and meet in Life Groups to share life with each other. We achieve our purpose by striving to meet our Life Group objectives in the lives of each of our members:

- **Love God**— Progressive growth in Christ is evident in my group members by experiencing Jesus daily.
- **Love People**—Mutual care for my group members is lived out. Transformation in Christ is evident in my group members and spiritual formation occurs based on meaningful study together.
- **Serve the World**—Group members contribute to the body according to their spiritual giftedness. Group members serve the lost and the lowly and build bridges from relationship.

"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. "
Acts 2:46-47

Life Group Leader Position Description

OBJECTIVE:

Lead a group of 4 to 10 adults in becoming Christ-like.

MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- 1. Build a leadership team:** The leader and co-leader are essential roles on a leadership team but a team can also include a host, teacher, apprentice leader, organizer etc.
- 2. Conduct life-changing group meetings:** Prepare for and lead group times that promote understanding and application of the Bible, and mutual care and support of members.
- 3. "Pastor" the members of your group:** Care for and nurture your group members so they become mature followers of Christ caring for one another and others beyond the group in the same fashion.
- 4. Grow Life Groups:** Develop an apprentice leader with the expectation of forming a new group or preparing the apprentice for leadership of a different group.
- 5. Support OCC:** Joyfully support your elders and leadership in the mission and vision of OCC

PERSONAL AFFIRMATION:

- I confess that Jesus Christ is my Savior and Lord.
- I believe the Bible is God's word, and authoritative for faith and life.
- I am a member of OCC.
- I agree to come under the authority of the Life Group ministry and fulfill the obligations of a leader.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS:

Any combination of the following should be present:

- Shepherding/Pastor (Ephesians 4:11-12)
- Leadership (Acts 13:1-3, 15)
- Encouragement (Acts 9:26-30)
- Administration (Acts 15)
- Ministry/Service (Acts 6:1-6)
- Evangelism (Acts 2:14-29)
- Teaching (Ephesians 4:11-12)

DESIRED SKILLS:

Facilitating discussion, **caring** for group members, including new people, delegating responsibility, and **conflict** resolution.

Life Group Leader Expectations

Life Groups are a vital part of OCC. As a Life Group leader, you are often the first person responsible for encouraging, caring for, **challenging**, rejoicing with, and comforting your group members. It's a high calling. Since this is such a crucial ministry, we have expectations that we ask all Life Group leaders to meet. Doing so will help you maintain a vibrant personal ministry and aid your leaders in their ministry to you.

As a Life Group leader, we ask you to reflect the following:

Pastor (Shepherding)

1. Live out the Life Group objectives in front of your members: Love God, Love People, Serve the World.
2. Faithfully lead your members—pray for them, call, email and or meet with them outside of life group meeting times.
3. Encourage your members to practice biblical principles of conflict resolution, encouragement, and accountability.

Dependability

1. Ensure that your group meets regularly as scheduled.
2. Devote appropriate time to planning group time and discussions.
3. Attend OCC meetings and ministry events including, trainings, Vision meetings, Let's Connect & First Wednesday services .

Availability

1. Communicate regularly with Director of Life Groups, including prompt responses to e-mail and voicemail.
2. USE tools: FellowshipOne (www.fellowshipone.com)

Teachability

1. Seek God's wisdom for leading your group.
2. Follow the ministry guidelines set out by the Life Group Pastor and others in authority over you.
3. Invite pastoral staff or elders to group meetings, and welcome feedback.
4. Connect with and reach out to Elders often for wisdom.

Life Group Ministry Objectives

Love God: Progressive growth in Christ is evident in my group members by experiencing Jesus daily.

- Life Group members are spiritual self-starters who are actively developing their relationship with God.
- Life Group members confront each other in a loving way to grow spiritually.
- Life Group members encourage each other to pursue a deeper relationship with Christ.

Love People: Mutual care for my group members is lived out. Transformation in Christ is evident in my group members and spiritual formation occurs based on meaningful study together.

- Life Group members know each other well enough to see when one needs a hand.
- Life Group members give and receive care unselfishly.
- Life Group members **share their time, talents, and resources with each other.**
- Life Group members talk about how God and Scripture are shaping their lives.
- The group is **a safe place** for members to share their thoughts and feelings transparently.
- Life Group members feel comfortable sharing their personal burdens and struggles.

Serve the World: Group members contribute to the body according to their spiritual giftedness.

- Life Group members have an accurate understanding of spiritual gifts.

- Life Group members encourage each other to discover and develop their spiritual gifts.
- Life Group members know their spiritual gifts and joyfully serve the church/community in their giftedness.
- Life Group members are intentionally building relationships within their sphere of influence so they can share the gospel.
- Life Group members know how to share their personal testimony in a Christ-centered way.
- Life Group members can explain salvation biblically, using Scripture.

Life Group Leaders' Covenant

As a Life Group leader of OCC, I agree with the following statements:

- I am a member of Overlake Christian Church.
- I accept the responsibilities of a Life Group leader as outlined in the LG leader description
- I understand and agree with the Life Group Leader Expectations.
- I will support the Life Group Ministry Objectives.

Life Group Leader, Date

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: What is the primary emphasis of a Life Group: discipleship or caring?

A1: Both! It is our desire to emphasize each appropriately, and this will vary from group to group. We want to disciple people – teach them the Scriptures, help them develop spiritual disciplines, understand the Christian faith, and become disciplers of others. We also want to care for people – to pray for them, encourage them, and meet their needs for love and acceptance. Thus we fulfill both the Great Commission (to make disciples) and the Great Commandment (love one another).

Q2: How many people make up a Life Group?

A2: We aim for groups to be between 4 and 10 members. When a group grows larger than 10, it becomes difficult to adequately care for everyone's needs. It also becomes easier for some members to get lost. In addition, group discussion occurs more openly in smaller groups.

Q3: How do I get members in my group?

A3: The OCC site is a great place for people to find your group whether they already attend Overlake or are searching for a home church. Feel free to invite people you know who may not be in a Life Group. Overlake uses a database so that you can input your group's description, time, date, and people in your group and people can directly email you for information. This is the minimum amount of work that you can do, it is also encouraged to seek out people, to have coffee with new people and not just expect people to show up because you are on the website. It is all RELATIONAL.

Q4: How do we handle childcare for our group?

A4: Some Life Groups rotate childcare responsibility and some hire their own babysitters. Connect with Jr/Sr high students who can help and might appreciate a small fee.

Q5: How do I decide what our group should study?

A5: Start by assessing the group members' needs and spiritual maturity. It is also a good idea to find out what interests your members. Other ideas are books on Christian living with study guides, spiritual disciplines, or topical studies. Books of the Bible including people of the Bible are strongly recommended. You can also check out some resources online at OCC's website at

<http://www.occ.org/lifegroups/lgtopics.asp> . Discuss this with the Director of Life Groups elainem@occ.org or the leader director in your area (Women's, Men, Singles etc.)

Q6: Do I need to have the spiritual gift of leadership to be an effective leader?

A6: Spiritual gifts are an important consideration, but not the only criteria. All gifts can be used to effectively lead, but leadership differs.

Q7: When should our group meet?

A7: It depends on what is most convenient for your members. Many groups meet weekly, but it has worked well for some groups to meet twice a month and then have a third social or service-related meeting.

Q8: How long should a good meeting last?

A8: Long enough to engage the group; short enough to create a longing to return. Most of our groups meet for 90 minutes. Don't feel like you have to bring every meeting to perfect closure.

Q9: When is my group too large and what do I do about it?

A9: In all of your communication emphasize the value of groups growing, launching and multiplying. If the expectation is clear and repeated often, over time people will get the message that groups are expected to launch NEW groups. All leaders are charged with and encouraged with the vision of extending the joys of community to others beyond their existing group. (Mt. 9:36-38)

Getting Started

The start of a new Life Group brings excitement and high morale. Use this to your advantage by getting members to build relationships. The first few weeks in a Life Group should be spent laying the foundation that will lead to deep, life-changing community.

Ideas for your first few meetings include:

First Meeting—Life Group formation meeting. Include plenty of social time to build relationships and get to know each other. You will also need to decide where the group will meet in subsequent weeks. Rotating homes is an excellent idea. It allows all to participate and share in responsibility. Try rotating by alphabet

Second Meeting—Dinner and getting to know each other. Discuss what the Life Group members want out of the group. You may want to do an icebreaker to encourage members to participate. This is also a great time to begin laying the groundwork for the values and objectives for your group.

Third Meeting— Lead your Life Group in an activity to help form group cohesiveness. Spend the remaining time allowing each group member the opportunity to tell his or her story of his or her faith journey. Remember that not all of your group may be Christians! Consider a list of group values.*

Fourth Meeting—First group discussion/study. Now that you have had a few weeks to get to know your group, hopefully you know your group better and their spiritual needs. Choose a short term study for the group with the following things in mind:

- Do a short series—6 weeks or less. Finishing a series is encouraging...and helps you adjust for the next one.
- Ask lots of questions that will help the group members continue to build relationships. Be sure to ask questions at different knowledge levels.
- Start with something light. You don't want to scare people off or intimidate them out of participating.

RECOMMENDED LIFE GROUP AGENDA

I. Gathering (15-20 minutes)

- Time of connection and welcome

- Time for refreshments or a pot luck or hosted dinner
 - Allow group members, and guests of the group, to establish a comfortable setting
- II. Bible Discussion (25-35 minutes)
- The focus is how to apply God’s Word to our lives and create a healthy group interaction
 - Each group is unique—select curriculum that best meets the specific needs of your Life Group (Sermon guides are a great resource)
- III. Prayer & Care (25-35 minutes)
- Time to share needs, celebrate praises, and pray together – be transparent yourself to encourage transparency and authenticity in others
 - Praying as a group develops caring, and an awareness of others’ needs

Covenant – VALUES –Statement*

Covenants or value statements are developed by each Life Group to serve as a guide for their group life. Since groups develop their own values, each group has its own personality and can meet the needs of the people involved.

Questions that can help your group form a values statement:

How do we want this group to impact our lives?
 What commitments will it take from each of us to make that impact?
 Are we willing to make these commitments to each other?

Essential elements to include in a values statement:

Confidentiality: What is said in the group stays in the group unless it is determined that a person is in danger of hurting themselves or someone else. In this case, the appropriate full-time Life Group staff will be notified to help. Nothing said in the group should be discussed outside the group without the permission of those involved.

Respect Others: We do not advise, analyze, or “fix” others. We are to support, encourage, and admonish each other toward Christ-likeness and always in truth and love.

Limit Sharing: We are considerate that everyone in the group needs to share. We will be sensitive not to dominate the group discussion times and limit our discussions.

Regular Attendance: We will make a commitment to our group to show up at the appointed meeting times, be on time and end on time. When we cannot attend, we will call the host to let them know.

Listen: Everyone needs a listening ear. When someone is talking, they have the floor. Everyone else should actively listen.

Conflict Resolution: Whenever relationships are involved, there will be conflict. We will handle the conflict Biblically according to the guidelines of Matthew 18.

Avoid Offensive Statements and Jokes: We are all on the same team. Therefore, we should guard against offending one another. If someone offends us, we commit to work it out directly with him or her.

Multiplication Plan: Begin now to develop and state your Multiplication plan.

Be Prepared: Come ready to participate fully in your group including completing any homework.

Scripture: Scripture study will focus on application to life and will be in line with The OCC Statement of Faith.

Socials and Serving the World: We commit to building community and impacting our world. These activities are as important to attend as the study time.

Use of Spiritual Gifts: Group members will contribute to the life of the groups by identifying and using their spiritual gifts.

Why do we need one?

A covenant is an agreement between group members that defines the direction of the group and the commitment required to meet group goals.

Examples of Covenants or value statements in Scripture

God and Noah – Genesis 6 and 9

God and Abraham – Genesis 17

Jonathan and David – 1 Samuel 18

Christ and the Church – 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6

Benefits of a values statement:

- Vision and purpose for group is clear
- Helps members understand what we're trying to accomplish
- Responsibility of group members is stated
- Conflict resolution is expected and planned
- Birthing is an event to anticipate and celebrate
- Help build and strengthen community
- It's written down.

People are more likely to take your covenant seriously when it is concrete.

Sharing Leadership

There are several important roles to play in a group. Below is a suggested list of positions that you can add to yours as the leader. Remember You may even think of additional roles that suit the needs of your group.

CO-LEADER

- Life Group assistant leader
- Helps set overall direction
- Takes turns facilitating group meetings
- Keeps attendance

HOST

- Provides comfortable setting for group
- Coordinates home and refreshment
- Reminds group members to be mindful of inviting and welcoming others
- Helps guests get plugged in to group

SOCIAL COORDINATOR (some larger groups might need this help)

- Coordinates group's fun social times

SERVE COORDINATOR

- Looks for and coordinates opportunities for the group to serve within the church or local missions
 - Connects with church STW team for opportunities
- Helps group serve each other in times of need (meals, cards, etc.)

PRAYER

- Helps group leader facilitate prayer times
- Serves as prayer champion, communicating prayer requests and information to members

A final reminder—Life Group Basics is only a starting point on your Life Group leadership journey. The table below points out the different types of support and resources that are available to you. The best leaders make the best use of their support structure. Be proactive.

A Life Group Leader's Guide to Care for Those Within the Group

What Is Biblical Care & Support?

Biblical care and support is helping to meet the physical and emotional needs of those around us in a way that leads people spiritually into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's been said, "A joy shared is multiplied, and a sorrow shared divided." As a community of people "doing life together", we experience tremendous joy as we celebrate one another's victories and successes. However, it doesn't take long for people to realize that life can also be messy. Each of us, whether by our own design or some outside influence, will inevitably face some degree of hardship or crisis in our lives. As fallen people living in a fallen world we, or someone close to us, will face hunger, disease, death, broken relationships, divorce, unemployment, loss of love ones, natural disasters, crime, addictions, loneliness, etc. It's at these times, we as God's kids, have the opportunity to support and encourage each other through bearing one another's burdens, both physically and emotionally.

Biblical care is not designed to create dependence on an individual, a specific group of people or the care and support network of the church, but its focus is to provide a variety of resources for the minimal amount of time necessary for people to realize a Biblical solution.

The Church - How to Provide Biblical Care Within the Body of Christ

Many people have the misconception the physical location of the church building is the Church. As a result, when needs arise in people's lives there is a tendency for them to believe their needs can be comprehensively met through that location alone. Certainly, the address of where a church is located is an avenue to meet a wide variety of needs, but in reality the church is not the physical location of the structure, but is a hub in which a collective group of God's people congregate.

The Book of Matthew tells us that Jesus instructed his eleven disciples to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." From that point, we are told they brought the good news of

the Gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the remotest parts of the earth—of which today we are their beneficiaries. One could only imagine how successful the spreading of the Gospel would have been if the only place to find a Bible, hear the Word taught, see prayer lifted up or hear worship music was in a church building. However, today it is commonly accepted by believers and non-believers alike that the provision of food, clothing, emergency shelter, financial assistance, comfort, counsel, etc is a function that is limited to that structure. Unfortunately, location, budget and the number of staff and volunteers available place real limitations on the level of services that can be provided through most church facilities

The fact of the matter is no individual entity within the Church body can effectively meet the needs of every individual. Collectively however, the Body of Christ has a tremendous abundance of resources and opportunity to share God’s love across a wide variety of situations. The key to effectively providing care is Body members being aware of their role in ministering to those around them and proactively understanding the various layers of resources available and when and how to access them).

A greater number of people care can be distributed throughout the entire Church Body according to the degree of need. There is great benefit when Life Group members minister to a wider number of the more basic needs of its members. However, as the intensity of a need increases, and a higher degree of specialized training is required, individuals are encouraged to be able to progressively access resources closer and closer to the limited, more focused resources of the church’s central location.

Caring Ministries @ OCC

Celebrate Recovery- The stated purpose of Celebrate Recovery is to fellowship and celebrate God’s healing power in our lives through the “8 Recovery Principles.” This experience allow us to “be changed.” By working and applying these Biblical principles, we begin to grow spiritually. We become free from our addictive, compulsive and dysfunctional behaviors. This freedom creates peace, serenity, joy and most importantly, a stronger personal relationship with God and others.

As we progress through the program we discover our personal, loving and forgiving Higher Power—Jesus Christ, the only true Higher Power.

Biblical counselors – Ministers to a wide variety of in-depth needs that also could potentially require immediate crisis response and intervention. As a result, ministers in this area require extensive training to ensure sound Biblical counsel is being provided while working across a number of specialized areas.

For OCC Biblical counseling contact: 425-895-5923 or counseling@occ.org

Aid & Assistance – Provides emergency food will distribute about a 2-4 day supply.

Applicants must apply and will be interviewed through the Caring Ministries network.

Support Groups – OCC offers a number of Support Groups for men and women struggling with a wide variety of difficult life issues. A comprehensive list of support groups, days and times may be found on the OCC webpage at:
<http://www.occ.org/ministries/care/support.asp>