

Small Groups Ministry



Guidebook and Checklist
for Small Group Leaders

Letter to Small Groups Leaders

March 25, 2020
Annunciation of the Theotokos

Dear Small Group Leader,

It's a blessing to welcome you to our team of Small Group Leaders.

As I write this, our fellow parishioners are feeling disconnected from the life of the Church. With parish ministries (and even liturgical services) being cancelled, it can be harder than even to feel connected to the Church.

That's where you come in.

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

Small groups allow people to establish deep, supportive connections with their brothers and sisters in Christ. It's an opportunity to not simply be one of many names on a roster, but to be a person in communion with other people.

Small groups give people space to be heard, to be seen, and to be known by their fellow Christians.

And, as a Small Groups Leader, you will have an incredibly important role in making this ministry successful.

WHY YOUR LEADERSHIP IS SO IMPORTANT

As a Small Group Leader, you'll help bring together 5-7 of your fellow Christians for weekly connection and fellowship. You'll keep them organizing by sending out important links and resources. You'll guide discussions to make sure everyone is heard. You'll lead prayers and help your brothers and sisters connect with the Lord.

And don't worry! Because you won't be doing this alone.

We're putting together training materials to help prepare you for the important responsibility of being a Small Group Leader. And we're developing a weekly curriculum to help you lead discussions and make the most of the time you spend with your Small Group.

And, in this Guidebook, we'll offer you step-by-step guidance to help you prepare for (and lead) each meeting of your Small Group.

While we're beginning this journey online, I hope this model of ministry can continue well into the future. In the weeks and months ahead, I hope the Christians that you're bringing together weekly will be able to come together face-to-face to learn, pray, and grow.

Together.

In Christ,

Steven Christoforou
Director, Y²AM

Why Small Groups Ministry?

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

We often measure the success of a ministry based on how many people attend.

But bigger isn't always better.

Big groups of people have a place in our ministries, but they don't necessarily help bring people together. It's hard to be vulnerable and share difficult things in front of a big group. It's hard to be heard and seen when the room is stuffed full of people.

And it's even harder online. It's far too easy to get lost in a crowded online chat.

Small groups give us an opportunity to foster more personal connection. Everyone has a chance to speak and be heard. Everyone has a chance to be seen. Everyone has a chance to be more than a passive participant in a crowded presentation.

NORMAL HUMAN INTERACTION TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL

Small Group is simply the application of normal human interaction for the purposes of spreading the Gospel, and caring for the people of God.

Our job and purpose in small group discipleship programs is to foster deeper relationships, and stronger commitments for those desiring them in all categories, and to move everyone to a higher level of commitment and spiritual experience.

There is no magic involved and whenever you have groups of people there will be a learning curve, mistakes, and great growth in depth and numbers. Loving and praying are what make small group leaders successful.

-Father John Peck
Parish Priest, All Saints of North America Orthodox Church (Sun City, AZ)

What is Small Groups Ministry?

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL GROUPS

- Weekly meetings (one hour long) of 6-8 participants
- Led by a Small Groups Leader
- Can either be based on existing ministries (for examples, Smalls Groups made up of only teens or young adults) or can bring together parishioners of different ages and backgrounds
- Begin with a prayer and introduction to the topic by the Small Groups Leader
- Time for discussion and reflection moderated by the Small Groups Leader
- End with a prayer and wrap-up by the Small Groups Leader

CORE PRINCIPLES OF SMALL GROUPS

INTENTIONAL: very clear goals and objectives

FACE TO FACE: designed for interpersonal relationship

3-12 PEOPLE: for interpersonal communication and support

REGULAR TIME SCHEDULE: groups meet once a week

COMMON PURPOSE: agreed upon contract that explains goals and objectives

DISCOVERING: the group is for people who are open to Christian teachings

GROWING: the group is for people who are looking for a deeper growth in Christ

POSSIBILITIES: willingness to stretch, dream, and share openly outside of your comfort one

-Lyman Coleman
Training Manual for Small Group Leaders

Role of Small Group Leaders

BEFORE MEETINGS

- Distribute links and materials
- Review weekly curriculum
- Connect with individual Small Group participants

More detailed, step-by-step guidance is available in the checklists on the following pages.

DURING MEETINGS

- Offer opening prayer and introduce the week's readings
- Make sure that everyone has a chance to speak and be heard
- Wrap up the discussion and offer a closing prayer

More detailed, step-by-step guidance is available in the checklists on the following pages.

AFTER MEETINGS

- Follow up on any open questions or concerns
- Connect with your Parish Small Groups Director

More detailed, step-by-step guidance is available in the checklists on the following pages.

Available Resources

Small Group Leader Training

We are preparing a live Small Group Leader training webinar which will take place the week of March 30, 2020. Check our social media for updates.

This webinar will offer basic instruction on :

1. the role of a Small Group Leader;
2. how to facilitate discussion;
3. encouraging participation by all members; and
4. resolving potential conflicts in the discussion.

The link to access this webinar is: Y2AM.org/SmallGroupLeaderTraining.

If you or your parish Small Group Leaders cannot attend this live webinar, a recording will be available on our YouTube channel: YouTube.com/Y2AM.

Weekly Curriculum Materials

The weekly curriculum materials will include opening prayers and introduction; discussion questions; and wrap-up and closing prayers. The will be available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups.

Technical Support

HOW TO JOIN AN ONLINE ZOOM MEETING: Y2AM.org/HowToJoinZoomMeeting

FULL LIST OF ZOOM VIDEO TUTORIALS: Y2AM.org/ZoomTutorials

LIVE, INTERACTIVE ZOOM TRAINING DAILY: Y2AM.org/DailyZoomTraining

ON-DEMAND/PRE-RECORD ZOOM TRAINING: Y2AM.org/OnDemandZoomTraining



Preparing for First Small Groups Meeting

1

Complete Small Group Leader Training

- Will be offered as a live webinar the week of March 30, 2020
- Link to the webinar:
Y2AM.org/SmallGroupLeaderTraining
- The webinar will also be recorded and available as video
YouTube.com/Y2AM

2

Familiarize Yourself with Zoom

- Zoom is our recommended platform for video meetings
- Link to archived Zoom tutorial videos:
Y2AM.org/ZoomTutorials
- Link to daily live Zoom tutorial webinars:
Y2AM.org/DailyZoomTraining
- NOTE: The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America is developing a plan to offer one paid Zoom license to every parish
 - While individual users can register for free accounts, a Small Group Leader will need a Zoom license to schedule meetings and offer full meeting functionality for Small Groups participants

3

Send Initial Materials to Your Group Members

- Guidebook for Small Group Participants PDF
Available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups
- Tutorial on how to join a Zoom meeting
Y2AM.org/HowToJoinZoomMeeting
- Zoom link for your weekly Small Group meeting
You will create this after your Zoom training
- Small Group Ground Rules PDF
 - Model Ground Rules are available in this PDF
 - Reaching consensus on Ground Rules is an important task for when each Small Group first assembles
- Remind them to have a pen and paper/notebook handy for each meeting

4

Connect with Your Small Group Members

- Reach out to each member individually
- Try to schedule time for a brief, one-on-one conversation with Zoom
 - This will allow you to both get to know each member and make sure they're comfortable using Zoom



Leading Your First Small Groups Meeting

1

Open With a Prayer

- Sample prayers will be available in each week's Small Groups curriculum
Y2AM.org/SmallGroups

2

Lead Brief Group Introductions

- By this point, you should have already connected with each member of your Small Group individually
- The members should have also had a chance to connect to each other individually as well
 - It's important that everyone at least know the names of everyone in the group.

3

Review the Small Group Ground Rules

- Model Ground Rules are available in this PDF
- It's important that the Small Group reach consensus on exactly what Ground Rules you will all commit to during your time together

4

Introduce that Week's Discussion

- Offer a brief introduction on that week's passages and discussion questions
 - Notes on weekly intros are available in the weekly curriculum materials
Available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups
- Read (or have a volunteer) read the Scripture passages being explored in that week's curriculum
- Aim to complete the entire intro within 7-10 minutes

5

Ask the First Question

- Read out loud the first discussion question included in the weekly curriculum materials
Available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups
- Ask Small Group participants to journal their answer
 - Give them a few minutes of silence
 - When it appears that everyone is done journaling, allow Small Group participants to share their answers
- Facilitate the discussion based on your Small Group Leader training
- Be mindful of the time

6

Lead that Week's Discussion

- Continue the above process for each of the two remaining questions included in the weekly curriculum materials
 - Available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups
- Keep your Small Groups Leader Training in mind
 - Make sure everyone has a chance to be heard
 - Remember that you are primarily facilitating the conversation, not simply participating in it
- Be mindful of the time
 - The discussion should last no more than 30 minutes in total
- Important note: Be mindful of inappropriate links or comments being left in the Zoom chat

7

Offer a Brief Wrap-Up

- Thank the Small Group members for participating in the discussion with honesty and openness
- Wrap-up the discussion based on points people brought up and the flow of the discussion
 - Notes on weekly wrap-ups are available in the weekly curriculum materials
 - Available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups
- Aim to speak for no more than 7-10 minutes

8

End With a Prayer

- Suggested prayers are included in the weekly curriculum materials
Available at Y2AM.org/SmallGroups
- Based on the time of day that your Small Group meets, consider inviting members to remain together to read a service together
 - For example, if your Small Group meets, in the evening, consider reading Compline together after the meeting



Leading Weekly Small Groups Meeting

1

Open With a Prayer

- Sample prayers will be available in each week's Small Groups curriculum
Y2AM.org/SmallGroups

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After Each Weekly Small Groups Meeting

1

Thank Your Small Group Members

- Send individual, personalized messages to each member of your Small Group
 - Send an email, a text, or whatever medium seems appropriate
 - Try to offer specific thanks for something each person said or did during the Small Group meeting

2

Follow Up As Needed

- Particular Small Group members may have said something, or asked for something, that necessitates some follow up
- Some possibilities include:
 - Sharing ideas to improve the Small Group experience
 - Expressing a personal need
- When appropriate, consult with your Parish Priest about how best to follow up



Model Prayers for Small Groups Meeting

AT THE START OF MEETINGS

Shine in our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind that we may comprehend the proclamations of Your Gospels. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having trampled down all carnal desires, we may lead a spiritual life, both thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the illumination of our souls and bodies, and to You we offer up glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer Before the Reading of the Gospel
Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

AT THE END OF MEETINGS

We give thanks to You, invisible King, Who by Your boundless power fashioned the universe, and in the multitude of Your mercy brought all things from nothing into being. Look down from heaven, O Master, upon those who have bowed their heads before You; for they have not bowed before flesh and blood, but before You, the awesome God. Therefore, O Master, make smooth and beneficial for us all, whatever lies ahead, according to the need of each: Sail with those who sail; travel with those who travel; heal the sick, Physician of our souls and bodies. Through the grace, compassion, and love for mankind of Your only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages

Prayer Following the Lord's Prayer
Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom



Model Ground Rules for Small Groups

EIGHT MODEL RULES

1. Allow everyone the chance to speak, try not to over-share.
2. Practice active listening when others are speaking.
3. Be respectful, no laughing at comments of other participants.
4. Speak one at a time.
5. No “one-upping;” this is the phenomenon where someone tells a story and the person who follows says something to the effect of, "You think *that's* something something, wait until you hear *this!*"
6. Be present, no cell phones or other distractions.
7. If something sensitive is shared in the group, it stays private within the group and its members.
8. Commit to reading each assigned passage at least once before coming to the Small Group.

ALWAYS IN A CIRCLE

When we begin a YES trip, we always bring everyone together to sit in a circle. All of our orientation and preparation is discussed in a circle, where we can see each other face to face and honor each person. By sitting in a circle, we express that we are together as one body from the moment we begin the experience. We are able to see the person who is speaking and give our ears and hearts completely to them. We sit shoulder to shoulder and express that no one is below or above anyone else. It dawned on me yesterday that since we are unable to be in the same room and arrange ourselves in a circle during online gatherings, we have to work harder to make sure our minds and hearts remain in the mindset that the circle provides. We may be chatting online, but we are always sitting in a circle.

Through this experience, I've often said that Jesus has baptized the divisiveness of screen time and made it unifying. It is where school is happening, work is happening, and prayer is happening. Because all of these things remain at the same level of importance, seeing each other at eye level and being a full participant in every encounter needs to remain the same. We have to be mindful to not be less present because it's easy to hide. If we let ourselves be a fly on the wall, rather than a human in a chair, we may end up breaking the small semblance of community we are able to have.

- saying things we wouldn't say to each other face to face
- succumbing to distractions
- not fully focusing on who is speaking and sharing
- having side conversations
- treating online gatherings like a TV show we are watching in the background

If online is the only space we have to gather, let's do everything we can to make it a holy space. When we are given these opportunities to work, pray, and learn together, let's receive them with deep gratitude. Let's strive, in every

encounter, to live into God's ideal for this world. May our online spaces be filled with:

- abundant compassion
- peaceful unity
- keen focus
- full presence
- honor for every human

It is difficult enough to be isolated. The time we do have “together” should not just resemble community, but completely embody it. Let us not forget that we are always sitting in a circle.

Katrina Bitar
Director of Youth Equipped to Serve

Source: yesnorthamerica.org/2020/03/25/always-in-a-circle/
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