



Connect Group Manual

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CONNECT GROUPS

Connect Groups are a part of our ministry at Christ Our Savior Lutheran Church (COS) that aims to help build member connections as we enjoy the privilege of reaching out to each other, our community, and the world with the message of Christ our Savior.

Connect Groups are an aspect of our ministry that is almost entirely led and conducted by the congregation. The pastoral staff does not run the Connect Groups. The pastoral staff does not even plan the Connect Groups. With this being said, the Congregational Assistant will take responsibility for the broad structure of the Connect Groups. This responsibility includes coordinating quarterly schedules, facilitating training for Connect Group leaders, along with organizing group information, and helping to promote the groups. Still, for the most part, this is pure member ministry.

This manual lays out our approach to Connect Groups at COS:

- What their purpose is
- What types of Connect Groups we want to offer
- How they are scheduled
- How you can plan to host a Connect Group

If you have any additional questions about Connect Groups not covered in this manual, please do not hesitate to contact John Dale, the COS Congregational Assistant, at 931-486-3737 or john.dale@coslutheran.com.

WHAT IS A CONNECT GROUP

When you share your life with a community of fellow believers, we call that “fellowship.” St. John writes, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3). When believers are united to God, they are inevitably united to one another also.

This is necessary. God did not design human beings to face life on their own. Instead, he intended for believers to be woven together in a community so that they might encourage one another as together they walk the often difficult path of life. Consider these words of direction from the Scripture, intended for all Christians.

- Be devoted to one another in love. – Romans 12:10
- Encourage one another and build each other up. – 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. – Hebrews 10:24
- Offer hospitality to one another. – 1 Peter 4:9

Connect Groups are one way COS hopes to carry that out.

The purpose of our Connect Groups is to help knit Christians together in a community where Spirit-wrought fellowship can be celebrated.

THE THREE TYPES OF CONNECT GROUPS

Our primary fellowship focus at COS is regularly gathering around the Means of Grace (Hebrews 10:25). We do this frequently through congregational worship services and Bible studies. While a Connect Group could certainly be a Bible Study, it does not necessarily have to be a Bible study. These Connect Groups are meant to help build connections among the people of COS.

With this in mind, we have three types of Connect Groups:

STUDY GROUPS

Study groups are comprised of Christians who want to gather for the spiritual study produced by Bible study and devotion. They take St. Peter's words to heart. "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

These Bible studies differ from Sunday morning Bible study. They are more discussion-oriented. Study group members take portions of God's Word and apply them to their lives. There is no "teacher" in study groups. Instead, there is a facilitator who keeps the discussion moving and focused on the topic of the day.

Study groups are the only of the three types of Connect Groups where the pastoral staff helps the leaders prepare. If you would like to be a study group leader, the pastoral staff will help you find appropriate and meaningful Bible study materials.

SERVICE GROUPS

Service groups are comprised of Christians who want to serve either COS or the community in some way. They understand that faith-wrought service gives a type of testimony, just as Jesus said. "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Service groups identify a way that they could serve the church in general, or serve specific people/groups within the church, or serve a segment of the community.

Some examples of service groups: a service group that meets at an assisted living center to socialize with the residents; a service group of young people that meet at elderly or sick members' homes to do yard work; a service group that works at a local food pantry; a service group that maintains the church's buildings or grounds.

SOCIAL GROUPS

Social groups are comprised of Christians who want to gather for some recreational fellowship.

Some examples of social groups: a social group that gets together to play golf once a month; a social group that discusses a book which the entire group has read; a social group that shops, or talks, or just gets together.

PLANNING AND PROMOTION

Each set of connect groups is preceded by four weeks of planning.

For example, if you want to facilitate a Connect Group for April, your work begins in March. First, you start by planning out what type of Connect group it is, who it's for, how often it meets, where it meets, etc. Then, you put this information on a Connect planning form, which you can find [HERE](#).

If you are reading this in print, please visit the Connect Group link at: www.coslutheran.com

The information for your group and all the other Connect Groups will be published, in print and online. People will enroll by contacting you, the group facilitator.

PLANNING A CONNECT GROUP

If you want to form a Connect Group, here are the things you need to consider before we can promote it.

Are you going to facilitate a Study Group, a Service Group, or a Social Group?

If you want to plan a Service Group or a Social Group, you can plan that on your own. If it's a Study Group (small group Bible Study), the pastoral staff can help you locate good Bible study material.

How often is the Connect Group going to meet?

Connect groups run for approximately 3 months. The goal is for Connect Groups to meet a minimum of three times, i.e., monthly meetings. However, they could meet as much as weekly. You will need to list every meeting date and time on the Connect Group planning form.

When is the Connect Group going to meet?

Say you determine your Connect Group is going to meet six times throughout the period. You now need to pick when that will be. Evenings or mornings? Weekend or weekday? It is entirely up to you. It is advisable to keep the day of the week and time consistent.

For how long will your Connect Group meet when it assembles?

If it's a Social Group meeting for a game night that begins at 7PM on Fridays, does that night end at 9PM or midnight? People need to know exactly what they are committing to.

Where is the Connect Group going to meet?

Connect Groups might meet at multiple locations. For example, a monthly golf Connect Group might meet at three different courses. But many Connect Groups, particularly Study Groups, will meet in the same location each time. The ideal place for this is in your home. Studies of church small groups have consistently shown that if the group's goal is to knit Christians together in family, meeting in the facilitator's home is ideal.

Another possibility is to meet somewhere in the community. For example, a Study Group of six meeting at a coffee shop for Bible study can give public testimony to the community of the importance of being in the Word.

If meeting in-home or off-site is simply not feasible, it is possible to have a Connect Group meet at church.

For whom is the Connect Group intended?

There is nothing wrong with creating Connect Groups for a certain demographic. Examples: a senior's Connect Group that visits various historic sites, a women's Connect Group book club, a single's Connect Group. You limit the number of possible participants, but that's okay. Connect Groups are typically kept at 12 people or less anyways.

What are the costs (or potential costs) of participation in the Connect Group?

It is not wise for there to be surprise expenses for Connect Group participants. Thus, if participants need to purchase materials, please list those costs on the Connect Group planning form.

What is it called?

You need to come up with a name. The catchier, the better!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I've never run a small group. How will I know what to do?

We will provide you with brief training to help plan for a Connect Group. No matter what type of group you would run – Study, Service, or Social.

Are Connect Groups just for COS members, or may non-members attend?

Of course, non-members may attend! That would be encouraged. Our primary purpose is simply to facilitate knitting people together into a true Christian family. But by all means, invite unchurched friends and family.

Why don't Connect Groups run year-round? Why break them up into shorter time commitments?

There are three compelling reasons to break groups up that are provided by most experts on running small groups in the church.

1. Without a definite beginning date, people assume they are “jumping in the middle” of something, even if you tell them it's a week-by-week Bible study. People don't want to jump into the middle of something.
2. Without a definite end date, people assume they are supposed to continue in the group indefinitely. People tend to not commit to something that is open-ended.
3. If people stay in classes that go on indefinitely, they only get to know those who are in their group. If the primary purpose of Connect Groups is to knit together a body of believers, having individuals stay in a group with the same people indefinitely goes counter to that purpose.

The same Connect group may be scheduled every time we offer them. But it will be promoted as a new and separate connect group for the reasons listed above.

What if I plan to host a Connect Group and no one signs up?

Small group experts will tell you that is likely to happen every time a church begins a Connect Group series. At least one “fizzles.” Some thoughts on this.

First of all, be careful how you define “no one.” If you have one person sign up, you have a group. Those same small group experts will tell you that meeting in a group of two or three is a very powerful way for Christians to grow together.

Second, if zero sign up, realize it demonstrates either a lack of interest in your suggested topic or that your topic was of lower interest than the others promoted that period. It’s not a lack of interest in you! Everyone who hosts a Connect Group will find out that, from time to time, one of their Connect Groups generates no interest.

Questions?

Contact the COS Congregational Assistant, John Dale, at 931-486-3737 or john.dale@coslutheran.com