



St Mark's Church
LEAMINGTON SPA

Small Groups Guide for Leaders

St Mark's Vision Statement

Belonging... Believing... Becoming...

A community of believers, sharing God's love with the world

We are called by God and enabled by the Holy Spirit to grow as an inclusive, worshipping community. We seek to encourage belonging and nurture believing, together becoming followers of Jesus who share God's love with the world.



Small groups have an important role in fulfilling our vision statement:

BELONGING: This relates to the roots of the tree, and is about being ‘**rooted and grounded in God’s love**’ as a church community. We aim to follow Jesus’s example offering acceptance and inclusion to all. Small groups provide safe shelter under the branches and solid ground under foot. It is from a friendly and safe place of belonging that roots can be put down, and the deeper questions of life and faith can be explored.

In practice: Welcome, hospitality, one body different parts.

BELIEVING: This relates to the trunk of the tree, growing upwards from the roots as we explore the Christian faith together. The trunk is solid and strong, offering us a safe and communal place to ask big questions and discover what it might mean to follow Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps us to learn, and to ‘**grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is**’. This life-long process unfolds through small groups and courses such as Alpha as well as through services and individual discipleship.

In practice: Jesus is embodied when Christians gather; honesty – bringing who we are.

BECOMING: This relates to the branches and leaves of the tree, reaching out to share God’s love, and to experience life in all its fullness. Our aim is to ‘**know this love that surpasses knowledge... so that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.**’ When we choose to follow Jesus we embark on a lifelong journey of ‘becoming’ – growing into the best possible version of ourselves, becoming the people God created us to be. We blossom and bear fruit, exercising our gifts together in various ways so that as a community we can offer shelter and sustenance to all those around us.

In practice: Servanthood, ministry for all, growing in faith and love at the same time

Quotes in bold from Ephesians 3:17-19.

The role of Leaders

Whether you prefer the term leader, facilitator, coordinator or insist the group is run by everyone, in practice someone will take charge. Ideally, there should be 2 named people: to act as contacts (eg. to receive emails and attend meetings). Leadership is about serving.

Role description:

- Complete the Church of England Basic Awareness Safeguarding training and be aware of the St Mark's safeguarding policy.
- Organise (or delegate) the running of the group (including venue, person leading, choice of material, method of contacting one another)
- Be aware of the St Mark's vision and the role of small groups in developing Belonging, Believing & Becoming.
- Be able to identify their own strengths and delegate to others in the group
- Be ready to encourage others in the group to share in leadership of the meetings, and be aware of the gifts of others in the group, especially potential leaders
- Always be ready to invite new people into the group
- Attend small group leaders' meetings (about once a term) and keep in touch with the coordinator(s)

It is NOT expected that Small Group Leaders will:

- Host every week or
- Always be the person to lead the bible study
- Know all the answers
- Take on the role forever!

Facilitation and Delegation

- Share the load
- Different people can lead different parts of the meeting

- Enjoy different ways of leading
- Allow others to develop gifts
- Grow new leaders

Safeguarding

Children may be present in small groups, this is with the agreement of those in the group and parents/ carers should always be present. Although anyone can be vulnerable, small groups would not normally provide any of the care for vulnerable adults which requires DBS checks. We believe safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and leaders should be aware of the church safeguarding policy and procedures for reporting concerns. If in any doubt seek advice from the vicar of parish safeguarding officer.

Confidentiality

Should be maintained within the group, but within Safeguarding guidelines.

Pastoral Care & Support

A lot of pastoral care happens in small groups, but sometimes things need to be passed on (probably to the vicar or Marie Calvert may be able to advise). Please don't hold on to things if they are causing you concern. Remember, you are not in this alone, support comes from the group itself, from other Small Group leaders, the coordinator or vicar. If we are giving out it is important that we allow others to give us input and encouragement.

Growing new leaders and new groups

There are different ways of starting new groups, and the process usually requires a degree of sacrifice: the group can multiply(divide!), but often a more successful model is when a couple of people from the group leave to start a new one.

It helps if groups start with the idea of growth in mind, and don't become too 'cosy'. It should be easy for new people to join a group.

Aspects of a group meeting

Delegating different aspects either the week before or during the week is a key role.

Bringing in a time to review the previous week, or to make time for testimony, will help everyone to enter into the **application** aspect of the teaching.

Welcome (Key for Belonging)

If appropriate the leader should greet people and then hand over to the person delegated to lead this section.

Aims:

- For people to feel comfortable
- Voluntary participation - to provide an opportunity for everyone to take part if they want to
- A key purpose of the Welcome section of the meeting is for group members to discover and learn about each other. (Eg. *Their background and interests, their spiritual path and experiences of God, their needs and gifts*)

Worship (does not have to be singing!)

Aims:

- To direct focus towards God
- To explore the many different ways of prayer and praise
- Can include silence or meditation on Scripture

Word (Key for Believing and Becoming)

Aims:

- To look at Scripture linked into the teaching theme running currently
- The Bible is designed to be read in community
- To have plenty of discussion in order to learn from each other
- To consider how we apply this in our lives
- To pray for ourselves that we would apply the teaching

Questions you can ask of any passage:

- a) Read the passage slowly, give people time to think and listen to what God might be saying, or what strikes them in some way. Then give time for people to share thoughts/ questions.
- b) What did the passage mean for the people at the time? What was the context, the culture? Was the passage written to address a particular issue? (A study Bible – or Google can help, but people may know more than they think). What would it have been like hearing this for the first time? (Particularly relevant for New Testament readings).
- c) What might it mean for us today?
- d) What is God saying to me through this passage, do I need to do anything? Have a few minutes of quiet for people to think about this/ God to speak to individuals.
- e) Pray about this – either you as the leader or members for each other.

Witness (An outward focus – for more people to come and belong)

Aims:

- To pray for people and situations that we face

Social action

We encourage each group to spend at least one session (evening, Saturday morning etc.) in a social action project every year.

We hope that our small groups are inspiring places for you and all those in your groups. If you would like to chat about anything please contact Amanda amanda@tomdg.com or Tim vicar@st-marks.net