



# LIFE GROUPS

LEADER GUIDEBOOK



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# VISION

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## What Life Groups Are

Life Groups are open, mid-sized, relational communities that meet weekly to provide men and women with a place to trust, follow, and obey Jesus from a heart of love and help others do the same. They gather to grow in and multiply relationships, biblical wisdom, and service. Life Groups operate as the church body's primary Spirit-directed relational vehicle and are highly encouraged for Creek members.

## What Life Groups Do

Every person at Richland Creek, at every age and stage of life, was made by God to love God, love people, and be loved by God and people. All are invited to regularly engage in a Life Group. In Life Groups, we commit by the power of the Holy Spirit to love God and each other through deepening relationships, increasing biblical wisdom, and serving others, all bathed in Scripture-led prayer.

# COMMITMENTS

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## Relationships

We commit to care-focused, deepening, discipling relationships. Each Life Group should be a place of welcoming love for anyone who visits or attends, in keeping with our commitment to the Gospel. Life Groups are our “home base” for building genuine relationships within the body of Christ. They are open groups, which means that anyone can join at any time, including unbelievers who are interested in examining the claims of Christ. Life Groups should encourage discipling relationships within the group, meaning this: No matter where someone's heart is in relation to Christ, their experience in a Life Group

should draw them closer to him. All regular Life Group participants should have the chance to know God, know others, and be known by them through mutual hospitality, care, and spiritual growth, saturated in prayer. As a result, Life Groups should be eager to grow, add new members as the Spirit leads, and look for opportunities to multiply and form new groups.

## Wisdom

We commit to nurturing biblical wisdom through weekly exposure to the transformational teaching of God's Word. The instruction of Scripture should guide church relationships. Many of our Lord's commands can only be obeyed in community—you can't love one another, for instance, without a "one another" to love. Life Groups will be gospel-focused and defined by a commitment to interactively study the whole counsel of God's Word and know it well. We want all active members to have a firm grasp of biblical theology and spiritual practice.

## Service

We commit to sacrificially serving each other, the larger church family, and our surrounding community. We serve not under compulsion but as a Spirit-driven response to God's grace and mercy. We will promote and encourage service connections within the church's ministry structure and serve together on behalf of established ministry outreach partners of the Creek.

***We further believe that prayer and evangelism are core components of group life, which both undergird and grow out of the three primary commitments. As such, prayer and evangelism can be interwoven throughout group life.***

**Prayer** — Life Groups should have a well-established pattern of meaningful, Scripture-led prayer as an essential part of group life. A well-established pattern of prayer would mean it is organically regular as well as purposefully scheduled, both in its weekly iterations and in frequent group sessions devoted to corporate prayer. Meaningful and Scripture-led means going beyond taking personal prayer requests and voicing those; it



means praying Scripture, praying according to churchwide goals, etc. Life groups should be committed to healthy, regular, and purposeful Scripture-led prayer in every aspect of group life.

**Evangelism** — Life Groups should keep intentional gospel witness at the forefront of every interaction. All commitments should have an evangelistic mindset and desire to reach others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Conversations, teaching, and actions should center around and proactively point to the Gospel so that the power of the Holy Spirit might save many.





# DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

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## Church Vision and Life Group Vision

All Life Groups operate under, and as a particular expression of, the Creek's churchwide vision, which is gathering to glorify God in worship, grow as disciples of Jesus, and go on mission with the gospel. Life Groups are not the church and thus will not necessarily reflect every avenue of vision or purpose of the church as a whole. Another way of saying this is that Life Groups are not meant to be the sole expression of church involvement for any particular individual, but function within a larger framework of intentional processes and programs at Richland Creek.

One way to understand this larger framework is through the Creek Discipleship Pathway. Because it takes a church to make a disciple, no specific gathering or program, including Life Groups, can claim exclusive rights to the discipleship process within the local church. Instead, our intentional church efforts all contribute to discipleship in one form or another. Life Group leaders should understand and be able to explain our Discipleship Pathway to others.

The presence of the Word, the practice of prayer, and the pattern of the Gospel undergird our discipleship. Our efforts have these things in common as they aim to help us trust, follow, and obey Jesus from a heart of love. At the same time, each of our gatherings and programs is distinct and uniquely contributes to our growth. Together, they form Richland Creek's Discipleship Pathway, whereby all members can grow as disciples and contribute to the church's mission.

## Discipleship Pathway



**Worship** is the congregational gathering of our church where we sing, pray, and learn together. This is the bedrock of our discipleship and our primary weekly rhythm, where glorifying God in worship and growing as disciples of Christ are both emphasized.

**Life Groups** are mid-sized communities of faith and learning. They emphasize growth by taking a balanced approach to knowledge, relationships, and service. They are a “home base” for ongoing relational discipleship.

**Grow Groups** are circles of encouragement and honesty, emphasizing relational commitment and spiritual discipline in a more intimate atmosphere.

**Equipping opportunities**, like classes and conferences, focus on knowledge transfer, growing our understanding of the Word and key skills for applying it.

**Ministry and Mission Teams** provide opportunities to serve and go on mission while also encouraging relationships.

There are three additional things to keep in mind about our Discipleship Pathway. First, these different contexts are complementary, not competing, in our discipleship efforts. They each have a role to play. Second, participation in all these programs does not “equal” discipleship. Busyness should not be confused with faithfulness, and not every member will be able to participate in each opportunity equally simultaneously. Members should seek to understand the goal of each opportunity and participate as God leads. Third, the elements of this pathway are not necessarily sequential. One does not leave Worship to attend a Life Group or grow out of a Grow Group to attend an Equipping class. A member may join a Ministry Team without attending a class or group.

## A Balanced Approach

Small and mid-sized group discipling efforts within the church often have two major components: Knowledge transfer (teaching) and relational commitment (the “one anothers”). Richland Creek has historically been strong on the former, and our formal elements of discipleship have primarily focused on contexts with a strong teacher-student dynamic.



Three of the intentional processes in our Creek Discipleship Pathway are specifically part of our Adult Ministry department. Life Groups are designed with a more balanced approach to knowledge transfer and relational commitment, while Grow Groups and Equipping efforts have different emphases.

While Life Groups may not emphasize as deep a relational

bond between members as Grow Groups, that doesn't mean relationships are absent (as noted by our Life Group commitment to care-focused relationships). Similarly, the teaching in Life Groups may not be as focused or detailed as some Equipping classes or seminars, but that doesn't mean the teaching is superficial. Understand this: Life Groups are our primary relational vehicle, and some people may not choose to engage in our opportunities. Life Groups thus provide as balanced an approach as possible while simultaneously not trying to be all things to all people.

# **BEST PRACTICES**

## **A Note on Use of Group Time**

How we use our time when we gather every week reflects our commitments and values. A Life Group that claims to value relationships, prayer, service, and teaching, but only uses its time together to study a Bible lesson, is out of balance and not living its purpose.

The Life Group leader is responsible for reflecting a balanced commitment in the group meeting time, which is usually 65-75 minutes. Weekly group meetings should regularly include elements of the following:

- **Care:** A time dedicated to Life Group members discussing concerns, challenges, and needs. This allows loving and truthful conversations. This would be accomplished during care group time for those with care groups.
- **Prayer:** A specific time dedicated to lifting up the needs of members and the church. This would also be accomplished in care group time, but whole Life Group prayer is also valuable.
- **Planning:** This can be brief, but leaders should expect to spend a few minutes talking together as a group about announcements, important events of the group, or planning for service opportunities. The time allotted to planning can vary from a few minutes (most of the time) to a majority of the meeting time (very rarely, when necessary to explain vision and coupled with prayer).
- **Teaching:** This would be the majority of the time together, usually 30-40 minutes of the 65-75 minute group time.

## Cultivating Care-focused Relationships

### Care Strategy

Every Life Group should have a specific strategy to ensure every member is contacted at least monthly to check on their spiritual and physical well-being, and to give them a chance for an honest and heartfelt conversation about their needs. In this case, contact could mean a conversation during Life Group, a text message or phone call, or any combination.

For groups with fewer than 20 active members, this strategy may include the Life Group leader, member care leader(s), and regular time spent in the group discussing these needs. In this case, the Life Group leader and member care leader are responsible for making sure each member is cared for and loved well.

Groups with more than 20 active members should strongly consider a Care Group strategy. Care groups are small circles of connection (6-12 people total) in which each member is assigned to a care group leader, who in turn reports to the member care leader. In a larger Life Group, it is easy to lose track of people, especially those with spotty attendance. Care groups should function such that no one “falls through the cracks,” even in a larger group. Care groups can talk together as a regular part of the weekly meeting schedule, within the Life Group meeting time (see above on use of meeting time). *For more information on organizing Care Groups, see the Care Group section in the appendix of this guidebook.*

### Grow Groups

Grow Groups exist as a separate, intentional churchwide ministry, but we include them here because they are encouraged and supported through Life Groups. Life Group leaders can encourage relational discipleship through the avenue of Grow Groups. The ultimate goal of Grow Groups is the same as that of Life Groups: To equip men and women to trust, follow, and obey Jesus from a heart of love and help others do the same.

However, whereas Life Groups are open groups that have a balanced approach to relationships and teaching, Grow Groups are closed and concentrate on deeper, commitment-focused relationships based on accountability. *For more information, leaders can read our Grow Group Guidebook.*

## Fellowship Events

Another avenue for cultivating care-focused relationships within a Life Group is intentional special events focused on fellowship. These could range from simple and spontaneous (going out to lunch together after church) to more in-depth and planned (a potluck Christmas dinner with gift exchange). The frequency and type of events will differ widely for each group, often depending on size. Larger groups have more logistical issues that often require more planning and preparation.

There is no specific requirement for how often a Life Group should plan fellowship events. Still, a good guideline for most groups is to get together outside the group time at least quarterly for a meal or some other kind of fellowship.

## Leadership

Essential leaders in this area include:

- Member care leader(s)

Optional, but highly recommended, leaders in this area include:

- Care Group leader(s)

Other optional leaders in this area include:

- Prayer leader
- Fellowship Event Coordinator
- Greeter

## Key Outcomes

As they cultivate care-focused relationships, Life Group leaders and members can expect to see the following things happening within their group:

1. If Care Groups are present, members are engaged in their Care Group, sharing prayer requests and following up on absent members. If a Care Group structure is not being used, members should regularly share prayer requests, and someone should be assigned to follow up on absent members.
2. Several members are also part of a Grow Group that focuses on deepening the spiritual growth of its members through Bible engagement, prayer, and accountability.
3. Relationships among Life Group members should grow closer over time.
4. Members should show concern about issues in the lives of other members and be willing to share similar experiences to encourage others to depend on God and His Word.
5. Members should be encouraged and willing to assist other members encountering various life trials.
6. Members should encourage others to join the group.

## Diagnostic Questions

How do you determine if the above key outcomes are true? Here are some good questions to ask yourself as a leader:

- Do I see members of my group praying together consistently?
- Do I hear of group members praying for each other outside of group time?
- Is my group organized enough for member care that I, as a leader, can get an update on each member with no more



than two phone calls?

- Is my group organized enough that every group member is contacted by another group member regularly (monthly at a minimum)?
- Are group members providing for the known physical and emotional needs of other members (meals, visits, shopping, transportation, caregiver relief, etc.)?
- Are there opportunities for members to know one another outside of group time?
- Are new people being invited to the group?
- Do newcomers experience biblical hospitality (greeted, group name tags, invitation to return, etc.)?
- Are absentees and members in crisis sent notes of encouragement?

## Nurturing Biblical Wisdom

The goal of our study time in Life Groups is to help participants encounter the truth of Scripture and understand how they can live it out in the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. The ground of our faith is the inerrant Word of God, and its place at the center of our Life Group ministry is reflected by the seriousness with which we approach the Bible together. We will nurture biblical wisdom by teaching the Word of God.

### Doctrine and Biblical Fidelity

In keeping with our church's doctrinal commitment to biblical inerrancy, all Life Group leaders and teachers (even substitutes) should maintain a commitment to authorial intent, grounding lessons in the historic meaning of the biblical text. In lesson preparation, good observation leads to sound interpretation, which leads to faithful application. Leaders should follow this approach to Bible study, letting the text itself guide our lessons rather than reading our own thoughts and ideas

into the Bible.

Every Life Group leader and teacher should agree to teach in accordance with and not contrary to our church's doctrinal statement, as included in our church constitution, as well as the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

## Teaching Practice

While teaching styles among Life Group leaders will vary, all leaders should value transformational teaching: Teaching that is relational, conversational, and practical. Even though there is an element of knowledge transfer in the Life Group environment, our group teaching time should strive to be more laboratory and less classroom. Leaders and teachers should avoid long lectures in favor of engagement, discussion, and application.

## Weekly Teaching Structure

All Adult Life Groups will follow the same weekly curriculum plan, and leaders should keep pace with it in their teaching, unless instructed otherwise by the Adult Ministry Pastor. No leader should teach outside of the approved structure unless directly permitted by the Adult Ministry Pastor.

In terms of curriculum approach, our Life Group studies are broad-based. We want them to cover as much ground as possible, aiming for basic biblical literacy. We would desire that if a participant commits to regular attendance (at least three out of four meetings a month) and sincere interaction with the lesson material (that is, they come prepared to listen and engage), they would go away from a Life Group curriculum cycle with a structural biblical theology: Knowing the parts in light of the whole, and the whole in light of the parts.

Our Life Group studies will be committed to Scripture and appropriate for life application. Every lesson will be grounded in a particular text of Scripture, but they don't all necessarily have to follow a through-the-book Bible study structure. While

through-the-book studies will be part of our cycle, we will also have studies that address theology (what does the Bible say about X?), life issues (how does the Bible help me understand X?) and larger biblical themes (the overall narrative of Scripture, relationship of Old and New Testaments, etc.).

## Leader Resources

Part of our Adult Ministry Pastor's ongoing responsibility is to provide resources and helps for the Life Group Leader in their transformational teaching. In addition to ongoing training opportunities (discussed later in the assessment section), Life Group Leaders should expect to receive at least a Leader Guide with information about the current week's lesson and examples of questions, sample outlines, teaching helps, background materials, etc. Leaders are not expected to follow this material slavishly, but should pay attention to it and incorporate it into their weekly study.

Also, the Adult Ministry Pastor will strive to produce a weekly teaching video, usually around 10-20 minutes long, that will explain approaches to the lesson and clear up potentially difficult issues within the text.

## Scope and Sequence

In general, our Life Group study will, over several years, engage in the following types of studies:

- Chronological, Christ-centered study of the biblical story using the Gospel Project (three years)
- Selected studies through key books/texts, such as: Genesis 1-12; Deuteronomy; the life of Abraham; the life of Joseph; Job; selected Psalms and Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song; Isaiah; Daniel; Esther; selected Minor Prophets; Mark; John; Sermon on the Mount; Christmas themes; Romans; Ephesians; Pastoral Epistles; Hebrews; James; 1 Peter; 1 John; Seven churches of Revelation
- Selected studies, doctrinally focused: Attributes of God,

communicable and incommunicable; Person and work of Christ; Holy Spirit; Church (maybe based on 1-2 Corinthians); Last Things (from Ezekiel, Daniel, 1-2 Thessalonians, Revelation)

- Selected studies, practical theology: Salvation, sanctification, and the Christian life (probably multiple studies on the gospel, growing in Christ, identity in Christ, personal spiritual habits, etc.); family issues (marriage, parenting, children, relationships)

## Leadership

Optional leaders in the area include:

- Regular, approved substitute teachers. No Life Group leader should employ a substitute teacher who is not a member of the church without prior approval of the Adult Ministry Pastor.

## Key Outcomes

As they practice transformational teaching, Life Group leaders can expect to see the following things happening within the group:

1. Faithful group members can increasingly identify the Bible's key themes and trace the Gospel's influence on each passage of Scripture.
2. Group members have a deepening hunger to study God's Word on their own, and are using the study materials provided by the church.
3. Group members bring their Bibles into the group and engage with the study by speaking or interacting.
4. Some group members are identified as substitute teachers or new Life Group leaders.
5. Group members are increasingly interested in being part of a Grow Group.

6. Group members are interested in sharing the Gospel with unbelievers and actively seeking those opportunities.

## Diagnostic Questions

How do you determine if the above key outcomes are true? Here are some good questions to ask yourself as a leader:

- Are you studying carefully to know the Bible lesson well and to structure a thoughtful lesson?
- When you craft your lesson, are you considering group engagement and application as well as exegetical insight?
- Is your study time well organized and consistent, but not boring and predictable?
- Are you consistently following the schedule and lesson guidance provided by the church?
- Are you appropriately using study tools to deepen and clarify your understanding of the Scripture?
- Have you been effectively raising up and equipping future leaders and teachers within the group?

## Encouraging Sacrificial Service

Every believer in Jesus is gifted to serve and care for the body in a particular way. For many of our church members, Life Groups are a primary way in which they can both discover their spiritual gift and exercise it to the glory of God. This is not to say that the Creek doesn't have means for people to serve outside of the Life Group context. But Life Group provides a great place for people to start. Plus, because Life Groups are small to medium-sized, they can organize for service and mission more effectively than the entire church.

## Member Care

Life Group members should take care of one another, espe-

cially when it comes to meeting physical needs. Each group should strive to meet physical needs for its own participants and other church members. This could mean meals for sick folks, service projects for those in need, etc. When a need exceeds one group's ability to meet it, other church leaders and Life Groups can unify as the body and serve together. The pastors will help define and direct member care best practices.

## Serving the Church

Each group can encourage its members to serve in particular church ministries, including those (such as Creek Kids and Creek Students) which require someone to miss group time for certain weeks of the month, or even months at a time. Group leaders should celebrate such commitments and regard them as “missionaries” from the group into ministry areas. Group members could also serve together in ministry events such as VBS, DNOW, Special Friends Respite Nights, and more.

## Community and Mission

Life Groups are a critical means for Richland Creek to serve its larger community, through partnerships and intentional service projects. These initiatives are intentional in that they are planned and purposeful, to share the Gospel or encourage those engaged in Gospel ministry outside the church. There are two primary ways that groups can intentionally pursue service opportunities.

- **Mission Partners.** Richland Creek maintains a number of partnerships with missionaries serving around the world. Life Groups can “adopt” these missionaries through our Mission Partner program and support them through prayer, gifts, etc. These Mission Partners are assigned and managed by the Missions Pastor.
- **Service Partnerships** with like-minded ministries or evangelical opportunities. Life Groups are encouraged to seek connections to groups and ministries outside of the church, so that they can have opportunities to serve. This

could look like partnerships with like-minded ministries or it could mean serving a local organization or group (like a public school) to share the gospel and glorify Christ. These partnerships would be conducted under the purview of Richland Creek's missions and outreach ministries. The Missions Pastor must approve all service partnerships. The Missions Pastor and Adult Ministry Pastor are available to help groups identify potential partnerships.

## Leadership

Essential leaders in this area include:

- Member care leader(s)

Other optional leaders in this area include:

- Outreach Coordinator
- Mission Partner Coordinator
- Service Coordinator

## Key Outcomes

As they cultivate care-focused relationships, Life Group leaders and members can expect to see the following things happening within their group:

1. Group members are increasingly excited about serving the Lord in their area of giftedness.
2. Group members are forming closer relationships by serving others together, and not just through fellowship.
3. Some group members are called to serve regularly in areas such as First Impressions, Creek Kids, or Creek Students.
4. The Life Group's regular partnerships are yielding spiritual fruit through gospel opportunities or encouraging partners.

## Diagnostic Questions

How do you determine if the above key outcomes are true? Here are some good questions to ask yourself as a leader:

- Are my group members being cared for when they have a physical need? Are anyone's needs going unmet?
- Is my group excited about opportunities to serve others?
- Are many of my group members, especially those who are members of the church, pursuing an opportunity to serve within church ministries?
- Am I making opportunities for service known and communicating them within the group?
- Are members of the group encouraged to be a part of Creek Mission teams or short-term mission trips?

## A Note on Developing New Leaders

Life Group Leaders should pray for opportunities to share responsibility in leading the group for the sake of multiplying leaders and Life Groups. This responsibility applies to leadership positions within the group to ensure that commitments are being kept. It also extends to assessing group members and helping them develop their gifts to use in other areas of church life. Having this in the front of your mind, as a Life Group leader, means you are preparing future leaders for service in the church broadly.

However, a Life Group leader should also consider his or her responsibility to develop future Life Group leaders and, thus, multiply/launch other Life Groups. Life Group Leaders should send out other leaders to continue the process of discipleship and multiply mature believers to continue the discipleship endeavor.

How can you do this? Here are some best practices to be aware of when preparing co-leaders and future leaders:



- Ask potential leaders to assist with announcements, prayer time, and Care Group time.
- Ask potential leaders to help with taking attendance or greeting guests/gathering guest information.
- Ask potential leaders to check in on fellow LG members toward the end of becoming Care Group leaders.
- Encourage potential leaders to serve as Grow Group facilitators, as a step toward discipling leadership.
- Ask potential leaders to help coordinate fellowship events.
- Ask potential leaders to co-teach the week's lesson.
- Ask potential leaders to prepare the week's lesson.

When you have walked a potential leader through some initial steps and you sense that someone could have the skills or one day be a Life Group Leader, here are some next steps:

- Have a face-to-face conversation with the potential leader in which you discuss with him or her what you have witnessed, your excitement about their leadership, and whether or not that potential leader believes teaching and Life Group leadership is something they would be interested in pursuing.
- Depending on the outcome of that conversation, engage the Adult Ministry Pastor in the process. Discuss the potential leader with him. The Adult Ministry Pastor will help put together a development plan.
- Continue providing opportunities for the potential leader to develop and grow, even as the Adult Ministry Pastor engages the new leader and plots a course toward launching a new Life Group.

Even if a potential leader does not turn out to launch a new Life Group, he or she could still be a valuable leader in the group or a relied-upon substitute teacher. There is always value in developing leaders!



# **ACCOUNTABILITY**

This section provides information and guidance for the Life Group leader as they pursue Christ in their service and excellence in their leadership. Outside of our Elder Body, no one else at the Creek has a more significant ongoing spiritual impact on our congregation than Life Group leaders. Because of this, Life Group leaders should hold themselves to high standards in both conduct and practice, according to biblical wisdom (James 3:1).

## **Accountability**

Every Life Group leader is highly encouraged to join a Grow Group for ongoing spiritual accountability. Any Life Group leader who is not engaged in a Grow Group should be prepared to share with the Adult Ministry Pastor what their personal accountability practices are.

## **Assessment**

In addition to the diagnostic questions provided in the Best Practices section of this Guidebook, Life Group leaders are encouraged to conduct a more formal assessment of their groups and leadership annually. This assessment process will not be punitive, but constructive. Life Group leaders are encouraged to share their assessments with the Adult Ministry Pastor for good communication, encouragement, and growth.

We have two primary formal assessment tools available. One is a more general scorecard for group health, and the other is explicitly directed at a leader's teaching ability.

### Scorecard

The appendix contains a copy of the Life Group Scorecard. This scorecard encourages leaders to “grade” their group life according to various outcomes based on the three commit-

ments of Life Groups. This process is somewhat subjective, but it encourages reflection on the three commitments and their corresponding best practices. A leader can also share this scorecard with other group members for a more well-rounded look at the group dynamics.

## Teaching Evaluation Program

Participation in this program is voluntary and optional. This process uses anonymous surveys from within the group and outside coaching to help a group leader grow in her or her teaching ability. The goal is to reveal areas for potential improvement and generate a baseline for growth and skill development. If you would like to participate in the Teaching Evaluation Program, please contact the Adult Ministry Pastor or the Adult Discipleship Coordinator.

## Continuing Education

Every Life Group leader should think about their ongoing development as a Christian and leader within the church. To this end, every Life Group leader should plan to complete at least two “credits” of continuing education annually. What counts as a “credit” for continuing education purposes?

- Take a class or attend a conference (either online or in person) as part of the Creek’s discipling ministry.
- Attend a Life Group leader development workshop
- Attend a conference or class, outside the context of the Creek, devoted to ongoing spiritual development (for example, classes/conferences at SEBTS)
- Read a book on spiritual development or area of leadership within Life Group leader responsibilities

This list isn’t necessarily meant to be exhaustive. If there is something you are engaged in that you feel is helpful to your growth as a Christian and leader, let the Adult Ministry Pastor know.

# ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

The following information is provided to assist the Life Group with various aspects of group life, especially those that may relate to other church ministries. Keep in mind, some information may get updated over time, so if you have questions about anything on the following pages, contact the Adult Ministry Pastor or Adult Discipleship Coordinator.

## Touchpoint

Richland Creek uses a database program called Touchpoint to track attendance, record member data, and so forth. Life Group leaders will primarily engage with Touchpoint using the Creek mobile app, where they can access member information, record attendance, and so forth. New leaders will be provided with basic Touchpoint training as they onboard, and updates on the use of Touchpoint will be provided via email or Life Group leader meetings. For questions regarding the use of Touchpoint, please contact the Adult Discipleship Coordinator or the Database Manager.

Official Life Group rosters are kept within Touchpoint, and Life Group leaders do not have access to change those. Requests for changes to the Life Group roster, either additions or deletions, should be communicated to the Adult Discipleship Coordinator.

## Communications

Each Life Group leader can use the method they think is best for regularly communicating with their group. Leaders are highly encouraged to use Touchpoint when sending emails to the group since this ensures that the members' email addresses are linked with the church's most current information. Some groups may additionally employ messaging services

like GroupMe or WhatsApp, or just a group text.

## Member Care and Tracking

As Life Group Leaders and other leaders within the group hear about life events, sicknesses, hospitalizations, etc., within their group, please communicate those needs to our Member Care team. This ensures our pastors know the need and can provide pastoral care where appropriate. This does not mean the Life Group cannot provide care, encouragement, and support. But our Elder Body greatly desires to know what is happening in a church member's life, and those in the Life Group are often the first to know about such things. Please communicate these things regularly to our member care team.

In the event of an emergency need, please communicate with the church office. If the emergency arises outside of normal business hours, contact the Member Care Pastor or Adult Ministry Pastor and they can pass along the information.

## Events on Campus

If your Life Group would like to have an event or fellowship at the church outside of your normal group meeting time, you may do that. Here are a few things to know:

- All church events must be approved and placed on the church calendar before scheduling. To inquire about availability and place an event on the calendar, contact the Adult Discipleship Coordinator or the Office Manager. This does not apply to events you hold off campus.
- During your event, building access should be restricted to one primary entrance and exit, which should be manned at all times when it is open. Please do not leave an exterior door propped open or unattended.
- Some church supplies, such as plates, cups, napkins, etc., are available for on-campus events only. If you plan to use such supplies, please let the Office Manager know in advance.

- Please clean up after yourself thoroughly. Take all trash to the dumpsters.
- No Life Group events, whether on campus or off, can be scheduled during church-wide events or ministries.

## On-Campus Emergency Situations

If you are in a Life Group gathering and experience an emergency, the Creek has protocols in place to handle such situations. For churchwide emergency situations such as natural disasters, fires, active shooters, etc., please refer to and follow the instructions posted in each classroom. Those instructions will be kept up to date.

If a member of your group experiences a medical emergency during Life Group, call 911 and then find a member of the Creek's security team, who can radio for an Emergency Response Team member to come and assist.

## Benevolence

Richland Creek has a benevolence policy in place to provide help for those in need. Here are a few things you should know about benevolence:

- There is a limit to how much benevolence we can provide to an individual. That limit is higher for members than non-members, because our benevolence primarily focuses on assisting those within our church family.
- We have intake forms for all those who receive aid. Our office staff manages that process, so please direct those who need benevolence to contact the church office during normal business hours.
- Do not imply or make promises to anyone regarding benevolence or aid. Do not say things like, "I'm sure our church can help you." While you might mean such comments to be encouraging, some folks might take that as a guarantee, and if they don't receive what they expect,

they become frustrated or angry.

- If your group would like to provide benevolence-related help to an individual in your group, you may do that. But please inform our Member Care Pastor before you do that. He may have valuable information you are not aware of, and he would also like to know when any assistance is being provided.

Any benevolence questions should be directed to our Member Care team or the Member Care Pastor.

## Counseling and Related Resources

As Life Group leaders, we do not walk alone in shepherding and guiding our group members. Sometimes, one of our group members needs a higher level of care and support than we or other members can adequately provide. In those cases, our church's Counseling Ministry may be able to help.

Here are a few things to know about our church's Counseling Ministry:

- The ministry primarily focuses on church members, not those outside our church. Since we are staffed by volunteer counselors, there will often be a waiting period even for church members to be seen, much less those outside our church.
- The first step for someone seeking counseling is to fill out the counseling request forms on our website. Please direct those interested in counseling to those forms.
- Do not imply or make promises to anyone regarding counseling availability. Do not say things like, "I know our counseling ministry can help you." While you might mean such comments to be encouraging, some folks might take that as a guarantee, and if they don't receive what they expect, they become frustrated or angry.

If you have questions about our Counseling Ministry, please contact the Counseling Ministry Director.



# APPENDICES

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Life Group Leader Position Description

Care Group Information

Member Care Leader Position Description

Quick Assessment Scorecard

# LIFE GROUP LEADER

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## Position Description

A Life Group Leader serves as a shepherd of people, a teacher of God's Word, and a leader of groups who are committed to care-focused relationships, transformational biblical wisdom, and sacrificial service.

What a Life Group Leader is

- A godly man or woman who demonstrates a growing and mature walk with Christ.
- Makes spending time with Jesus a priority through personal prayer, Bible study, and worship.
- Free from ongoing and habitual sin that would hinder the leader from fully participating in the work of the gospel or representing Christ and the church well.
- If married, the leader's spouse should be part of his/her team and actively support the leader and others. The spouse should demonstrate a mature walk with Christ.
- Agrees with the church's doctrine, constitution & bylaws, vision, and ministry philosophy.
- Experience in effective Bible teaching, discipleship, evangelism, and leadership of members and non-members.
- A track record of involvement with and dedication to a Creek Life Group.
- Understands Richland Creek's Discipleship Pathway, including participation in various programs.
- Strong written, verbal, and interpersonal communication

skills, as well as self-motivated, flexible, and organized.

- A recommendation from a current Life Group leader attesting to the candidate's faithfulness and suitability to serve.

The following are preferred for a Life Group Leader, or a potential leader must be willing to grow toward them:

- A track record of identifying, raising up, and leading other leaders. Leaders will have a sending mindset.
- Have completed a course of study related to sound biblical interpretation and basic biblical theology.

### What a Life Group Leader Does: Shepherd

- Know and talk to the people in your group as much as possible, considering size and group context.
- Ensure a caring and welcoming environment by being an active and enthusiastic example of biblical hospitality.
- Raise up and equip a Member Care leader to, under your guidance, maintain a Care Group structure.
- Assist the Member Care leader in raising up and caring for Care Group leaders.
- Follow up regularly with the Member Care leader and Care Group leaders to ensure the Life Group is functioning well.
- Raise up other leaders to assist in the biblical hospitality of the group as well.

### What a Life Group Leader Does: Teacher

- Function as the main teacher for the Life Group's regular weekly meeting.
- Teach with the goal of imparting biblical knowledge geared toward life application, understanding that the Bible is not understood until it is obeyed.

- Organize your lesson plan well, keeping in mind various learning styles that exist within the context of your particular group.
- Encourage interaction by group members with the biblical text, moving from observation to interpretation to application within the lesson itself.
- Consider how active learning and regular comprehension checks affect the value of the learning environment.

## What a Life Group Leader Does: Leader

- Communicate constantly and well with your group, keeping them informed of relevant church announcements and group events. Raise up leaders to assist.
- Ensure that there is a consistent and appropriate schedule of fellowship opportunities for your group outside of the weekly gathering. Raise up leaders to assist.
- Work with other church leaders and other group leaders to champion or organize local community outreach and service opportunities for your group.
- Enthusiastically support the church's vision for discipleship and growth within the context of your Life Group, including participation in Grow Groups, Equipping opportunities, Ministry and Mission Teams, etc.

# MEMBER CARE LEADER

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## Position Description

The primary responsibility of the Member Care Leader is to make sure group relationships are arranged so that every member is contacted on a regular basis and physical needs that arise within the group are met or communicated appropriately. The Member Care Leader should be a committed and mature disciple of Christ. The Member Care Leader should be able to effectively delegate to Care Group leaders within the Life Group, when necessary.

## Qualifications for Member Care Leader

- Baptized, committed Christ follower; member of Richland Creek, attending worship consistently and affirming statement of faith
- Practicing spiritual disciplines of Bible, prayer, worship, witness, community, ministry, generosity and mission
- Demonstrates good judgment and decision-making
- Desire to replicate discipleship in others
- Open to transparency and honesty in relationships with other leaders

## Responsibilities of Member Care Leader

- Recruit and train Care Group Leaders.
- Assign new group members to Care Groups.
- Contact Care Group leaders every two weeks to check on spiritual health and see if they have needs.

- Assist Care Group leaders where appropriate in meeting needs within the group – for example, help with setting up a meal train, sign up list to help with other needs, etc.
- Communicate needs within the group.
- If there are needs requiring outside assistance, contact Life Group leader and deacon representative.
- Communicate any substantial member care information (upcoming surgeries or illnesses, expectant mothers, significant hospitalizations, etc.) to the Connections and Member Care team.
- Cheerful, servant heart in assisting Life Group leader in other areas as needed.

# CARE GROUP PRACTICES

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## Getting Them Started, Keeping Them Going

### A Culture of Care

There are at least a few aspects of a healthy member care culture. People attend regularly because they want to and know they need to. There is a healthy expectation of obedience, not of judgment but of encouragement – or else the idea of stirring one another up to love and good works is pretty much meaningless. There are people who know one another well enough to annoy and sin against one another, which may not seem positive until you recall that the command to forgive means little without genuine relationships. If everything is on the surface, and our relationships have no depth, there is no opportunity for the grace and mercy of Christ to transform our relationships. We are left empty and shallow.

But here's the reality: We cannot force people to love one another. You can't make a participant in your Life Group care about other people, look out for them, serve them, etc. For some, that is a huge frustration, because they are sheep dogs by nature – they like herding people back into the group, making sure they don't wander off, perhaps barking at them a little bit when they do. Others are, by nature, not really paying attention to the wanderers, but running ahead and encouraging others to follow. Those folks need to look around for some sheep dogs. Still others are walking closely in and among the sheep – talking to them, teaching them, loving them – such that they're not really paying much attention to the sheep wandering off. All of those characterizations are actually fine because each shepherding style is different, but the point is this: To create a culture of member care, every shepherd

needs help. That's where Care Groups come in.

## Care Group Mechanisms

Member care will not happen unless we intentionally facilitate it. That's where care groups come in. Care Groups are small circles of connection (6-12 people total) in which members are known and talk regularly, to the end of loving and truthful conversations.

### **How can I facilitate Care Groups within my Life Group?**

Step 1: Look for a Member Care Leader. This person, or people, make sure group relationships are arranged so that every member is contacted regularly and physical needs that arise within the group are met or communicated appropriately. They recruit and train Care Group leaders, with the assistance and direction of the Life Group leader.

Step 2: Work with Member Care Leader(s) to identify, recruit, and train Care Group leaders.

Step 3: Divide your group roster into Care Groups. Two ways to do it. One is by touch. In this way, each Care Group has people there sporadically, occasionally, and regularly. So you essentially divide your roll into three groups: They come on occasion (less than once a month, on average); they come about half the time; and they come regularly (3x or more per month). You then assign couples or singles, in equal measure, to the groups. If you have a large diversity of ages in your group, you could do it by age and stage, while also keeping attendance in mind. And finally, if you have a very small group, you could actually operate your Life Group as a Care Group, in which case, you and the Member Care leader function as the Care Group leader for the group.

Step 4: Release Care Groups to minister to each other. Announce it ahead of time, make sure your CG leaders are present if at all possible, and then go. If there are questions, answer them. As you make mistakes, fix them.



Remember: Using class time for care is critical, so devote about 15 minutes per week, normally, to Care Group time.

### **What do we do in Care Group time?**

First task: Discuss member care needs and assign contacts. The Care Group leader will note who is not present and assign contacts.

Second task: Pray for individual prayer requests. This is an opportunity for deeper relationships to form.

### **How do we handle LG visitors during Care Group time?**

Option 1: A separate “new people group” facilitated by the LG leader, the member care leader, an outreach leader, or combination. While care groups are talking, you would take a few moments to explain to the visitor what your group values, get to know them a little bit, and then pray with them. After folks have been in this group for a few weeks, then ask them if they would like to formally join your group, after which time you would assign them to a Care Group.

Option 2: Include them, with sufficient explanation, in the member care discussion. This would be the approach if you have a smaller Life Group that may consist of only one or two Care Groups. You will need to explain briefly to them what you’re doing and why (a few sentences will suffice), and make an effort to not exclude them from the conversation while also not making them feel singled out.

# CARE GROUP LEADER

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## Position Description

The primary responsibility of the Care Group Leader is to make sure group members are contacted regularly and needs within the group are either met or communicated to other leaders. The Care Group Leader should be a committed disciple of Christ who has demonstrated an eagerness to grow in godliness and relationships within the body of Christ.

## Qualifications for Care Group Leader

- Baptized, committed Christ-follower; member of Richland Creek, attending worship consistently and affirming statement of faith
- Knowledge of and eagerness to grow in understanding of the Word, prayer, worship, witness, and relationship with others
- Good communication and delegation skills
- Willingness to pray in front of a small group

## Responsibilities of Care Group Leader

- Recruit and train an assistant Care Group Leader for times when the leader is absent.
- Assign contacts to group members on a weekly basis.
- Personally contact everyone in their Care Group at least every other month.
- Organize the meeting of needs within the Care Group – for example, set up a meal train for sickness, a sign-up sheet for help with child care, etc.

- Communicate needs within the group as well as to the Member Care Leader and Life Group leader.
- Lead group weekly to pray for requests within the Care Group, or coach others to lead in prayer.
- Cheerful, servant heart in assisting Member Care leader and Life Group leader in other areas as needed.

# ASSESSMENT SCORECARD

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Use the following questions and criteria to estimate the effectiveness of your group according to our three basic commitments. For best practices on using this scorecard, see the Accountability section of this guidebook.

## Practicing Relationships

Are groups organized to care for people?	A	B	C	D
Is there a balance between connection among group members and Biblical content of the lessons?	A	B	C	D
Are newcomers proactively welcomed and cared for by most of the group?	A	B	C	D
Do group members pray regularly for members in need or crisis?	A	B	C	D
Are Care Groups and Grow Groups strengthening relationships?	A	B	C	D

## Practicing Wisdom

Are group members growing as disciples?	A	B	C	D
Are studies carefully prepared and engaging?	A	B	C	D
Do group members pray about practical ways they can apply what they have learned?	A	B	C	D
Are apprentice leaders identified and developed?	A	B	C	D
Are new groups started regularly?	A	B	C	D

## Practicing Service

Are groups making a difference in the community?	A	B	C	D
Are members encouraged to serve in the church?	A	B	C	D
Do people serve on the group's leadership team?	A	B	C	D
Do group members pray about ways to serve?	A	B	C	D
Are new people invited to connect with the group?	A	B	C	D
Are group members initiating gospel conversations?	A	B	C	D