



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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# COMMUNITY GROUPS AT MERCY HILL CHURCH

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Discipleship happens in rows and circles. Community Groups are those circles where we spend time pursuing Jesus together. They are the “glue” that help people get connected and stay connected here at Mercy Hill. They are where community and challenge come together to spur on spiritual growth. Community Groups meet weekly for an average of ten weeks, three times a year. They are typically groups of 10-20 people where relationship, Christ-centered discussion, and prayer are intentionally pursued for the purpose of discipleship.

Community Group Leaders have a key role at Mercy Hill Church. This handbook is an overview of the expectations of a Community Group Leader at Mercy Hill Church. A group member who enters the apprentice process will work under an existing Community Group Leader to develop the skills to lead a group in the areas listed below. Becoming a Community Group Leader isn't a final destination but rather another step in the discipleship process.

# FROM OUR PASTOR

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At Mercy Hill, we are not a church that does Community Groups; we are a church *of* Community Groups. So much of what it means to be a church is expressed during the week as we are in each other's lives. Community Groups are essential for discipleship because in them we build community, bridge the gap between the sermon and our lives, and beg God to move in us and through us. We are not built to be alone, and it is impossible to grow in Christianity without relationships. For Anna and I, our personal experience in groups has been incredible, both in seasons of joy and in seasons of loss and pain.

As the lead pastor of Mercy Hill, I want you to hear directly from me how important groups are. As we say over and over again, discipleship is Word taught, life caught, and it's crucial to flesh out how to apply the Word to our lives week in and week out. Group is where we're held accountable to put sermons into practice and where we truly see life-change happen.

Thank you for investing in a Community Group at Mercy Hill!

**Andrew Hopper**  
**Lead Pastor**

# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER FLYWHEEL

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## CONNECT

Acts 2:42-47 outlines the importance of meeting together, doing life together, seeking the Lord together, praying & praising God together. When group members connect relationally, this creates fertile ground for spiritual growth. Connection can happen naturally, or it can need nurturing. Your job as the group leader is to make connections and to help your group members make connections with other group members. The group leader's role is outlined below:

01

*Create an environment where connection can happen. You set the tone for the relational warmth of your group.*

02

*Plan at least one non-Community Group gathering per session with your group members.*

03

*Connect with your group members outside of group. This could be through text messages, phone calls, emails, or notes. Plan to make a connection with your group members outside of group once a week.*

## CHALLENGE

Once connection has been made, spiritual growth and discipleship can begin through a culture of challenge. 2 Peter 3:18 calls believers to growth in their spiritual journey. It will take intentionality to create a culture of challenge in your group each week. Your role in creating a culture of challenge for your group members is as follows:

- 01** Pray for your group members. The Holy Spirit does the true work of sanctification and growth in the lives of believers. We get to be a part of this process as group leaders while recognizing that our role in this process is complementary. The Holy Spirit produces fruit. We get to facilitate growth. One of the best things you can do for your group members regarding their spiritual growth is pray for them.
- 02** Follow the Community Group Guide provided weekly through the resources tab on your Planning Center Groups page. This Community Group Guide has been prayerfully created each week based on the sermon from the weekend. Utilizing the guide sets the stage for self-reflection, challenge, and growth to take place.
- 03** Consider each part of your group's meeting structure and how you can create a culture of challenge within your group. Comfort can produce complacency. Challenge produces growth.
- 04** Seek the Lord through spiritual disciplines as you lead your group members through a culture of challenge.

## CALL UP LEADERS

Your role as a leader is to identify and call up leaders who will eventually launch a group of their own. Here's how we recommend going about this:

01

1. Be praying for your group members regarding their potential leadership. You're looking for group members who are spiritually warm and relationally warm (Larry Osborne, Sticky Church).

02

2. Have intentional conversations with your group members about entering the apprentice process. Once you've identified a potential leader, have ICNU (I see in you - more information below) conversation with that person or couple.

03

3. Once your group members are in the apprentice process, you'll oversee the training that takes place during your group. Apprentices will need to lead three times during a group session. Each time they lead, you'll give them feedback and fill out this form to let us know how it went.

04

4. Delegate ownership of your group meeting to your group members. This could include hosting, bringing snacks, taking notes during prayer time and even leading the discussion and prayer times. Your goal is to share the responsibility of leadership with your group members to grow in your leadership and develop leaders within your group.

## COMMISSION

Your role as a group leader is incomplete without the goal of raising up and sending out apprentices who will launch new groups! Your role in multiplication of your group is as follows:

### 01

Cast vision for launching groups. This can be both during your group meeting times and one-on-one. Community Groups are one of the primary movers of discipleship at our church. As new people join Mercy Hill, we'll need new leaders to start new groups. Your group members will be some of those leaders!

### 02

Train your apprentices for leadership. We'll send you more information about this process when your group members apply for apprenticeship.

### 03

Commission apprentices who are launching their own groups during the last week of your group before they launch. Determine what would be most meaningful to your apprentices who are launching. Encourage them through prayer, gifts, scripture, and affirmation as they prepare to launch their own Community Group!

# MEETING STRUCTURE

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Community Group meetings are structured with three key elements which we call The 3Bs - building relationships, bridging the gap (between what we know and what we do), and begging God for more through prayer which are described below. We believe these three elements create an optimal environment for discipleship to take place.

## TIME STRUCTURE

### FOR COMMUNITY GROUP MEETINGS

Community Group meeting structure can vary slightly but should typically follow these general guidelines:

- 15 minutes of welcome refreshment time (Build Relationships)
- 25 minutes of discussion time (Bridge the Gap)
- 35 minutes of prayer/accountability time (Beg God for More)
- 15 minutes of closing fellowship/refreshment time (Build Relationships)



## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

A Community Group is a community. This part of your group goes hand and hand with the “connect” step of the Community Groups Flywheel.

Structured environments produce organic relationships. In an ideal Community Group, these relationships will mutually edify all who are involved as we live out our commitment to each other as a true faith family.

To enhance this, Community Group Leaders can create environments outside of the structured group time.

**Community Group Leader tip:** Consider asking one group member to share their testimony each week during this time to help move past small talk and go deeper.

## **BRIDGE THE GAP**

Each gathering will have some time devoted to leading discussion based on the most recent sermon, “Bridging the Gap” between what we know and what we do! This creates a lecture/lab environment where people take what they learned in the sermon and are challenged to apply it to their lives. Discussion guides will be provided each week on Friday for the upcoming week of group gatherings.

*The group leader is responsible for facilitating the discussion time. Each week, the group leader is to read through the Community Group Guide in its entirety to prepare for leadership.*

*Community Group Leader tip: come up with a plan to encourage participation from each group member! Prepare to lead discussion with follow-up questions, assign group members to read scripture, and find ways to include each member of your group in the discussion!*

## **BEG GOD FOR MORE**

We want Community Groups to be filled with prayer. This is where we intercede for each other, our city, our nation, and the world. Prayer points will be provided each week as part of the discussion guide.

*The Community Group leader is responsible for creating an environment of prayer in their Community Group.*

*As we “Beg God for More” through prayer during our group meeting, groups may break into small groups to pray, or break up men/women, etc. Community Groups are to be places where people are praying and being prayed for.*

*Community Group Leader tip: Encourage your group members to ask for prayer requests regarding what is going on in their own lives. It can be easy to ask for prayer for others, and it takes vulnerability and self-awareness to ask for prayer for things we are currently dealing with. We want discipleship to take place which happens through self-reflection and personal growth.*

# COMPETENCIES

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**Competency #1** Create a Hospitable Environment (both physically and relationally.)

Environment is a big deal. We are always assessing our environment. It's important that the environment of the group meeting location and the relational environment (set by the group's leadership) are warm and welcoming.

One super important aspect of creating a hospitable environment and an environment where growth can take place, is managing your group time wisely. Each group meeting is an opportunity for you to steward the resources of time, relationship, and conversation. Managing your group's meeting time and following the suggested structure (The 3 Bs) will create an optimal environment for discipleship to take place. There may be times when you recognize that you need to pivot (e.g. a group member needing more time in prayer or choosing to do a hangout night to focus on building relationships).

*Tip: You have the responsibility and authority to make the final call and pivot as needed. Using emotional intelligence and reading the room will be two skills that will help you make these decisions as they come up.*

**Competency #2** Facilitate Engaging Discussion

Group discussion can bring further clarity to what was taught from scripture through the sermon. Community Group Leaders should not only be able to lead discussions, but they should also be able to do so in a way that draws others in to participate and internalize what is being discussed.

To do this, leaders should first use the group guide to prepare for discussion each week. Leaders should prepare to use the guide as a tool and not a crutch. They should then seek to use emotional intelligence, ask good questions, manage over-sharers and silent group members, and lead through other nuances of facilitating discussions. The main role of the group leader during the "Bridge the Gap" part of your group meeting is to facilitate engaging discussion.

*Tip: Avoid lecturing or teaching. Your group members should be talking more than you during this time!*

### **Competency #3** Create a Culture of Challenge

As Community Group Leaders, you set the tone for each group meeting and create the culture of your group. Group members must be challenged to grow for growth to occur.

The first step in creating a culture of challenge is to know your group members. Knowing your group members will help you know how they need to be challenged to grow. Each of your group members will have unique needs for growth. Developing relationships, asking good questions, and seeking growth in your own life will help you create a culture of challenge where discipleship can take place.

### **Competency #4** Care & Support for Group Members

Your group members will need various levels of care in different seasons. Group members going through significant life changes, loss of a job or loved one, health issues, etc. may need additional care and support.

Your role as a group leader puts you in the unique position of overseeing the support and care of your group members. You are welcome and encouraged to delegate this support to other group members (such as asking one of your group members to put together a meal train). Please keep your Shepherding Elder updated on care needs within your group as they come up.

Occasionally, situations will arise that require the involvement of your Shepherding Elder and/or Campus Pastor.

**Prayer:** One aspect of care and support for group members is praying for your group members inside and outside of your group meeting time.

*Tip: Text groups and group messaging can be an extremely helpful way to communicate requests and prayers quickly and in real time. Find what works best for your group!*

**Confidentiality:** Another aspect of caring for and supporting your group members is creating a culture of confidentiality. You as the leader should exemplify and uphold this value for the protection and care of your group members.

*Tip: Share at the beginning of each group session (and repeat as needed), that what is shared within your group, stays within your group (unless someone is at risk of hurting themselves or someone else).*

## **Competency #5** Raise Up Leaders for Multiplication

**Identify Potential Leaders:** One of the primary goals of your group leadership is to multiply your group through raising up apprentices who will be sent out to launch their own Community Groups.

The church requires that leaders raise up other leaders who will raise up other leaders. It should be the focus of every group leader to not only identify leaders but to help them develop further in their leadership ability.

How do you identify a potential Community Group Leader? You want to be looking for spiritual warmth and relational warmth (*Larry Osborne, Sticky Church*). This could look like any or some combination of the following:

### ***A spiritually warm group member is one who....***

- Participates in group discussion with insight and authenticity.
- Is willing to pray for other group members aloud during prayer time.
- Admits struggle while pursuing God.
- Reminds other group members of truths found in scripture.

### ***A relationally warm group member is one who...***

- Warmly interacts with other group members.
- Remembers key details in the lives of other group members and asks about them.

You can start the process of developing leaders from the first day your group meets! We suggest doing this in the following ways:

**A** **Delegate Responsibility:** You can start the process of raising up leaders from day one by sharing the responsibility of group leadership with your group members! Delegate bringing snacks, taking notes during prayer time, and even leading the group discussion to your group members. Remember that engagement drives attendance. Your group members will feel ownership in their group and be more likely to participate and eventually lead groups of their own if they see this model of leadership from you.

**B** **ICNU (I see in you) Conversations:** Once you've identified a potential leader in your group, the first step is to have an ICNU conversation with them. An ICNU conversation is one that intentionally encourages and calls out the qualities that you see in a group member. It also calls them to what you see in their future regarding the good work that God has in store for them. This could be in general or specifically regarding the Community Group Leader Apprentice process.

### Here are some examples of ICNU:

“Mary, the way you responded when Lizzy was expressing what she was going through during her divorce was incredibly empathetic and biblically sound. You embodied Christ’s love for her while teaching her to apply the truths found in God’s word. I could see you leading a group where people feel incredibly cared for and encouraged because of your leadership.”

“Bob, the way that you have helped hold Steven accountable during our prayer time shows me that you care for people enough to remember the details of their lives and ask them tough questions. I could see you leading in a Community Group someday where people are challenged to grow and disciplined well.”

# A NOTE ABOUT IDENTIFYING AND DEVELOPING APPRENTICES:

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We know that not every one of your group members will become Community Group Leaders. We recognize that some of your group members who want to become leaders may not be fit for leadership and others may be great leaders, but a challenging season or capacity gets in the way. Your job is simply to have ICNU conversations and invite group members who you see as spiritually and relationally warm into the apprentice process. These conversations should happen individually or with couples over the phone or in-person.

# CULTURE

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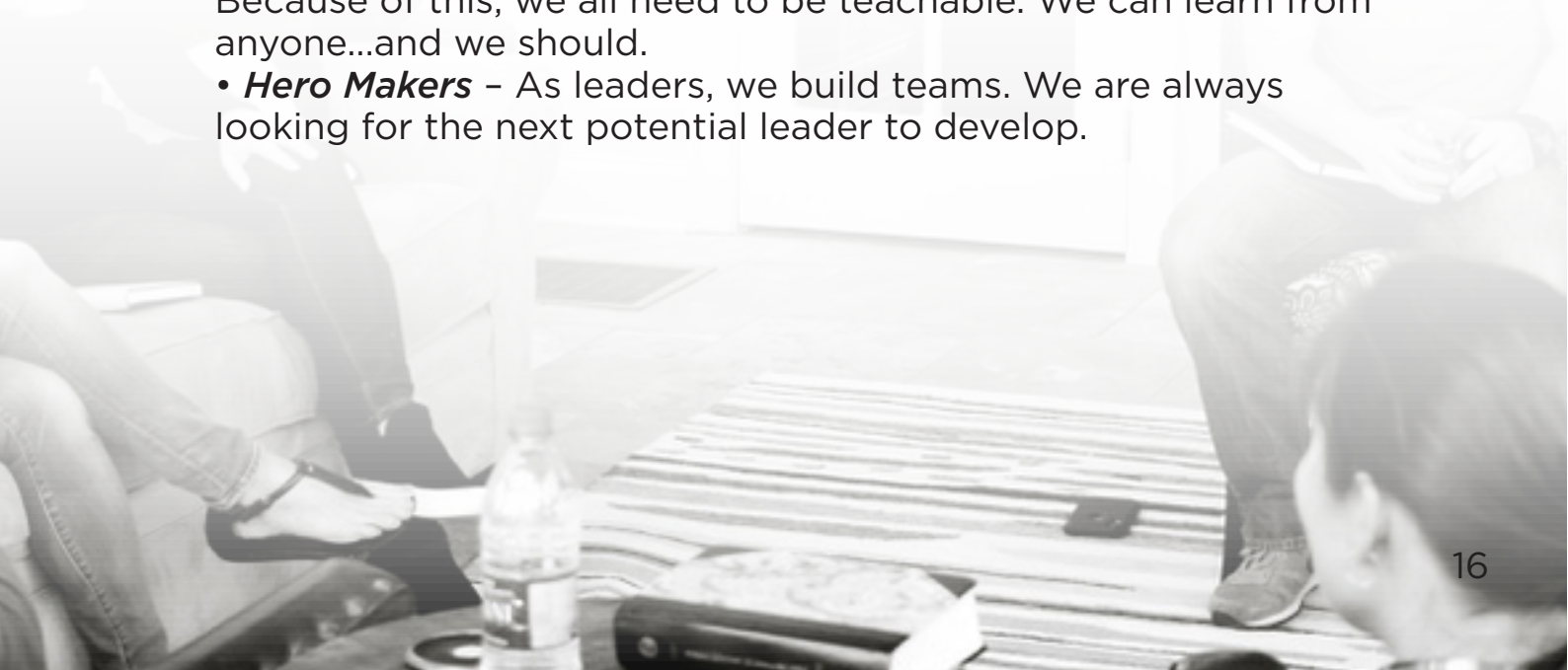
## QUALIFICATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP

- Each Community Group Leader will be a member in good standing with Mercy Hill Church.
- Each Community Group Leader will support and commit to the Discipleship Flywheel (Gather, Groups, Give, Go) as the pathway of discipleship at Mercy Hill Church.
- Each Community Group Leader will pass a background check prior to entering the apprentice process. (If the background check is not passed, a conversation with the Shepherding Elder or Campus Pastor who oversees that group will need to confirm that the person is fit for leadership at Mercy Hill Church knowing that group members and potentially vulnerable populations will be under their care.)

## CULTURE OF COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS

Community Group Leaders at Mercy Hill Church will have characteristics that both reflect Jesus and create a culture of warmth and growth for their group members. Here are some key characteristics of Community Group Leaders:

- ***Hungry for Growth*** – Personally, for Mercy Hill Church, and the ministry of the Church worldwide.
- ***Happy and Fun to be Around*** – Ministry can be super serious. It's important to have leaders who can joke around and have fun.
- ***Humble*** – We have a high feedback culture here at Mercy Hill. Because of this, we all need to be teachable. We can learn from anyone...and we should.
- ***Hero Makers*** – As leaders, we build teams. We are always looking for the next potential leader to develop.



# RESOURCES

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Community Group meetings are structured with three key elements (The 3 Bs): building relationships, bridging the gap (between what we know and what we do), and begging God for more through prayer which are described below. We believe these three elements create an optimal environment for discipleship to take place.

1. ***Read the Community Group Leader Handbook*** (this handbook).
2. ***Complete Community Group Leader Apprentice Application*** - Community Group Leader Apprentice Application.
3. ***Watch your email for an official request to run a background check*** (only needed if you haven't been background checked through MCH or if your check has expired).
4. ***Meet with Campus Pastor, Associate Campus Pastor, Community Groups staff member, or Elder*** for interview about apprenticing.
5. ***Apply for church membership if not already a member*** - Covenant Membership Application:  
<https://www.cognitofrms.com/MercyHillChurch1/covenantmembershipapplication>
6. ***Purchase and read Sticky Church*** by Larry Osborne.
8. ***Listen to the "Abide"*** sermon series by Pastor Andrew. Here's the link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL5W6fMLzxdt9VCSwybSR6WZ4PBmEOi-oD>
9. ***Lead your Community Group*** three times during this session - coordinate with your group leaders to schedule these.
10. ***Conversation with Campus Pastor, Elder, or Community Group***

# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER RESOURCES

## Community Group Leader Resources:

### **Online Resources**

Planning Center Online – for weekly guides and sermon manuscripts (found under the “Resources” tab on Groups), taking attendance, updating group roster, etc. Community Group Leader Resource Page.

### **Administrative Resources**

Community Groups Staff – for questions concerning planning center and group logistics.

### **Coaching Resources**

Shepherding Elder – for helping you think through spiritual issues within your group, checking on your spiritual health.

*This relationship will have its basis in coaching and encouragement but is also the primary means for Elders to shepherd the flock. When issues of church discipline, absence, major life change, or celebration occur in the life of church members, they should be passed by the Community Group Leader to the Shepherding Elder promptly.*

### **Pastoral Resources**

Campus Pastor - for yearly check-in for spiritual health; coaching for larger spiritual issues.



## **EXPECTED RHYTHMS**

### ***Weekly:***

- Read the Leader Study and do the assignments in the Community Group Guide each week (about 15-30 minutes per week).
- Prepare to lead your group members through The 3 Bs during each group meeting (about 15-30 minutes weekly).
- Lead your group meeting (1.5+ hours per week)
- Connect with group members outside of group (time can vary)
- Pursue spiritual growth through spiritual disciplines.
- Seek health in all areas of life including spiritual, emotional, familial, relational, mental, physical, and financial.

### ***Monthly:***

- Connect with your Shepherding Elder about potential leaders, care needs, and how your group is going.

### ***Quarterly:***

- Attend the All Leader Gathering (two-hour gatherings, three times a year – winter, spring, fall)
- Plan one informal gathering for your group members.

### ***Yearly:***

- Attend the Group Leader Retreat in November of each year.
- During summer break, re-read the Community Group Leader Handbook (this handbook) and commit to a new year (fall, winter, spring sessions) of group leadership or let us know that you plan to take a break.

# FINAL WORDS

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**2 Timothy 1:12-14** - “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. 13 Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

As you go into the apprentice process or continue in your leadership as a Community Group Leader, it’s important to remember that as a follower of Jesus, you don’t lead in your own strength. You will experience many moments of joy leading others in your Community Group, and you will likely also experience moments that cause you to draw close to the Lord as you are reminded of your own weaknesses and your need for His strength. Take a moment to reflect on the verses above as you trust in God as the ultimate shepherd of your group (vs. 12), as you follow the pattern of faith in Christ in love (vs. 13), and as you cooperate with God through the Holy Spirit to lead your group (vs. 14).