Welcome to the Party!

This Starter Guide is designed to set your group up to succeed from week one! As a group, rely on this resource to help you get to know one another.

Small groups at Fairfax Community Church exist to help people love God and love others by creating a conversational environment. They are place to share, grow, and connect. They are marked by discipleship that happens through mutual learning, mutual care and mutual trust.

At the end of this guide, your group will evaluate whether or not to continue meeting together. If your group decides to continue meeting, you will make a commitment to share in each other’s lives for the next 18-24 months.

Small groups are at the core of what we do here; they are one of our two essential environments, the other being worship. By choosing to connect to a small group, you are entering into the blessings that come through pursuing community!

Following GroupLink, one of our group mentors will email the group, introducing themselves.

An electronic copy of this starter guide is available to download: www.fairfax.cc/starterguide

With gratitude,
The Small Groups Team
Tips on Using the Starter Guide

The main goal of the guide is to paint a picture of how to create a safe small group environment that promotes growth in Christ. This guide contains four conversations, most of which can be completed in one small group meeting, but they may also extend into the next week.

Facilitate Your Group

- Start and end on time
- Keep the conversation on track by encouraging participation by all members
- Take turns using this guide to facilitate
- Looking ahead: be in prayer over who your group will select as small group leader.

Pray

- Spend time in prayer with each other during each meeting
- Continue in prayer for each other throughout the week
- Find a way for you as individuals or as a group to document the prayers (prayer journal, someone sends all requests to group, write them on index cards, post to a private Facebook page)

This weekly habit of lifting each other in prayer helps build authentic community.

Communicate

- Encourage the group to stay in communication throughout the week
- Email, Facebook, text messages, phone calls, time together at church
- Some groups have used the application GroupMe as a way to communicate with the entire group.
Reach Out

Our Small Group Pastors are here for you! If anyone in your group has a question related to group life, don't hesitate to contact us.

You can call the Groups Team at 703-745-1040 or email us at smallgroups@fairfax.cc.
Conversation One – Getting Started

Opening

Plan to begin promptly at your agreed starting time by answering the following get-to-know-you questions.

Also, one of the topics you should cover tonight is how the group would like to approach meals or refreshments and childcare (if applicable).

Storytelling

Have each group member share stories based on the questions below. Make it a conversation and feel free to ask follow-up questions.

- Where were you born and where do you call home?
- What brought you to Fairfax Community Church?

Best Practices

Please read through the best practices together in the following section as a group.

*Discipleship in Small Groups: Love God, Love Others*

At the core of community life is discipleship. God has brought your group together for a specific time and purpose. Begin to pray for God to show you what he wants to do through your group. God will transform you, but you are responsible for your spiritual growth. Consider how you want to grow and what you hope to learn through this small group. Take a minute to write down your thoughts.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Leadership in Small Groups

Leadership is best when it arises from within the group. At the conclusion of the guide, your group will have a conversation about selecting a small group leader. This person (or couple) will partner with your group mentor for training, resources and direction as your group grows as disciples. Over the next few weeks, pray for God’s direction as your group chooses a small group leader.

Frequency/Availability

It is important to make your small group a priority. The best way to build momentum and trust in your group is to spend time together. Commit to show up, invest in conversation and build meaningful relationships. Think ahead about potential obstacles or schedule conflicts. To invest in your small group fully, you need to be available to attend group regularly and be fully present. Please be accessible by answering emails, texts, and returning phone calls promptly. This helps build a sense of unity with the group.

Common Practices

In your small group, it is helpful to build a sense of rhythm and routine. During your weekly meetings, cultivate a predictable environment. Most groups meet at the same location each week and have a flow to their time together. Your meeting should include a time of study, sharing stories, prayer and looking ahead to the weeks to come. As a group, cultivate a sense of rhythm and routine built around these common practices.

Common Resources

Over the course of your group’s life cycle, you will have the opportunity to share your home, resources, and time with group members. Fairfax.cc encourages small groups to be the first line of care for group members. Time after time, we have seen small groups gather around a group member and provide support that reflects the love of Christ. If your group ever requires assistance beyond what the group can provide, please visit http://www.fairfax.cc/care.
Group Norms
To help talk through some of these best practices, discuss the following:

1. Where will the group meet? Who will host as a backup?

________________________________________________________________________________

2. At what time will your meetings begin? End?

________________________________________________________________________________

3. If a member is not able to make group how should they notify the group (via email or text)? How much notice is expected?

________________________________________________________________________________

4. What are the childcare arrangements/expectations (if applicable)?

________________________________________________________________________________

Closing
Ask someone who’s comfortable praying aloud to close your time with gratitude to God for bringing this group together and the coming weeks.
Conversation Two: Praying Together

Opening
Prayer is an important part of the small group dynamic. Keep in mind that everyone has different comfort levels when it comes to praying. Consider the placement of prayer during your meeting, allowing enough time for all prayer requests.

Storytelling
Ask each group member to share a story based on 1 of the 2 questions below. As you listen, bring your curiosity and feel free to ask follow-up questions.

- As you think about your spiritual journey who/what has made a significant impact?
- When have you felt part of a community?

Study
The time you spend together in prayer is powerful because of the connection formed between the members of your group and God. By sharing requests that are personal in nature, your time sharing and in prayer will remain most focused.

At first, not necessarily everyone in a group is comfortable praying out loud. It’s important that your group have an open and honest conversation about praying together.

The Psalms are a book of poetry and prayer, largely written by King David. Ask one or two members of the group to read Psalm 86:1-13 aloud.

- What words or themes do you see repeated in this Psalm?
- How do you those themes influence our prayer time individually and as a group?
- How comfortable are you praying alone or in a group setting?
Tips for Praying in Groups

- Never force someone to pray. Encourage those who are uncomfortable to join the group in silent prayer. In the same vein, don’t unexpectedly single someone out to pray unless they’ve indicated that they are comfortable being asked on the spot.

- One person can guide your prayer time by focusing the group on one topic and then moving to a new topic after a sufficient amount of time has passed. For those new to faith or praying aloud, this structure can be helpful.

- Using index cards, write your name and requests down. Then place cards in a pile and have each person take a card and pray for the requests. The card can be taken home as a reminder to continuing praying throughout the week.

- The group could use a prayer journal to record each week’s requests. In a given week one person can pray through the requests or the journal can circulate around the group with each person praying for another. If you use a journal, return to previous weeks in the future and make sure to update those areas of prayer and celebrate where appropriate.

- In groups with men and women, split by gender for prayer. Some do so weekly and others monthly. This allows for a higher level of transparency.

- Many groups record weekly requests and send them out to the group to continue in prayer for one another throughout the week.

- Consider a study on prayer itself. Take time to learn more about what prayer is and its connection to one’s relationship to God. This may help provide clarity and alleviate fears associated with prayer.

Closing: Prayer Requests

Share a prayer request or praise with the group. Then have one or two people close in prayer.
Conversation Three – Life Together

Opening
As your group continues, predictability is a crucial aspect to your group meetings. Be aware of approaching holidays, vacation, and work schedules that will impact your meetings. When you look ahead, it helps the group make decisions in advance rather than altering plans last minute.

Storytelling
As you get started, have each person share a high and/or low point from the week. When you close, use these stories to influence your prayer time.

Three Ms
A healthy small group dynamic develops a shared sense of value related to learning, care and accountability as well as serving together. As your group shares these values, you will experience tremendous growth individually and collectively.

These are known as the “Three Ms” and are building block for group life. Mutual learning encourages a shared discovery of who God is and how He works. Mutual care can be seen through serving as the primary line of care for one another. When your group has a significant and/or ongoing care situation within the group, please remain connected to your group Mentor/Pastor. Mutual trust is creating a safe environment that provides space to willfully speak about our lives. It also allows for good questions that invite us to see our blind spots, which will lead us to a great place of clarity.
Study
The apostle Paul wrote the book of 1 Corinthians to the church in Corinth, a major city, seaport and trade center. This letter was written around AD 55. Have someone read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 aloud.

- What is theme of this passage?
- What is the significance of this metaphor for our small group?
- How can we allow our differences (personality, abilities, passions) to promote personal growth and draw us closer to Christ?

Closing
Next week, your group will decide who will take on the role of small group leader or co-leaders. If there is someone you feel would be a good leader, plan to share your observations and why it’s meaningful to you. If you are feeling prompted to lead, actively plan to share your desire. Remember, no one person has the final say. The decision belongs to the group. Read the notes below to help prepare you for the conversation.

Selecting your Small Group Leader

*What is a small group leader?*

When it comes to leading a small group, the overarching quality of leadership is measured by the ability to influence direction. With the big picture in mind, a small group leader pursues what he or she believes is best for the health of the group. The leader must be fully present relationally within the group and be able to accurately measure the ever-changing dynamics of the group. While decision-making itself is important, the process the group undergoes should reflect the leader’s influence, not their control.

*How do we choose our small group leader?*

This element is crucial to the success of your small group. Much like the formation of your group, the selection of leadership may be an organic
process. As you reflect on the weeks that your group has met, consider who has already influenced you. Your answer could be one person or several people. Keep in mind that influence may be revealed via a subtle or direct approach. Ask yourself, “Does this person possess a genuine relationship with God?” “Does this person help foster vibrant conversation?” “Will this person be a champion for the group?”

What can I expect from our leader?

Your small group leader is a follower of Jesus Christ, which means you can go to them to talk about your spiritual journey and to process your questions. It doesn’t mean that they have all the answers, but they can help you clarify your perspective. Also, your small group leader is connected to a group mentor who can also support the group. In addition to meeting one-on-one with the group leader, the mentor is available for any questions or ideas the leader or the group may have.

What other responsibilities does a small group leader have?

Your small group leader will meet regularly with your group’s mentor for one-on-one coaching specific to your group. As a new small group leader, he or she will attend new leader training. In the fall and spring, your leader will attend leadership development gatherings with other Fairfax.cc small group leaders, where they are further equipped to lead your group in discipleship. Your leader is the primary lifeline between the church and your group, connecting your group to resources for care, growth and service.

Ask one or two people to close in prayer. Pray specifically over the high/low stories shared earlier.

Prayer Requests
Conversation Four – Serving Together & Leadership

Opening
This week begins with a discussion about service and finishes with a conversation about finalizing your group and choosing who will be the group leader.

Storytelling
What have you valued most about your group so far?

Serving Together
The best way to grow in your faith is to give it away. A serving mentality aligns our focus with God. As a group, there is value in the shared experience of serving together. Many groups find that serving on the weekend or during their normal meeting day and time helpful.

It’s possible that not everyone in the group will be able to make every service opportunity. Don’t make all hands on deck a prerequisite to serving as a group. It is better to have some of the group serve than not serve at all.

We ask that groups commit to serving together at least twice a year. It is our hope that service becomes part of the rhythm of your group. To get started, email golocal@fairfax.cc (Our GoLocal Partners can be found on the website at http://www.fairfax.cc/outreach).

Tips for serving
- Serve during the time of your group meeting
- Are there needs that you are aware of in your community or organizations you are already connected to?
- If there are children in your group, consider an opportunity that welcomes children or arrange to have one couple plan to care for the
kids while the group serves. Next time, arrange for a different couple to stay with the kids.

**Small Group Agreement**

Take a few minutes to review the Small Group Agreement. This will help your small group normalize expectations in order to help create an authentic and predictable environment. If you have any questions don’t hesitate to contact your group mentor!

**Values & Goals**

**Community** – Life is not meant to be lived in isolation. Small groups intentionally pursue relationships where one can know and be known by others.

**Authenticity** – The atmosphere of a small group should encourage openness and transparency among members. This is an environment where people should feel free to be themselves.

**Confidentiality** – For authenticity to occur, members must be able to trust that issues discussed within a small group will not be shared outside of the group.

**Respect** – Group members should never say anything that will embarrass their spouse or members of the group.

**Availability** – A primary responsibility of community is to prioritize for specific relationships. This requires a willingness to be available to meet each other’s needs.

**Adjournment** – In the DC Metro area jobs change, families grow, and schedules change. As uncomfortable as transition can be, it is frequently catalytic to our spiritual growth because we’re reminded of our need to trust God. With this reality in mind, most small groups at Fairfax.cc adjourn after 18-24 months.
Discuss

Discuss who you believe will make the best leader for your small group. This may or may not be someone with prior small group leadership experience. Ultimately, this decision is about developing a consensus rather than taking a vote. Whether there is someone you want to suggest for the role or you are interested in accepting the role, please be willing to share.

Whomever the group chooses to serve as the potential leader can expect to receive an email or phone call from their mentor.

As you close in prayer, thank God for the way He has been present in your group since it formed. Ask that he would guide and direct your group in a way that honors him and promotes growth in you.

Closing

Plan to have dinner together next week. Whether you go out to a restaurant or choose to go potluck style, celebrate these first weeks together!

Have one or two people close in prayer for your new group leader.

Prayer Requests
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Group Leadership Team

Who are the Small Group Pastors?

Andy Gingrich – andygingrich@fairfax.cc
Kayla Allen – kaylaallen@fairfax.cc

What is a Small Group Mentor?

Small Group Mentors at Fairfax Community Church are volunteers dedicated to helping small groups by being supportive through prayer, encouragement, and direction. The relationship between small group leaders and mentors develops through one-on-one meetings, leadership training, email and phone correspondence.

What should I let my Small Group Mentor know about?

Be sure to keep us in the loop on:

- group dynamics
- study questions
- service opportunities
- care needs
- participant changes
- stories of transformation

If you feel someone in your small group, has a question, perceives something is “not quite right,” or feels like the group is disconnected, let your Small Group Mentor know! If needed the Mentor may consult with a Small Group Pastor.
How to Choose a Study

1. Start with the purpose of the small group.

“Why are you here and what do you want to get out of this group?”

Everyone in the group should share these thoughts with the rest of the group. The leader needs to record what is shared. Look for patterns in how people answer, describing the purpose of the group. Group answers into broader categories and look for primary goals.

For example, one small group’s conversation landed with the following primary goals with other related ideas falling under these primary pursuits.

**Goal 1: Mature spiritually**
Understand God’s word
Increase Bible knowledge
Answer spiritual questions
Apply God’s word in a practical way

**Goal 2: Learn how to live the Christian life**
Serve others
Build community
Connect with the church

2. Ideas for Specific Studies

Talk about any specific bible studies, books, or DVD studies that you are aware of or specific topics you would like to study. The leader should make a list of these things. Prioritize this list based on the group’s goals you’ve established. The leader can also consult the online resource library for ideas at http://www.fairfax.cc/groups/just-for-leaders/. Contact your group mentor for more info!
Further questions to help build your list of potential studies

- How does this study reflect our group’s goals of growth and discipleship?
- Is the depth appropriate for our group?
- What is the required preparation time? Is it realistic for our group?
- Will the length of the total study maintain group interest? Are individual chapters/sessions reasonable for the weekly timing or our group? (Note: we recommend 6-8 week studies)

Community Care Resources

If someone in your group is experiencing a difficult time, we know that the group is the best way for care and encouragement to be provided. When someone is in crisis, the group embraces and upholds the individual. Small groups can be supportive in many spiritual, emotional and even practical ways. But sometimes the group isn’t equipped to help in a way that is needed or sustainable.

The church has resources to help point someone to an extension of care. These resources are available to everyone in your group. Visit www.fairfax.cc/care for more information on these resources and contact your mentor for assistance.