

Life Groups

Mornington
Presbyterian Church

www.morningtonpres.org.nz



Overview

Small groups have been part of the life of the church since the beginning when Christians met regularly together in homes. They have a strong place in the history of the church and they are the context in which millions of Christians rejoice and learn and serve today. Sunday morning worship provides some valuable opportunities but small groups are much better for much of what we are called to do as Christians.

We are keen to grow our small group ministry because there are so many advantages – advantages for you and for those you can serve as part of the life of the group. This leaflet is designed to introduce you to what we envisage and to talk about some of the blessings.

Small groups are healthiest when they give attention to four relationships:

- The relationships within the group
- Our relationships with God
- Our relationship with the church
- Our relationship with the world

Each dimension adds a richness to the life of the group and focuses us on being who God has called us to be. Groups might differ in how they do these things and the priority they put on each one, giving rise to lots of different styles of group. Some might focus more on serving. Others might major on Bible study or fellowship. Even so, we will encourage each group to incorporate each of the four relationships, in some way.

Our mission, as a church, is to help people follow Jesus. Small groups are one of the absolutely best ways of doing that.

Please read this material and spend time asking God about your involvement in an MPC small group. We would love to have you on board.

Doing Life Together

Like lots of other churches, we have chosen to call our small groups “Life Groups”.

Jesus came to offer us life – abundant life and eternal life. Life Groups are an ideal context for discovering that life, as we study, have fun, pray and serve together. We need each other. The church is a body with many different parts. Others have skills and spiritual gifts that we don’t have, and we have skills and spiritual gifts that they don’t. Imagine being part of a loving group when you are in a tough place and having your friends pray for you and offer practical help. Likewise, when we are able to help someone in the group, we discover more of that life that Jesus offers.

“Life Groups” is a good name for another reasons. In our groups, we can “do life together”. We do far more than meet for a weekly discussion. We:

- journey with the person who is struggling
- go 10-pin bowling, or have a board games afternoon
- wallpaper a room
- grapple with how to resist temptation
- invite others for a meal
- pray for unsaved friends

In other words, we become part of a community that shares life together.

In our world, people are often isolated and lonely. Maybe you feel that too. You can know the blessings of being part of a close, loving community that is also modelling something that might be very appealing to outsiders.

Relating to the group

As we have already mentioned, many of the blessings result from being part of a close, caring community.

Life Groups are small enough for everyone to be known. That doesn't mean just knowing each other's names but knowing about that person's joys and hopes, as well as their fears and struggles. It means being able to pray intelligently and "bear one another's burdens".

It might mean you and a friend check in each day over the phone or that you gather to watch the rugby. If a crisis occurs, the message can spread quickly and some of you can be on the doorstep in moments. Maybe someone else in the group owns a trailer and can help get rid of your rubbish. Life groups celebrate birthdays and special events.

It will mean having older Christians alongside you, that you can learn from, as you serve together.

There are many "one another" commands in the New Testament and Life Groups are an ideal context for putting those into practice and for being blessed as others are obedient to them.

Belonging

Relating to God

Our growth to spiritual maturity is a priority for God. Maybe you would like to be a stronger Christian, with a better understanding of the Bible, praying more fervently and living the Christian life you read about in books (as well as in the Bible.)

We can grow a certain extent on our own but it is nothing compared to the growth that is possible when we are in community. God has designed us to grow as we give and receive. Proverbs 27:17 says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."

Again, the body image is important, as is the teaching about spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 14:12 talks about prioritising the spiritual gifts that build up the church. Discovering and using your spiritual gifts might be the next step in your spiritual growth. You will also grow as you are ministered to.

But maybe that is not the next step for you. Maybe the blessings in store for you are in the areas of discovering the secrets of effective prayer, or learning to hear God's voice, or allowing the Holy Spirit to transform some aspect of your character so that you are more like Jesus.

Whatever it is, a Life Group can be an incubator for your spiritual growth.

Growing

Relating to the church

We do not want our Life Groups to be exclusively inward looking, serving only their members. Inward-looking groups tend to stagnate. There are two ways in which Life Groups can look beyond themselves: serving the church and reaching out to the community.

Our Life Groups are, of course, part of the church as a whole and there are myriad opportunities for your group to bless others in the church. We would like each group to serve in some way. Rather than burn out a few busy people, we want to share the load and give opportunities to bless and to be blessed. Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. We want you to know those blessings.

How that is done will depend on the strengths of each group. Maybe your group could lead a service occasionally or pick up the responsibility of setting up for church each week. Maybe you could be the prayer team to support the children's ministry. Or maybe you are good at preparing Bible study material that others can use. Maybe your group could be on a cleaning roster along with others. Maybe you could organise a social evening.

Your Life Group is your immediate family but we are all brothers and sisters and it is a joy to share the load and serve one another.

Serving

Relating to the world

Perhaps the greatest untapped blessings are in reaching out to our world. Jesus commanded us to *go* and promised to be with us when we do. The greatest blessings are found when we are on the cutting edge, really engaging in the mission we have been given and having to rely on God.

Ordinarily, that would sound intimidating but it is doable as part of a group. We certainly want our groups to be conscious of our community and, by the grace of God, to make a difference.

Life Groups can work together, using the variety of spiritual gifts within the group. They could, for example, organise a street party. Someone might do the administration, others might extend the invitations, while others cook and still others make their home available.

Or a group might become a regular part of the local gardening club or offer to establish a garden at the school. The possibilities are limited only by our imagination.

Step One might be serving in some way, thereby showing the love of God and building relationships. That is crucially important but we are more than a service club and we want more for people than that.

Our bigger desire is to see people saved. We will never be happy serving but not saving, and so a group might run a small Alpha course or simply invite a new friend into the Life Group with the expectation that there, he/she will see Christianity in action. It is healthy when groups are always thinking about who they can invite to join them.

Imagine your Life Group throwing a party because someone has become a Christian, just as God does each time a sinner repents.

Outreach

What now?

Here is what we would like to do.

1. Give you information about our proposed Life Groups.
2. Find out who is interested.
3. Resource leaders
4. Get cracking

Because we would like each Life Group to look outwards to the world, it makes sense to group people with a particular outreach interest, together in the same group. Please let us know if you have an interest in reaching out to a particular community e.g. your street or young mums or Asian immigrants or the local chess club.

If you don't, we will do our best to form groups depending on your preferred time of day, locations etc. and we will ask those groups to then discern what their mission might be.

So, please fill in a printed response form or fill in the form on our website. The next step is yours.

If we can help, please do contact Peter or Rachel or an elder or a friend. That is what being family is all about.