The Way Church

Small Groups At The Way Church

Prologue

Thank you for being willing to pastor a Small Group at *The Way Church*. Although not everyone is called to full-time pastoral ministry, we believe that many are graced to pastor others. We trust that for this season, God has called you to shepherd a small group and He will empower you to serve and strengthen the people placed in your care. We are so grateful for your willingness to say yes.

As a staff, we feel responsible to equip you for the work of ministering to others. This handbook is designed to help you understand the role of a small group pastor at *The Way Church,* explain our small group model in detail, and point you toward additional resources that will serve you as you pastor others over the next year. Our hope is that you experience a vibrant ministry environment where people can grow in their relationship with God, connect with one another, and serve the city together.

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Pillars of Small Groups

Connect. Grow. Serve.

Each Small Group is centred around the values of **Connect, Grow, and Serve**. Our desire is to create environments where we connect with other followers of Jesus, grow in our discipleship to Him, and, out of a place of deep connection with God and other believers, join in God's work by serving those around us.

Here are the three values in more detail:

1. Connect

Connect involves the opportunity to meet others, deepen relationships, and nurture a space where people feel seen and known by others. In a lonely city, we don't want people to "do life" alone. Because connection is a deep value, we encourage leaders to make space each week for conversation and unhurried interaction. When possible, we also invite leaders to initiate separate social gatherings for the sake of relationship building and memory making as a group.

2. Grow

The value "grow" involves fostering an environment where people can deepen their discipleship to Jesus. Each small group at The Way is centred around the person of Jesus, the written word of God, and an openness to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We want small groups to be more than social events—they are dynamic ministry settings where individuals take real steps in their relationship with Christ.

3. Serve

The value "serve" involves Small Groups engaging in some sort of serve project on a regular basis (monthly, or every six weeks). We want to make sure our groups don't get insular and so to help with this we create practical ways for Small Groups to meet needs in the city. 40+ Small Groups engaged in 40+ different service projects can make a real difference in neighbourhoods throughout the year.

Small Group Team

Role Descriptions

Every Small Group at The Way will have a Small Group pastor and a team of **5** other members serving in unique roles. The Small Group Pastor may take on one of the roles described below, but not more than one. (eg. some pastors also play the role of the host).

The Benefits of a Five-Role Model

A. Shares the planning and problem-solving, while letting people use their unique gifts and serve in an area of passion or interest.

B. Allows each team member to focus exclusively on their role and perform it to the best of their ability.

C. Provides a committed core from which Small Groups can grow and thrive.

D. Allows people to serve at different levels of Christian maturity

E. Creates opportunities for people to develop in leadership and sets the stage for Small Group multiplication.

1. DISCUSSION FACILITATOR

The primary purpose is to make space for people to share, ask questions, and engage with the content in a personal way. The discussion facilitator often works with the small group pastor to make a plan for discussion each week. One of the most important things about this role is being sensitive to what kind of discussion will actually help people open up and process meaningfully. In our experience this often happens best in groups of 2-3 as opposed to a large group setting.

- Review the discussion guide before Small Group and choose what questions will work best with the group (10 minutes to 1 hour, depending on your personality, confidence level & the weekly content / assignment)
- Set the stage for the discussion i.e. Introducing theme and video, reading text for the week
- Walk people through the discussion questions, inviting people to share, and asking follow-up questions to engage others
- Ensure there are other discussion leaders ready to lead when

breaking people up into small groups. This could be the Small Group pastor, or another trusted member of the group.

2. CONNECT & FOLLOW-UP

The hope for our Small Groups is that no one falls through the cracks!

- Before Small Group: Send out weekly Small Group emails with that night's topic and other information that needs to be relayed. Eg. Youtube link to watch the sermon online
- After Small Group: Follow up with first-time guests (phone call, email, or text thanking them for coming)
- Take attendance on Planning Center after each meeting
- Check in on group members who have stopped attending
- Organise and administer home drop-offs (gifts, food, notes, etc - responding to both celebration and grief that members face throughout the year)
- Optional: Keep track of birthdays in the group

3. HOST

The host role is responsible for opening up their home/space for the Small Group to meet. Our desire is that everyone feels welcome. Sometimes small group pastors host, but this is often held by someone other than the small group pastor.

- In charge of letting people in and being at home prior to the start time
- In charge of preparing the environment. A welcoming space matters more than a perfect one. Space that is simple, clean, and prepared with care is a real gift for the group. This includes thinking about furniture and seating.
- In charge of setting ambiance and preparing the space (i.e playing music, lighting candles, comfortable lighting, fireplace etc) These tasks could be shared with the hospitality role.
- In charge of setting up the TV.
- In charge of assigning person to letting people in at the front door / buzz people up

4. HOSPITALITY

Our desire is that everyone feels welcomed in, whatever their questions or background.

- Responsible for organizing food/drink/games/icebreaker activities. This person is not in charge of bringing food every week! The role requires creating a schedule and organizing group members to share the load of bringing snacks/drinks each week. The role is ensuring snacks are brought.
- Although games & ice breakers aren't required each week, we encourage the hospitality person to organize this aspect of Small Group as well. The hospitality volunteer can prepare this aspect on their own, or ask members of the group to help plan activities
- The hospitality team member is also the one who will sometimes organize other activities. (e.g beach hangs, bowling, a group hike etc.)

5. SERVE COORDINATOR

We ask that each group finds regular opportunities to serve together. Often, serve projects are connected to local organisations, however, groups are free to be creative in finding opportunities to serve and bless people in the city. Our dream is that every neighbourhood in Vancouver would be blessed because small groups are serving in every neighbourhood.

- The serve role is responsible for organising regular serving opportunities for the Small Group. These opportunities can happen every 4-6 weeks on the night of Small Group, or alternative days as directed by the Small Group pastor
- The serve role is encouraged to connect with The Way Church staff for support if they need help with ideas/ connections
- The serve role is responsible for organising these opportunities, as well as communicating serve details with the group members

Reference: You will receive a document with serve options to assist in your role, and Jon LeFave can be contacted with any serve related questions.

+ SMALL GROUP PASTOR

The Small Group pastor brings oversight to the Small Group team and overall vision and pastoral leadership to the Small Group. (i.e Prayer, care, next steps, discipleship)

- **The pastor is responsible for filling the 5 small group team roles prior to the launch of their small group.** Although staff often help with this, the pastor's job is to identify people with appropriate gifting and a willingness to serve. It is important for the pastor to build a complimentary team.

- The pastor is responsible for keeping a pulse on group dynamics. Every group is different and groups often shift season to season. The pastor's job includes listening to the relational, emotional, and physical needs of the group. Although we do not ask pastors to respond to all individual needs, we do ask that they work with their team to respond and customise the group in light of who is there and what people are navigating in life and faith.

- The pastor is responsible for maintaining clarity around what the gatherings are for and the pastor is in charge of holding rhythms of reading scripture and prayer in the group (eg. when and how the group will include prayer in weekly Small Group gatherings)

- The pastor is also asked to attend leadership gatherings, team training events and the ministry leaders weekend away Nov. 6-8.

Expectations & Responsibilities of Each Small Group Pastor:

- Each small group pastor signs a **covenant**. The covenant is about a commitment to Christ, the church and personal holiness in pursuit of Jesus. We are not asking for perfection, but for progress in the direction of increasing Christian maturity.

- Each small group pastor commits to **3 leadership gatherings + 2 regional gatherings** with other small group pastors at their site. Pastors are also asked to attend one **weekend away** with all the other ministry leaders at the Way.

- Each small group Pastor commits to a **pastoral check-in meeting** with a member of our Small group lead team on a regular basis (appx every 6 weeks) for personal accountability and care. The goal for this time is to care for you— your life, your relationship with Jesus and your growth as a leader.

- Each pastor is responsible for who is added to the small group. This work is done in sequence with the connect and follow up role, but it at times requires the engagement of our pastoral staff to know whether or not the person should join. Sometimes, the better course of action is for an individual to connect with a pastor staff first, and other times it is best for them to join a different group.

- Each pastor is responsible for **leading a team of 5 volunteers** who help run the Small Group each week. The pastor is responsible for vision casting, caring for the team, and making sure the team knows what is expected of them. Although these team members often have leadership giftings, we do not consider them Way Church leaders and therefore the vetting process is much less rigorous and can be done by the small group pastor.

- Each pastor is asked to attend both an **annual retreat** in November, and each pastor is asked to host an **annual training day** for their whole team in September. These are mandatory events for those signing up to lead groups, as they include important training.

- Small groups provide front-line pastoral care for members of our church. Pastors aren't responsible for pastoring every member of the group individually, however. Such a responsibility might quickly feel overwhelming. What pastors will do is lean in when significant needs arise in the group. This may involve informing our pastoral staff about significant issues and/or crises in the group, if the Small Group pastor needs extra support. Moreover, pastors are also invited to prayerfully consider the spiritual needs of the group, and what healthy next steps might be for individuals in their Small Group. (I.e. those who might consider baptism, those who might want to join an accountability group, etc.)

A Standard Evening of Small Group
At The Way Church

Small Groups at The Way gather on **Sundays, Mondays, and Tuesdays.** Most Small Group evenings will include the elements described below. We do, however, encourage

Small Group pastors to take liberties as they see fit. For example, every so often, the group can have a games night or a worship night instead of the regular Small Group content & format. We strongly encourage creativity, as you discern what would best serve your group—provided the group is primarily following the format below.

Standard:

- Each gathering should aim to be 2 hours long (eg. 7:00-9:00 pm)
- Each gathering should aim to include some sort of relational time (often in the form of an ice-breaker question or "get to know one another" type prompt.)
- Each week scripture is read out loud (most often the teaching text from Sunday)
- Each week groups watch the 10-15 minute Small Group video (recaps the sermon, highlights key community updates and primes discussion)
- Discussion time (questions found in Small Group guide)
- Prayer time (format for this will vary)
- Some sort of food/drink/time to connect at the end

Optional:

- Worship
- Communion
- Liturgical reading
- Testimonies
- Games
- Dinner together
- Kids component

We celebrate pastors discerning the needs of their particular group and adding the above as they see fit. We don't want to inappropriately box leaders in as they seek to strengthen the discipleship of those in their group. We want both alignment and consistency to live alongside diversity of expression.

Small Group Calendar

2026/27

September 2026	**October** 2026	**November** 2026	**December** 2026	**January** 2027
Team Training Night **(6-8) -** *in homes with teams* Small Groups Launch **(13, 14, 15)**	Leadership Gathering **(3)** **this will happen following Team-Day 2026 (in the same location)*	Leaders weekend away. Rockridge Canyon **(6-8)**	Christmas parties with your groups- Last group of the year **(13, 14, 15)** Regional pastors wrap up gathering **(TBD)**	Small groups begin again **(10, 11, 12)**

February 2027	**March** 2027	**April** 2027	**May** 2027	**June** 2027
Leaders Gathering **(3)**		Regional Pastors Gathering **(14)**	Leaders Gathering **(26)**	Small Groups end for the year **(13, 14, 15)** June regional pastors wrap-up **(23)**

Leadership gatherings are designed to equip, encourage, and celebrate leaders at the church. At each gathering, there is teaching, prayer, and time for encouraging one another. We encourage Small Group pastors to prioritize this time together as it informs, unifies, and strengthens leaders across the church.

Pastors Covenant

This covenant outlines commitments that are indicative of mature, Christian discipleship. The overarching context is a Gospel framework saturated with grace and room for failure, set-backs and progressive growth in godliness.

We are not searching for perfection, but progress in the direction of increasing Christian maturity, of which the below commitments are an important sample. More than that, we believe the statements below are an invitation to deep joy and life in Jesus.

With the above in mind, take some time to prayerfully read through this covenant before signing it.

1. **I WILL COMMIT TO GROWING IN MY KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WORD AND THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES** (2 Timothy 3:14-17, Proverbs 27:17, 2 Peter 1:16-21, Psalm 10) I will grow in my knowledge of God's word and in the practice of spiritual disciplines (i.e. prayer, fasting, solitude, study, sabbath, service etc).

Commentary:

We can't lead people where we are unwilling to go. We can't impart to people what we don't possess ourselves. Apart from the practice of spiritual disciplines, Christian leadership becomes an onerous affair— an attempt to irrigate deserts with an empty well or, more positively, trying to water gardens with a dry well. Our desire is to lead out of a depth of intimacy with Jesus. The above statement is a commitment to our own spiritual health, knowing it will impact the spiritual health of others. More than that, spiritual disciplines are about delighting ourselves in the Lord and tasting and seeing that He is good.

2. **I WILL COMMIT TO PURSUING HOLINESS IN MY PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE** (Hebrews 12:14, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Ephesians 5, Romans 6:19, Ephesians 4:20-24) Holiness means both being set apart for the purposes of God and moral purity. Not moral perfection, but the pursuit of moral purity in our thoughts, speech and actions.

Commentary:

In general, the above commitment includes a lifestyle of humility, teachability, confession and repentance. More specifically, holiness includes fleeing sexual immorality, pursuing generosity and justice, guarding our speech, practicing forgiveness, loving our neighbors and enemies, cultivating a heart for the poor, and embracing confession and repentance whenever we fail to do any of the above.

Holiness is not opposed to our long-term happiness. Holiness is about wholeness. Holiness is becoming who you were made to be; holiness is the freedom of the children of God, experienced most fully when our world is liberated from its bondage to sin. In other words, to commit to pursuing holiness is to commit to pursuing our long term joy and wholeness!

3. **I WILL COMMIT TO COMMUNITY** (Gal. 6:2, Romans 15:1-3, Colossians 3:12-15, Hebrews 10:24-25) I am committed to caring for and encouraging my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Commentary:

We were created for a loving relationship with God and one another. As it has been said, relationships may be our greatest source of hurt, but they are also our greatest source of healing. It is not always easy. I only have to *commit* to the community when it gets hard. This commitment means that when conflict arises, I will actively seek resolution and reconciliation with the leaders of the church, or members of my small group/serve team and wider church community. Practically this may look like repenting of our sin and forgiving the sins of others. It involves living out the Gospel of reconciliation with the help of the Holy Spirit. If conflict does arise, the pastoral leadership of the church will always be available for counsel, intervention and prayerful support.

4. **I WILL GIVE GENEROUSLY** (Malachi 3:6-10, Luke 6:38, 2 Corinthians 9:6, Proverbs 3:9, 1 Corinthians 16:2) I will be faithful in doing my part in supporting the ministry of *The Way Church* and/or other non-profits, giving my time and my money according to my ability, as the Bible teaches.

Commentary:

We can't put a percentage on a generous posture, or open-handed, spirit-lead living, but we want to chase after radical generosity that grows our faith as individuals.

Jesus talks about wealth in a large percentage of his parables so as a church we recognize that there can be no real discipleship to Jesus that doesn't have implications for our wealth and generosity. The above is a commitment to being an open-handed person in a tight-fisted culture.

5. **I WILL COMMIT TO MAKING CONNECTIONS AND BUILDING BRIDGES** (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 15:3-31, 2 Corinthians 5:14-21) I will reach out with the message and love of Jesus to the people God has put in my path, and act in the belief that people who have not yet encountered the love of God matter deeply to Him.

Commentary:

One way this commitment is reflected is in our small group ministry. All small groups at The Way are open, or porous groups, where people can come in and out. This is because we want to be on mission with Jesus more than we want to be comfortable, or insular. Therefore, as a leadership team we are committed to being open to connecting with people, building bridges and extending invitations to others.

6. **I WILL SUPPORT THE VISION AND LEADERSHIP OF THE WAY CHURCH** (Acts 20:28, Ephesians 4:11-13, Jeremiah 3:15, 1 Peter 5:2-3, Hebrews 13:7) I will support, with my words and my actions, the vision and the leadership which God has given to The Way church, of which I have a significant part to play. This includes agreement with *The Way Churches'* Statement of Faith, our views on marriage and sexuality and our secondary beliefs on spiritual gifts and empowering women in ministry etc.

Commentary:

This involves a commitment to fulfill the vision of *The Way Church* for ministry. We will seek to implement the vision with our actions and seek to honor the vision with our words. This commitment doesn't mean we can't challenge leadership—to serve in this way is to be a part of leadership at the church. Hard questions are welcome. We believe that constructive push back is not personal, it is simply the process of "iron sharpening iron". If we hope to gain traction with people in leadership positions with authority over us, a basic principle could be: support in public, challenge in private, rather than vice versa. Such an approach builds trust and fosters a healthy environment.

Signature:

Date:

Small Group Support

Lead Team

The small group leadership team exists to help care for you - our small group pastors. We want to provide relational and pastoral touch points for our small group pastors and make sure you feel supported.

These individuals have all led a small group before, and are people we deeply trust to lead with Christlike humility and wisdom. Each of you will have one small group lead team member assigned to you. They will reach out in early September to set up an initial phone call or coffee.

Staff

Staff wise, one of our site pastors will also be assigned to you. If you are in Strathcona you will connect with Jeremy, Fairview you'll connect with Rachel and North Van you'll connect with Jon. If you ever have pastoral concerns about your small group or have bigger questions about doctrine or pastorally sensitive situations, reach out to the pastor of your site.

If you have small group system questions we also have a small group administrator who is responsible for back end management and logistics.

This individual is the same for all sites.

Email katie.karram@thewaychurch.ca with these types of questions or concerns.

How Do I Build My Team?

Our pastors and support staff are here to support you as a Small Group pastor to alleviate the load of building a team. So don't hesitate to reach out.

Here are ways you can build your team:

- Ask people who you know live close to where the group is being held
- Ask people whose interests and giftings line up with a role
- **Reach out to our team at The Way** for help build out your team. The goal is to have your team set before your group goes live.

Appendix 1 | Small Group Model

MODEL:

The Small Group Model was birthed out of prayer, trial and error and through the inspiration of 3 unique models. Learning from these models gratefully influenced and contributed to the development of the Small Groups ministry at The Way.

Inspiration 1: Francis Chan
'We Are Church' Small Group Experience

> The model of Francis Chan and his team is centered around **highly empowered lay leaders**. Each Small Group Pastor must meet a high bar in character and competency.

Inspiration 2: Josh Kelsey
C3 Church, New York

> Josh Kelsey's model emphasises **gathering a team around each leader.** The Small Group leader operates with a team of 5 that are empowered to own an aspect of the Small Group (hospitality, host, discussion, etc.)

Inspiration 3: Jeff Vanderstelt
Doxa Church

> Jeff Vanderstelt leads Doxa church, and they call their Small Groups **'missional communities'.** Their missional communities prioritize serving in the neighborhood they are

based. Each group finds a way to serve people in their neighborhood, which influenced the implementation of the Serve Role in each Small Group at The Way.