

Leader Guide



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Mission

Communities @ Grace provide a place to gather together to apply spiritual practices to our lives with the goal of transformation into Christlikeness.

# Why are Communities important?

The very beginning of the church in Acts involved people coming together in small groups to eat, pray, share their lives, learn how to grow in their faith and be deeply connected with others of like mind. We are trying to carry out this picture in our Communities @ Grace groups.

On Sundays we meet, worship in song, and hear from the Word of God. One thing that is missing during this time is gathering in a small community where we do life alongside one another as we mature in Christ. Our Communities provide the depth needed for all believers to progress in our spiritual walk personally and with others.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we learn that the Church is the “body” of Christ. We each have different gifts and ways of sharing how God designed us. In our groups we want to focus not just on individual growth, but also on how all members of a Community add their attributes to help the group grow deeper in love with God and each other. Because we want to grow individually and as members of a group, we view Communities @ Grace as the current primary focus of discipleship at Grace Community Church.

What are Communities @ Grace?

*Communities @ Grace are small groups of 10-12 adults who gather weekly to grow in relationship with each other and are committed to helping each other grow in their relationship with God. The foundation of all communities is the love and grace God has for us, and the extension of that to our Community.*

* For all adults all ages, all are mixed ages and stages
* Meet weekly for 2 hours
* Every Community will meet together for a minimum of one year
* Each Community member may have a trial period of 3 weeks, to make sure the Community is a good fit. If it is not, the member can contact the Community Leadership Team to discuss a change

Goals of Communities @ Grace

* Active growth in faith and relationship with Jesus, through practicing the way of Jesus together at Community and individually at home
* Grow in the knowledge and application of His Word, discipling each other weekly at Community
* Build deeper relationships with other members of your Community
* Get involved with your Community in serving together at church, and with outreach needs in the surrounding community

Our primary goal is to see *changed lives* in our groups. If we don’t see fruit from our time together then we have failed in our primary goal. Our groups should not be just a social time or a time for prayer and learning about scripture, but a time of change where we practice the lessons each week so they impact our entire life as a believer.

How do Communities @ Grace fit into GCC spiritual life?

There are a variety of men and women’s gatherings and studies at GCC, many of which are bible study or service focused. Communities emphasize *practicing* what we know and learn from scripture.

Traditionally, discipleship focuses on learning from the Bible in a way that focuses on what we know over time. In our groups we take a different approach in that the emphasis is on *practicing* what we know and learn. To help you understand the differences, review the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Bible Study** | **Community** |
| Leader is often responsible for content, so needs some knowledge on content. Leader needs to be prepared to discuss new content each week and often takes on other roles in the group | Leader is provided with content, and leader facilitates the content, creating less pressure on the leader. People in the group take on needed roles in the life of the group. |
| Interpret the Bible together | Practice connecting in relationship with God together and separately |
| Depending on bible study style, often requires leader and sometimes member study during the week | Entire group spends time during the week practicing the topic presented each week |
| Gain more biblical knowledge | Emphasis on practicing being like Jesus |
| Emphasis on the mind. The more you know the more you are growing in your walk with the Lord | Focus on whole person. Desire is to help believers apply knowledge to who they are emotionally, spiritually, physically. |

Communities are focused on *spiritual transformation*, meaning they participate in a discussion together based on biblical teaching, and then encourage one another and offer weekly accountability in order to spur each other on in growing to be more like Jesus.

What is a Grace Community Leader Committing to?

**In Relationship to Grace Leadership:**

* Regular attendance of Grace Sunday Gatherings
* Commitment to being trained and coached as a leader
* Support the team verbally and by actions or if there are issues bring them to the team to be resolved

**In Your Personal Life:**

* Modeling a life of Christlikeness
* Modeling a life of Emotional Health
* Developing your personal spiritual life
* Praying for your Community

**In Your Community:**

* Living as the shepherd of your Community, guiding and correcting gently
* Weekly sharing a meal, communion and facilitating discussion with your Community
* Fostering deep, interpersonal relationships with your Community
* Leading your Community through the Practices, Family, and Outreach
* Creating an Environment for your Community to grow as Family
* Leading your Community in confronting sin and conflict
* Leading your Community through decision making processes
* Sharing leadership and raising up leaders whenever possible, including sharing roles in the Community with members
* Taking time to regularly evaluate the health of your Community
* Encouraging accountability as people try to apply the lessons. If no one is doing the homework, do your best to discover why and try to resolve the issue(s). Let the leader team know if changes are needed in the lessons or other materials.

# How are Communities structured?

## Communities @ Grace Leadership Team

Communities are overseen by the Pastor of Small Group Community (Rhonda Patrick), who provides direction to all groups. In addition, there is a team that provides support and training for all groups under the pastor’s direction. Community Leaders are welcome to contact the Pastor of Small Group Community at any time to set up a meeting. The pastor will connect one-on-one monthly with each leader.

## Monthly Rhythm

*Week 1-3, Discipleship Weeks:* Focus on discipleship through weekly guides

*Week 4, Family Week*: Focus on time together and relax and get to know each other better. It is not a week off, but a time get to know each other in a less structured way.

## Weekly Rhythm

The team makes available to the leader a weekly guide that provides guidance to introduce and practice the weekly topic. A full example of a weekly guide is in the appendix, but the structure assumes a two-hour meeting time.

 *(Example: Community meeting time 6:30pm-8:30pm)*

 **6:15pm:** Arrive, set up food.

**6:30pm:** Begin serving food and enjoy a time of fellowship together, at the end of the meal time, practice communion together

 **7:15pm:** Review last week’s practice, and any successes or challenges each
 individual may have had

 **7:25pm:** Discussion and learning

 **7:55pm:** Do new practice together

 **8:10pm:** Discuss how to practice individually during the week

 **8:20pm:** Prayer and praise time, pray for each other

# What GCC will provide to leaders

The leadership team is listed on the provided contact list. They provide the following for each group:

* Pastoral leadership
* Weekly guides
* Leadership development
* Monthly coaching meeting with Rhonda Patrick, Pastor of Small Group Community

Our goal is to have an adequate connection with each Community leader to develop them to feel comfortable leading their group and dealing with any issues that may occur. We want leaders and Communities to be healthy, growing people who are growing in relationship with God and each other.

# What do we ask of leaders

You have a very important role in the life of people at GCC and the Community you lead. As leaders of Communities @ Grace, you are shepherding the hearts of those that have joined your Community.

# Role of the leader and members in the group

Your role as the leader is to facilitate the Community each week, but the guides we provide can be shared with others who can lead lessons. Your role is to keep an eye on the overall health of the Community and make changes as needed. To help you, we strongly suggest that members of your Community take on the following roles that you will need to provide support with initially. This helps members take on ownership and shared responsibility. This is a giving and receiving opportunity.

## Host

The host provides a place for the community to meet each week. Some groups meet in the same location each week and others change it each week. The leader can host meetings, but it is not an obligation.

## Meal Coordinator

This person comes up with potluck ideas for your Community and coordinates a menu. Your Community can discuss how this should be done to fit your Community’s needs.

## Prayer Coordinator

This person leads the group’s prayer activities.  We would like the time to focus on how each person will apply the lesson practice each week. There is a time and place for work, health and other needs, but try to focus on application of the content. We recommend that the prayers should be written down and some groups provide a journal purchased from Dollar Tree store.

## Communion Coordinator (January 2023)

The Communion Coordinator will lead Communion time each week, and provide the materials and cups to use.

## Outreach Coordinator

Our expectation is that each group would commit to doing 2-3 serving projects per year as a group. We have a list of places to get connected to serving outside of GCC and will also help with opportunities within GCC.

## Family Fun Coordinator

This person plans regular family fun nights for the community to enjoy together

Support for Leaders

**Regular Gatherings |** The Communities @ Grace leadership team, and our Pastor of Small Group Communities will plan regular gatherings available for all community leaders to attend to give feedback, receive support, and enjoy being together.

**Coaching |** The Pastor of Small Group Communities will provide monthly coaching sessions for each leader. These sessions are for personal growth, problem solving, or other needs the leader has.

**Ministry Leader |** Rhonda Patrick is our Pastor of Communities, and is available for support by phone at 503-492-9966 ext. 105, cell phone 503-318-3140 or by email at rhondap@gracecc.net.

**Church Elders & Pastoral Staff** | Our Elders and Pastoral Staff are eager and willing to help and support you as Community leaders! Please visit us at gracecc.net/team for specific contact information.

**HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

Conflict is a reality. Therefore, to deny that conflict exists is to deny reality. Great relationships and difficult relationships face the same tough issues. What makes the difference is how they deal with it. So, what is the process of healthy conflict resolution.

**Typical Responses**

**Battleship:** This is where something bothers me or makes me angry and I immediately blow up at the person. This doesn’t resolve anything at all and causes a lot of damage.

**Submarine:** When I’m hurt, bothered, or angry I just stuff it inside and try to act like nothing happened. This is not as visible at the first reaction but just as damaging.

**\*Note: Both are dysfunctional.**

**Step Towards Resolving It:** Choose not to react but to respond. Taking time to think it through for just a few seconds. Then stepping towards the person to resolve the issue in the best way possible.

**Mental Open-Door Policy:** Believe in them, be committed to them, but talk to them. Truth without grace is not truth and grace without truth is not grace.

**A HEALTHY CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS**

Take a legitimate concern, to the legitimate person, at a legitimate time, in a legitimate way, for a legitimate reason.

**Legitimate Concern:** Usually what we do is to ignore the problem and hope it goes away. That is very unhealthy and doesn’t work. What happens usually is that things get worse. So, determine if it is something that needs to be dealt with (which is usually the case) or if it is some issue that you have where you get bugged about things that don’t really matter.

**Legitimate Person:** The legitimate person is not your other friends, co-workers or family members! It is that person. So, believe the best in them and go and talk with them. Christian gossip is HORRIBLE and DESTRUCTIVE!

**Legitimate Time:** Which is not in a meeting or in front of a bunch of other people. Go to them in private and talk things through with them.

**Legitimate Way:** Believe the best of them and pray sincerely for them. Go to the calmly and express your concerns but let them know you want the best for them and for everyone around them.

**Legitimate Reasons:** And it’s not to get back at them or make them feel bad. It’s to help them be a better person, to relate better with others and to glorify God better.

Characteristics of an effective Community:

* **Openness**: people are willing to share their thoughts on the topic and how the topic impacts them. It also means that each person is willing to listen to others' perspectives without judgment.
* **Confidentiality**: what is said stays in the group. If there are thoughts or concerns expressed in the group they are to be discussed only within the group context. They are not shared with people outside the group unless there is a safety concern.
* **Consistency**: individuals and families are expected to commit to attending meetings each week. Infrequent attendance can reduce the ability for the Community as a whole to get to know and accept one another on a deeper level.
* **Participation**: each person will do their best to share equally as others do also. If one person does not share in the communication or takes too much of the time allowed, then the others are forced to adjust how much they share. The best meetings are those where all participate and are heard from.
* **Acceptance**: we accept the words of each other at face value. We accept where each person is in their biblical journey and encourage each person to move forward in personal growth.
* **Practices:** each person in the Community is committing to actively pursuing spiritual growth through spending time on the provided practices each week, not just at Community, but at home as well.

*When group members share similar expectations of the group, it is more likely to succeed. If anyone’s expectations are consistently unmet, the opportunity for discontent increases. We each need to keep track of our own expectations, but also help others understand theirs when appropriate.*

Things to talk through:

* Meeting frequency: weekly
* Location options: same location each time, different locations
* Refreshments:
	+ Light meal or potluck
	+ Prepared by host, signup list, all members of group?
* Childcare:
	+ No childcare is needed
	+ Locations: at meeting site, family finds childcare at home, multiple families at one members home
	+ How coverage is handled: Parents hire childcare, group contributes to cost of shared childcare, (there are resources available from the church to assist with childcare if needed)

Sample Guide:

**Lament Practice: Week 15| Week of Jan. 30 - Feb. 5**

**Communities @ Grace**

**Overview of the Night:**

 15 Minutes Before Start Time :  Arrive + Set Out Food

 45 Minutes : Welcome, Pray, Eat, + Mingle

 15 Minutes : Review Last Week’s Practice

 45 Minutes : Introduction of Practice + Discussion

 5 Minutes :  Practice for Week Ahead

 10 Minutes : Pray for One Another + Close

**Goal for Week:** This week we begin the study of prayers of lament.

**45 Minutes : Welcome, Pray, Eat, + Mingle**

* How do you express yourself when you experience pure joy?
* What situations can cause you to feel embarrassed?

**15 Minutes : Review of last week’s practice experience**

Reflect on the 3 values:  A desire to be with God and learn from him, do what God teaches me, grow in love and service to all people.  Practice one and share with the group.

**45 Minutes : Introduction of Practice + Discussion**

* When you think of prayer, what comes to mind?

Lament is a practice of prayer outwardly demonstrating your sorrow or regret.  It can include:

* crying out to God to tell him your despair or sorrow
* asking for forgiveness
* seeking his help
* reminding him of the times he has been faithful
* often ending with your promise to give him the glory

God knows that we have “strong feelings” about our life or our regrets.

In both the Old and New Testament we see God’s people pour out laments to him. He values these prayers that will deepen our relationship with Him.  Two thirds of the Psalms are laments.

* Did any of you receive teaching about the use of prayers of lament as you’ve learned to follow Jesus?
* Why might believers avoid using prayers of lament? *(too messy, rude, disrespectful)*

God deserves our reverence and gratitude. He also desires a deep relationship that is authentic and he wants us to bring our deepest needs to him.

Initially you may lament out of anger towards God, and he is ready to hear your true emotions and pain.  We cry out to God because we believe he is our HOPE.  He can change a situation or help guide us as we walk the rocky path, carrying us as needed.

* What are your initial thoughts about using laments in your prayer life?
* What shift in your thinking would help you use prayers of lament?

Acknowledging our situation, naming our feelings and asking for God’s help can have a miraculous effect on our emotional well-being.  Sharing our burdens with the Creator can shift us away from despair and stress.  When we are completely truthful before God we are able to receive his guidance and restore our joy.

Read Psalm 13, then provide a copy of “The Message” (found at the end of this lesson) to each member and have someone read it aloud.

* What is your initial reaction?
* What emotions is David expressing in this passage?
* How does the prayer change from the beginning to the end?

 *(Leader:  the tone changes from accusing God to praising him.)*

**Practice during Group**

* Get into groups of 2 or 3 Take a minute to privately reflect and pick a situation that could be your lament this week. Write it down.
* Each person takes a turn to briefly tell about their situation and the way they feel pain, stress, or despair from the situation.
* No need to offer advice or share a similar experience. Just listen, and if you can, agree to support each other in prayer this week concerning each situation.

**Ways to Practice this Week -** *encourage people to pick one or two to try*

* Pick a Psalm - 10, 22, 38, or 130.  Read it slowly (use several different Bible translations) and note the verse or passage that relates to your lament. Copy it down and talk to God about it every day. How did he speak to you about your situation?
* Journal about one of these topics, note your feelings and how they might be changing as you lament to God and look for hope in the situation:

 *-Something or someone you are struggling with*

 *-An injustice in your life, or in the world*

 *-A grief*

 *-Painful situation or problem in your life*

 *-What outcome do you want in a certain scenario?*

 *-What are your fears?*

* Write a lament or poem about a situation that grieves you.

**10 Minutes :** Pray for One Another + Close

* Consider praying as a whole group or in triads for personal prayer requests.
* End on time, in order to honor everyone’s time.

**Psalm 13 from The Message - Eugene Peterson**

1-2

Long enough, God—

    you’ve ignored me long enough.

I’ve looked at the back of your head

    long enough. Long enough

I’ve carried this ton of trouble,

    lived with a stomach full of pain.

Long enough my arrogant enemies

    have looked down their noses at me.

3-4

Take a good look at me, God, my God;

    I want to look life in the eye,

So no enemy can get the best of me

    or laugh when I fall on my face.

5-6

I’ve thrown myself headlong into your arms—

I’m celebrating your rescue.

I’m singing at the top of my lungs,

I’m so full of answered prayers.