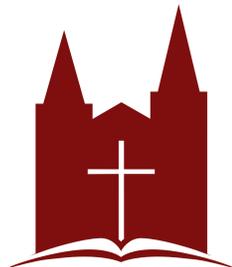




Connect Groups



St. Paul
LUTHERAN CHURCH

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St. Paul Connect Groups

Connect Groups are a new part of our ministry at St. Paul. We want to do more than be a friendly church. We want to be a church of friends. Connect Groups are where friendships can be made.

Connect Groups are the aspect of our ministry that is almost entirely led and conducted by church members. The pastors don't run the Connect Groups. The pastors don't even plan the Connect Groups. The pastors will provide a little training for Connect Group leaders. But for the most part, this is pure member ministry.

This booklet lays out our approach to Connect Groups at St. Paul:

- 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 pamphlet, please don't hesitate to contact one of the pastors of St. Paul.

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 in a community so they might encourage one another as they walk the path of life. Consider these words of direction from the Scriptures, 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 the way St. Paul carries that out. The purpose of our Connect Groups is to knit Christians together in a community, that they might share their lives and have ways for Spirit-wrought fellowship to be celebrated.

Three Types of Connect Groups

Connect Groups are not synonymous with Bible study. The main purpose of Bible-study is spiritual growth. The main purpose of Connect Groups is to knit the people of St. Paul together so that they might share their lives as God's Word directs them to. Sharing of one's life can certainly happen in a Bible study, but it can happen in other ways as well. Thus, 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. There is a facilitator who keeps discussion moving and focused on the topic of the day.

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

SERVICE GROUPS

Service Groups are comprised of Christians who want to serve either St. Paul 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 group that meets at an assisted living center to socialize with the residents; a group of young people that meet at elderly or sick members' homes to do yard work; a group that works at a local food pantry; a 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. They understand that just as God rested from his labor (Genesis 2:2), so also man will rest from time to time. We need to rest and recharge intellectually and emotionally, so that after that rest we might resume serving our God with vigor.

Examples of Social Groups: a group that gets together to play golf once a month; a group that discusses a book which the entire group has read; a group that shops, or talks, or just gets together.

The Trimester Schedule

There are three Connect Group trimesters each year. Thus, if someone joins a Connect Group, they are committing for approximately three months.

THE START TIMES

The three trimesters are arranged around three logical times for people to jump into congregational life at St. Paul:

- Trimester One begins right in mid-January. It's a new year, a time people think about changing an aspect of their lives. Plus, since it begins a few weeks after Christmas, it gives us an opportunity to invite visitors who worshipped with us at St. Paul and make some new friends.
- Trimester Two begins in mid-May. Therefore, it occurs not too long after Easter. Some of our Easter visitors will be considering joining St. Paul. This provides

	Groups planned	Groups promoted	Groups meet
January		Tri 1	
February			Tri 1
March	Tri 2		Tri 1
April		Tri 2	
May			Tri 2
June			Tri 2
July	Tri 3		Tri 2
August		Tri 3	
September			Tri 3
October			Tri 3
November	Tri 1		Tri 3
December		Tri 1	

an opportunity to those individuals to get to know some of the members of our church. The Connect Groups offered in this trimester also allow opportunity for Bible study at the time when adult Sunday Bible Class is on hiatus for the *summer*.

- Trimester Three begins mid-September. Summer is a time when people take vacations. Many relocate during these months. Fall, when school starts up and things settle down, provides a great opportunity for our final trimester.

Trimester Planning and Promotion

The trimesters are preceded by four weeks of promotion. Those are preceded by four weeks of planning.

For example, if you want to facilitate a Connect Group for Trimester One, your work begins mid-November. You start planning out what type of group it is, who it's for, how often it meets, where it meets, etc. You put this information on a digital Connect Group Planning Form, which you can find [HERE](#) or at this web address: <https://forms.gle/h4QpaH8cNL7aDTGg7>.

Printed Connect Group Planning Forms can be found on the Information Desk. You would need to have that form submitted by the due-date, which will be in mid-December.

The information for your and all the other Trimester One Connect Groups would be published mid-December through mid-January, both in print and online. People will enroll by signing up on the church app or by contacting the church office.

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 pastor can help you locate good Bible study material.

How often is the Connect Group going to meet?

Connect Groups run approximately 12 to 13 weeks. We want Connect Groups to meet a minimum of three times, i.e. monthly meetings. 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 that is meeting for game night which 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 goal of the group is to knit Christians together in family, meeting in the facilitator's home is ideal. "Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:13).

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 OK. Connect Groups shouldn't be more than 12 people anyway.

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 — it's not hard!

Are Connect groups just for St. Paul members, or may non-members attend?

Of course non-members may attend! That would be encouraged. Our primary purpose is simply to knit 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 begin 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.

Secondly, 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. So give it a try! Don’t be afraid.