

Life Group Leader Primer

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Welcome to the process of becoming an official FLAG Church Life Group Leader! We hold such a high value for our leaders here and are so grateful that you would join us on this journey. As you already know, our vision is to Know God, Find Freedom, Discover Purpose, and Make a Difference by practicing the way of Jesus together.

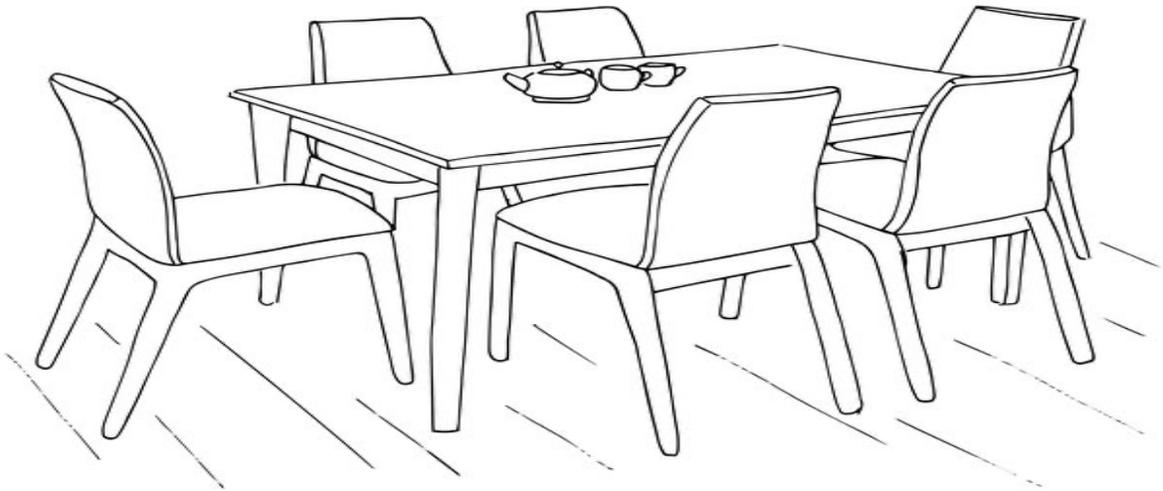
In this Primer you will find all sorts of resources in your development as a Life Group Leader – from building and maintaining Group health to safeguarding your own emotional and spiritual life to working as a group towards sustainability and vulnerability. And we want community and leadership to be fun – we do not believe life together has to be boring.

This booklet will contain more than you need right now, so make sure to keep referring back to it as you lead. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at shelby@flagchurch.com

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Your Group



3 Best Practices for Getting Settled

1. Everyone Finds a Seat

Co-Leaders (required)

Coordinators (recommended)

- Communication
- Food and Hospitality
- Communion
- Mission

Other Roles (Optional)

- Birthdays
- Worship
- Etc.

2. Everyone Goes in the Same Direction

3 weeks Discipleship (i.e. 9 Practices or an approved right now media study outside of term)

1 week Family (e.g. game nights, story sharing, themed meal night, etc.)

3. Everyone Communicates Clearly

- Noticing
- Considering
- Keep in Mind

Becoming a Frontline Pastor

Modeling Healthy Relationship & Communication

- Active Listening
- Ask Good Questions
- Set Boundaries (See Appendix A)
- Build Relationships

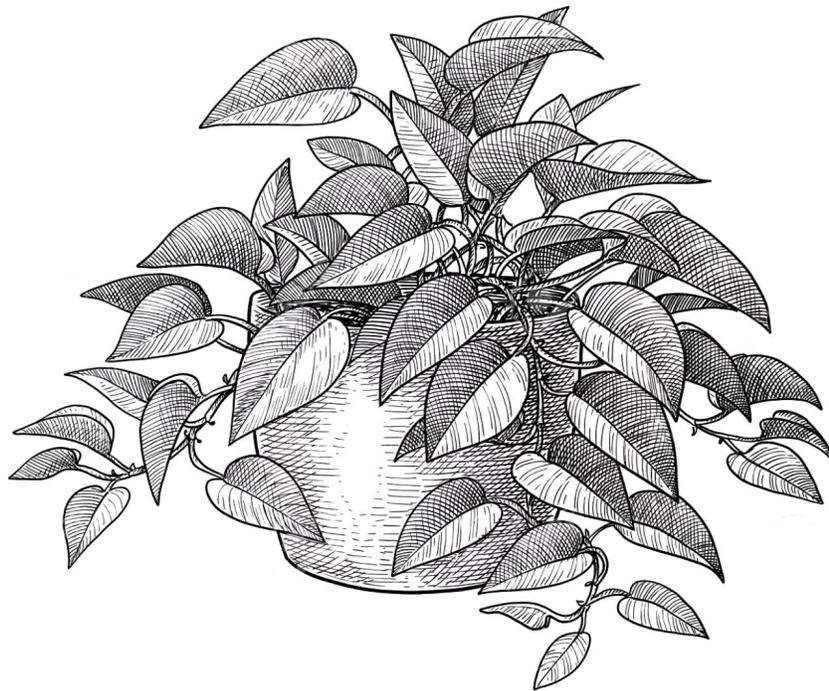
Modeling Healthy Conflict & Resolution

- Assume the Best
- Seek to Understand
- Practice Matthew 18 (see Appendix B)

Modeling Active Participation

- Engage Your Own Discipleship
- Go to Church & Community
- Ask For & Invite Help

Your Leadership



New Leader Pathway

Pathway

The Basics



Life Group Leader Application and Assessment

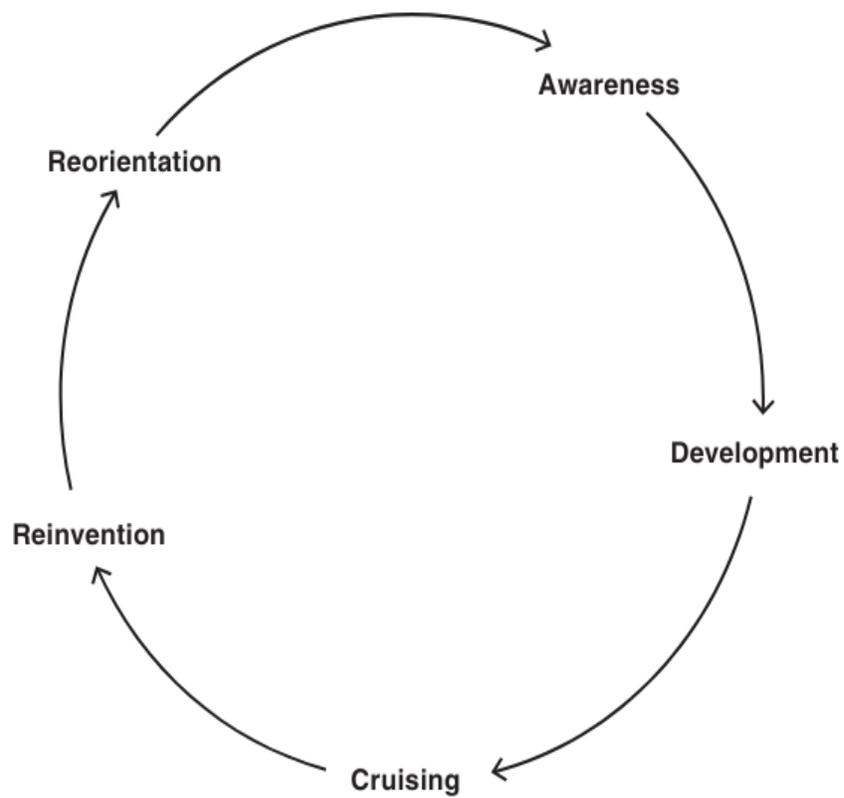


1:1 Meeting with Discipleship Pastor



New Leader Training

Leadership Cycle



* See Appendix C on page 24
for Community Cycle

Leadership Development

“The best thing any of us have to bring to leadership is our own transforming selves.”

- **Ruth Haley Barton**

“In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, cares, reaches out and wants to heal.”

- **Henri Nouwen**

Life Group Leader Commitments

Active Participation in Your Own Spiritual Formation & Leadership Development

- Faithful response to Jesus' invitation of discipleship
- Attention and intention to emotional health, wellbeing, relationships, rest, work, and leadership development
- Regular practice and pursuit of being led by the Holy Spirit
- Integrate FLAG's Daily Prayer Rhythm into your life

Active Participation in The Life Groups Department

- Regular Attendance and participation in Life Group Leaders Meetings
- Openness to leadership development, adjustments, and feedback from FLAG'S Life Group team
- Regular and open communication with the Life Group Department

Active Participation in Your Community

- Living as the frontline pastor by fostering intentional relationships with Group members (pastoral care for spiritual growth and wellbeing)
- Weekly sharing a meal and facilitating discussion with your Group
- Practicing the monthly Group Rhythm: Discipleship (3 weeks), family (1 week)
- Leading your Group through decision making process, sharing and delegating leadership

Active Participation in FLAG Church

- Regular attendance and involvement in the Sunday gatherings
- Agreement and engagement with the FLAG Church vision
- Living under the authority of the Scriptures
- Active relationship with FLAG Church Leadership

Common Hurdles

Transitions

Integrating Kids

Inconsistent Attendance

Adding People

Crisis: Mental health, marriage crisis, etc.

Conflict & Sin: Sexual sin, substance use, etc.

Resources & Next Steps

FLAG Church Approved Right Now Media Studies

<https://www.flagchurch.com/lifegroups>

Group Guides

Important Dates

Appendix A

Setting Boundaries & Expectations

We wanted to offer some language that could be helpful in navigating certain common situations.

Setting boundaries for group discussion

“Hey everyone! Before we begin our group conversation tonight, I want to share a few goals I have with you. First, I really want everyone to have the opportunity to talk. So, if you’re normally a talker or verbal processor, I want to invite you to be conscious of how much you’re sharing and help me make sure there’s time and space for everyone to share. Because of this goal, I may interrupt you at a certain point. This isn’t to say that what you’re saying isn’t good, it’s that my first priority tonight is that everyone gets to share. My second goal is that when people share, we do a really good job listening. Sometimes we can ask questions like, “Is there anything else you want to share?” or “are you wanting feedback about what you’re sharing?” Let’s remember that sometimes offering suggestions or feedback can feel invalidating to people when they share. So those are our goals tonight. Does anyone have any questions about those?”

Setting boundaries with someone who talks a lot in group conversations

Before your Group meets: “Hey Bob! I wanted to have a quick conversation with you about your group discussions at Group. I’ve noticed that you don’t typically have a problem answering questions and offering your thoughts – and you have really good things to say! I’ve also noticed, though, that there are people in our Group who have a harder time showing up to some of these conversations and don’t naturally offer their thoughts or insights to them. I’m, wondering if you could help me work on improving our group conversations. This could look like you holding off on offering up your thoughts until at least 2 other people have shared. It could be that you intentionally spend a group conversation asking questions instead of feedback or input. How does that sound to you?”

After your Group meets: “Hey Bob!” Thank you so much for helping me last night. I really noticed you trying and I think it was so cool that you left room for Sarah to say what she was thinking. You also asked Sam such a good question. Thank you for that! I did notice that you responded to Jenny’s sharing with advice, though, and I wasn’t really sensing that she was looking for any. Next time, maybe try saying something like, “Thank you for sharing Jenny. Are you wanting advice on what you were just saying? Or did you just want to share that with us? Does that make sense? I think it could help us keep moving forward together in our goal of having more participation in group conversations.”

When someone discloses something about their mental health or life that requires training or knowledge I don’t have

“Thank you so much for trusting me with this. I feel really honored that you would share this with me. I have to be honest with you and say that while I am totally able to be with you on this part of your journey, I’m not qualified to lead you through it. But I do know some people who can help and I really want to come alongside you as you pursue getting well. So can I help you find someone who can help?”

Note: For the Suicide Lifeline, text or call 988.

Appendix B

Confronting Sin (Matthew 18)

Confronting Sin in a Group can be messy. But Jesus invites us to lovingly pursue people who are in sin, inviting them to repentance and holiness and partnering with them in restoration. While the scriptures give us guidelines on how to work through sin in community, *it is not a science*. It takes wisdom. Because of that, below are some principles (not rules) derived from Matthew 18:15-17

Pre-Conversation

1. Act Quickly

If we wait too long to address sin in Groups, it can lead to feelings of betrayal and to greater pain that sin causes. For this reason, as soon as you know there is serious sin, we want to address it quickly.

2. Get to the Relational Epicenter

Matthew 18 assumes that the person confronting sin is a brother or sister. The questions to ask before approaching this person are: Who first became aware of this behavior? And who has the most relational equity with this person? That person is best equipped to confront the person in sin.

3. Consult the Life Groups Team

You are not meant to do this alone. For this reason, anytime serious sin or conflict arises in your Group, consult the Life Group Team before confronting the issue and throughout the entire process.

Invitation

Eventually, you (or the person addressing the sin) will have to have face-to-face conversations with the person in sin. Here are some of the elements those conversations could contain:

4. Learn More

Assume you do not have all the facts. This means your first conversation might begin with simply asking questions about the behavior or situation.

5. Be Clear and Direct About the Sin

Once you have learned more about the situation, clearly identify what sin you are concerned about. This means being specific about the nature of the sin and, if need be, the teachings of Jesus.

6. Invite Repentance

Present a clear, specific invitation to repentance (a change of thinking and living). What does change look like?

Likely, this process will involve more than one conversation. Consult the Life Group team before and after every conversation. If the invitation conversations go well, then you can move on to making a plan of restoration (part 3). If the invitation conversations go poorly it will mean:

7. Bring Along Someone Else

If your early conversations do not indicate any desire to change, it can be helpful to bring along someone else in your Life Group to approach the person in sin. Again, the goal is to invite repentance that leads to restoration.

8. Pastors or Elders Step in

If there is still not progress, a pastor or elder will step in to invite repentance and restoration.

Restoration

9. Forming a Plan for Restoration

Whether amends need to be made, relationships need to change, or habits need to be developed, it will be helpful to provide practical steps for moving forward. The questions to ask are: How can I practically help you? What would holiness look like in this area? What obstacles could hinder your ongoing growth? Partner with the Communities Team for resources and practical steps.

10. Setting up Accountability and Support

Long term, supporting this person will look like providing accountability and support. Form a pattern of checking in to see how this person is doing and the progress they have made. Change takes time, so it is important to make sure that support extends past the initial invitation conversations.

Appendix C

Rhythms of Attention Practice

The rounds below can be practiced in any order, although we recommend beginning (after prayer inviting God's presence) with either Checking In of the Appreciation Round.

I. Checking in:

Using the acronym SASHET (sad, angry, scared, happy, excited, tender), take turns sharing with your partner(s) the most prominent emotions on your heart and why. Once you're done sharing, end with the phrase "I'm in." This signals that you're finished. Those listening can respond "Thank you for sharing."

Some Guidelines:

- You may share as little or as much as you feel comfortable
- Anyone may "pass," but keep in mind that growth happens through vulnerability
- This is not a time to offer advice, try to fix, or tell stories about your own similar experiences; put your "fit-it-hat" away
- "Openness requires a degree of brokenness, and may be difficult and painful." –Ian Marcus Corbin
- "The secret to community lies in the way we let other people get through to us and the way we move out of ourselves. This is, of course, the mystery of spirituality, of vulnerability, and powerlessness. When a person on a serious inner journey to their own vulnerability is also in immediate contact with the vulnerable world, then some form of community will almost always result." –Richard Rohr, CAC Meditation 5/4/20

II. Two Minute Appreciation Story:

Each group member takes a turn sharing (in as close to two minutes as possible) an event, interaction, or something they experienced that resulted in their feeling gratitude and/or joy. This can be a story that happened recently or a long time ago. Don't be worried about "topping" each other's stories or that your story is simple as being glad to be with your dog. What's important is that it made you feel appreciation/joy in a way that is unique to you. As with Checking In, finish by saying, "I'm in."

It's good to include naming not just the event and the emotions but also how your body felt as you experienced it (laughing, crying, clapping, heart pounding, etc.) Sharing in this way does two things: 1) By connecting our body to our experience and emotions, we use both sides of our brain simultaneously (2) Sharing appreciation raises joy and activates our brain's "relational circuits," making us ready to connect with others in a constructive and meaningful way.

Joy is not a fickle, fleeting happiness – it's a pervasive sense of well-being and satisfaction. It's like a river of delight flowing beside us (Ps. 36:8). Feelings of joy come and go, but a demeanor of joy, with related positive thoughts, choices, and attitudes, remains when we participate in God's kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy (Rom. 14:17).

III. Listening To Jesus:

During this time, the group members decide on an amount of time to be silent (we recommend 5-10 minutes if possible) reflecting on what was shared using an open question directed at Jesus, listening for his response. You could use some general questions such as

“Jesus, what would you like to say to us right now?”

“Jesus, what is it you would like us to know (about...)?

“Jesus, what would you like to say to your church?”

Take a moment to quiet yourselves and direct your thoughts towards Jesus as you ask the question. Sometimes taking long, deep breaths can help. As you listen, take note of spontaneous thoughts that come to you –writing them down is very helpful. Do not judge them or stop to try and figure out if they’re from Jesus, just let them flow. Perhaps a song, Scripture verse or passage comes to mind, or you may get a picture or image. Pay attention also to feeling you experience. Once the designated listening time is done, come back together and share what you heard and or saw. Do not feel discouraged or pressure to make something up if you did not “get” anything. This is a skill that gets better with practice, so just enjoy the experiment. If you didn’t hear anything or feel that what you heard was too personal, feel free to “pass”.

We often preface our sharing with “This could be the Lord, or it could just be me.” (No “thus saith the Lord” decrees.) It is the burden of community to help us discern if what we heard aligns with Scripture and what sounds congruent with what God might say to us. Words for a specific person should be shared carefully and openhandedly. We can be sure that harsh, demeaning, critical thoughts are not from the Lord, who is our Shephard and treats us kindly and compassionately.

- “People who understand and warmly desire to hear God’s voice will want to hear it when life is uneventful just as much as when they are facing trouble or big decisions.” (Willard, Hearing God, 258)

IV. Closing Round

- Take a moment to reflect on your time together. What did you notice? What are you grateful for? What did you feel? What is your takeaway? What did you observe in the group? Where did God show up?
- Take turns sharing one or two things that you are taking away from your time together. After your time together, continue to reflect on that, asking the Lord what might be significant about that for you.
- End with a prayer of gratitude for what the Lord revealed during your time and for His presence with you.