

ST. LUKE

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Nine Essentials for a Healthy Life Group



THE NINE GROUP ESSENTIALS

Life groups are designed for participants to take next steps to becoming more like Jesus. We call this spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is the work of God, the Holy Spirit. These nine group essentials are key elements we've learned that help create the optimum environment were God does his work in us.

1. Grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

- This essential reminds us to stay spiritually nourished.
- In John 15, Jesus uses the metaphor of a vine and branches to instruct his followers to abide in Him. When we stay connected to Jesus in this way, we welcome God's work in us and through us.
- Spiritual growth occurs when we put ourselves in places where the Holy Spirit does his work. We talk about this at St. Luke through our discipleship path: Learn God's love in worship, live God's love in life groups, and unleash God's love when we serve, invite, and give to meet the hopes and hurts of others.
- Spiritual disciplines such as a daily quiet time with the Lord for the reading of scripture and prayer is highly encouraged.
- *How do you stay rooted in your relationship with Jesus?*

2. Cultivate relationships within the group.

- This essential is focused on how we build community and create a safe atmosphere for others.
- In Matthew 22, Jesus outlines the two greatest commandments: love God and love one another. The first life group essential is grows our love for God. The second grows our love for each other. Growing spiritually is about both growing in love for God and love for others.
- By encouraging and facilitating connections outside of regular group meetings, you demonstrate the priority of relationships. Some examples may include going out for coffee or a meal, enjoying activities like a concert, baseball game, mini-golf, or bowling together.
- Model helpful transparency. Appropriate vulnerability on your part as the leader helps group members to be more at ease and open to share.
- Discuss and establish a group agreement for how your group will function.
- *How are you and your group members connecting outside of group time? How have you modeled helpful transparency for your group?*

3. Promote participation by keeping everyone involved.

- This essential focuses on how you involve your group members and create ownership.
- In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul describes how each of us is gifted and contributes to the Body of Christ. We are designed to all play a part in God's mission here on earth.
- Shared participation with the logistics of the group creates broader ownership of the group. Some examples include: facilitating the study, hosting the meeting, preparing the snack, leading prayer time, planning socials, guiding the curriculum-choice discussion, etc.
- Delegating tasks allows you to focus on the spiritual growth of group members and maintaining a safe environment where group members are comfortable to talk openly about their challenges.
- Promoting participation is also a great first step toward another of our group essentials: prepare others for leadership.
- It is also important to help each member participate in group discussion. Some ideas to help you encourage this participation may include: not talking first, allowing the group time to think (silence is okay), and appropriate nudging (ex. Bob, what do you think?).
- While we want each group member to participate in the group discussion, keep the environment safe by allowing the right to pass on a question. It's okay to skip questions that you perceive are too deep for your group at this time. Pay attention – if group members are often passing, perhaps the question is asking people to go too deep too soon.
- Asking good questions makes participation in discussion easier. Not all questions are worded well to engage group members. Avoid yes or no questions. Try to keep questions open ended.
- Sincerely value group members' insights (ex. "Thanks for sharing that" "Can you tell me more about that?" "What I hear you saying is..."). Be openly curious about what people are saying.
- *What tasks can you delegate to other group members? In the next week, personally ask group members to help with the logistics of group.*

4. Provide pastoral care for each other.

- This essential focuses on the big and small ways we can provide care.
- In Ezekiel 34, the prophet Ezekiel describes a leader caring for his people like a shepherd caring for his sheep. God desires shepherds who feed the flock; lead them to rest; seek the lost; bring back the scattered; bind up the broken; and strengthen the sick. This is a big task and that's why we encourage you to share it collectively with your group.
- Take the lead to provide care when group members experience pain or difficulty, but that doesn't mean you are solely responsible. Coordinate efforts with group members.
- At its most basic level, providing care is staying aware of what's going on in group member's lives.
 - Acknowledge and celebrate birthdays and anniversaries.
 - Follow up with prayer requests. This follow up communicates that you care enough to remember what's going on in one another's lives. Ask for updates.

- Visiting a group member in the hospital.
- Providing care also means being first responders when circumstances get rough.
 - It may be as simple as offering to babysit a couple's children for a weekend so they can focus on their marriage.
 - Maybe it's changing your plans so you can attend an out-of-town funeral in order to be there for a group member who has lost someone close.
 - It can even be setting up a calendar to provide meals during a group member's illness or after the birth of a baby.
- There are levels of care that may go beyond the capacity of the group to handle. It's important to know your limits and ask for help from your coach, Groups Director, or Pastor.
- There is a difference between providing care and becoming a caretaker.
- Shared pain is often the gateway to community and group growth.
- *What is your greatest concern as you think of your responsibility to provide care? How do you make it a priority for your group to support and care for each other?*

5. Invite others to join your group.

- This essential helps groups stay open to the new people God will bring into their lives to help them grow.
- In Luke 5, Jesus calls the tax collector, Levi, to be his disciple. In response, Levi, hosts a party with his friends and invites Jesus. When we invite others to join the group, we invite them to meet Jesus.
- Before you begin inviting new members, involve everyone in the process. Everyone in your group should consider how to invite someone to the group.
- Regularly pray for God to bring people into the group.
- Consider having a few group members meet the potential member before inviting them to a meeting.
- Let the potential group member know that they aren't making a commitment and that you are looking for a mutual fit.
- Explain the vision of your group to the potential member.
- Ask potential members to think about and pray about joining the group.
- After new members attend the group have everyone briefly retell some stories about their journey into your group. Reaffirm or revise (with the newcomer's input) the group agreement.
- If your group is made up of couples, it is wise to invite at least two new couples to join your group at a time. If your group includes singles, invite at least two or three singles at a time. This is a broad guideline, but one that helps newcomers feel less like outsiders.
- Allow the group to assimilate new members and grow together for a season before inviting additional people. No one wants to stifle growth; this is just a broad guideline. A revolving door of people in and out of a life group of eight to twelve can be a bit crazy. Add people, then help them get connected and settled into the group.

- *How open is your group to inviting others to join?*

6. Increase evangelistic behavior.

- This essential helps group members grow more confident and comfortable in sharing their faith with non-Christians.
- In Romans 10:17, the apostle Paul says, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” When you invite others to join your group, you are inviting them to hear the Good news of Jesus.
- Our goal is to connect the people we care about most into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Each group will use the 30-Day Check-in which includes training, accountability, coaching, and inspiration to increase our evangelistic behavior. You will be provided tools for leading the 30-Day Check-in.
- *How often does your group pray for non-Christians to connect with Jesus? What can your group do to help you reach them?*

7. Serve together.

- This essential expands the focus of the group beyond itself.
- The Bible is filled with instruction for serving one another and those in need. Jesus sums up this teaching with one final commandment in John 13:34-35, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”
- Serving those outside of the group is a great way to leverage the influence of the group by unleashing God’s love in the world while strengthening the relationships within the group.
- There are three primary ways to serve others: serve one another *inside* the group (we covered this in Essential #4 Provide pastoral care for each other), serving *individually outside* the group, and serving others *as a group*.
- There is no shortage of service opportunities at St. Luke. Browse your weekly bulletin for announcements of upcoming opportunities to serve inside or outside the church.
- Serve together monthly or in another recurring time in your schedule. Make this essential part of your natural rhythm. If it’s not on your calendar, it won’t happen.
- Consider serving as a group, but rotating the members. Some service opportunities require a smaller number of people. The group takes responsibility for a regular serving opportunity, but promises that a set number (three or four, for example) will always be there to serve. All members of the group are trained and able to serve, but it will not be the same people going to serve each time.
- The key is a lifestyle of service. Sometimes this will be structured; sometimes it will simply be a personal or group response to an immediate need. If your group is on mission with its values and commitments, service will soon become a way of life, not simple an occasional event.
- *In what ways is service a consistent part of your group experience?*

8. Prepare others for leadership.

- This essential prepares the group to transition well by equipping current group members to lead.
- In 2 Timothy 2:2, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy to grow leaders. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”
- The vitality and effectiveness of any local church is directly related to the quality of its leadership. The ministry of group life flourishes when we develop new leaders.
- By passing on knowledge, skills, and opportunities, you are preparing others for future leadership while sharpening your own.
- Look for group members who take the group seriously.
- Consider people who challenge your leadership. These people may be potential leaders who are frustrated because they have no opportunity to lead.
- Pray regularly for new apprentices (Luke 6:12-16)
- Observe group members as you delegate tasks to them (Essential #3). Give them additional opportunities to see if perhaps they have some leadership potential.
- Look for people who exhibit spiritual, emotional, and social qualifications.
 - Spiritually: Is it evident God is working in their life? Do they consistently nurture their own spiritual growth? Do they share the vision of life groups?
 - Emotionally: Are they secure enough to be appropriately vulnerable and honest with the group? Are they emotionally stable? Are they aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and not subject to mood swings that affect the group dynamic?
 - Socially: Do they openly participate without dominating discussion? Are they able to listen to others in a caring way? Are they able to facilitate discussion?
- If you see the potential leadership gifting in a group member tell them what you see in them and why you would follow them.
- *How are you intentionally investing in a potential leader in your group? Who in your group right now do you see as a potential leader?*

9. Transition well as you multiply or birth new life groups within 1 to 2 years.

- This essential prepares us to adapt to changes in life as God provides new opportunities for us to help others grow in their faith and for new relationships to grow our faith.
- In Ecclesiastes 3, Solomon eloquently describes how “there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” It is not realistic to expect every life group to last a lifetime. There is a time for your group to be as it is, and there is a time for change.

- As all groups have a natural life cycle, leaders must work with their group members to craft a picture of a strong transition.
- As you invite others to join your group (essential #5), you will naturally outgrow your group's capacity to connect on the same level for sharing and caring. When another group member is ready to lead (essential #8), multiplication is a great way for some bonds to continue, while new ones can form more deeply.
- We will start new life groups annually through a churchwide campaign. Launching new life groups by releasing experienced group members to take a step into leading new groups is a wonderful testimony to what God has done in the life of your group.
- Cast a vision for a new group from the onset of your group, especially if an apprentice leader is present. Include this goal in your ground rules or covenant.
- Several months before launching a new group, begin the process of breaking into subgroups for some part of every meeting. This means that the apprentice leader and the leader each lead a small group for part of the meeting. This often occurs in two rooms of the same house or apartment. Breaking into subgroups allows members to begin to feel the process of separation from other group members or from the apprentice. The goal is not to divide the group, but give some structure to the new group that is forming. It is likely that you will grow to fourteen or sixteen members before considering this process.
- The leader and apprentice should each be seeking new apprentices in preparation for the launch. Make sure these new apprentices each work with one of the subgroups.
- Begin meeting as two groups for most of the meeting time. At the time of launch, celebrate the beginning of a new group.
- When celebrating the launch of a new group, thank God for what He is doing. Hold a time of prayer as you commission and bless the two groups. Recognize and affirm the leadership in each group. Allow members to express their feelings of celebration and sadness. (Remember, you can still meet as one large group as often as you like. This is a process, not an abrupt tearing apart of two communities.) Spend time praying about the future of both groups and about what God might do to help each grow spiritually and numerically. Have each member write a letter to the rest of the group expressing their feelings of thankfulness and respect. Take pictures or videos of the groups as you prepare to launch. Set a schedule for a few planned social events together in the future so that the group reunites on a regular basis.
- *How are you planning today for a successful transition in your current group?*