

Community Ministry Training Guide

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Vision

The Table Church's vision is to embody a more beautiful gospel that announces collective liberation and the renewal of all things. Our mission is to cultivate communities of authentic belonging following in the prophetic, thoughtful, and radical way of Jesus.

The Table Church is an LGBTQ+-affirming, anti-racist, and justice-oriented community. We seek to embody our values of radical friendship, revolutionary justice, relentless curiosity, restorative play, and rooted improvisation. Our community ministry is one of the primary ways that we carry forth this mission into our daily lives as Christians.

Community Ministry at the Table takes primarily two distinct, though occasionally overlapping, forms:

- **Affinity Groups.** These are identity-based groups designed to strengthen relationships so that those individuals can more fully live into their unique identity as image-bearers of God. We currently have an LGBTQIA+ group, a Women's group, a Black group, an Asian group, a Disability group, a Family and Caregivers group, and a Men's group. Typically, Affinity Groups meet once a month though some prefer more frequently.
- **Community Groups.** These are weekly or bi-weekly meetings designed to create connection and kinship with one another and with God. These groups can be short-term or long-term. Some of our groups may be oriented around sharing a meal together, but others may take place virtually or include a missional component (i.e., through doing acts of justice and service within our community). There will be curriculum and framework options available for Community Groups, but leaders have the freedom to structure the group to fit the needs and interests of their group.

We also offer short-term classes and seminars at The Table, led by our pastoral team or volunteers within our community, in January and May of every year. Other classes may be offered throughout the year as deemed fit.

Laying the Foundation

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, and to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8 (NRSV).

Community Ministry at The Table is designed to create spaces where we learn to follow Jesus Christ, build spiritual friendships, and pursue justice within our city. This framework is known as our UP-IN-OUT model for building community.

UP | Follow Jesus.

"I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing." John 15:5.

Following the way of Jesus Christ is always worth it. Community Ministry allows us to explore the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as a revelation of the character of God and determine how we might follow in God's steps.

IN | Grow in our relationships.

"And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25.

We were not meant to walk through life alone. We were built for community. Community ministry cultivates an intentional time on a regular basis for people to bring their full selves to the table and share their lives with one another.

OUT | Become a light to our city.

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” James 1:27.

As we journey with God and each other, we can imagine how our gifts and talents may become the means to transform our city. Community ministry is designed to encourage members to prayerfully consider the needs and assets of our community and seek practical ways to pursue justice. These do not have to be huge actions, but rather small steps taken faithfully every day.

Structuring a Community Group

Community Groups are one of the primary ways to connect with others and form relationships at The Table. Typically, a Community Group is a weekly or bi-weekly gathering of people in a home to share a meal, engage in thoughtful and authentic conversation, and pray together. Community Groups are where we learn to follow Jesus in the rhythms of our lives, deepen our relationships with others, and seek the welfare of our neighborhood and city.

All Community Groups follow four principles:

- **Center table fellowship**, because we believe breaking bread with one another breaks down barriers, and Jesus frequently shared meals with many different sorts of folk. Even if a Community Group does not physically take place within a home, finding ways to incorporate food can help foster a sense of community, a feeling of “sharing life around a table.”
- **Include a discussion**, to invite and challenge us to take the next faithful step toward authentically and thoughtfully following Jesus.
- **Spend quality time together**, to create a community who prays for one another, rejoices with one another, mourns with one another, and shares our lives with one another.
- **Consider our sense of place**, to understand our location within the DMV region and seek ways to intentionally invest in the heart of our community. If you meet in one location, this may look like participating in the needs of your community. If you meet virtually or you meet in a variety of locations, this may look like considering how to live out the demands of justice right where you are.

Becoming a Community Ministry Leader

What are the characteristics of Community Ministry leaders?

BE A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST | Leaders have a personal walk with Jesus as they seek to do what Jesus would do if he were in their place. We do not have to be perfect on this walk, but we must be willing to take the next faithful step. Healthy leadership flows from our relationship with Jesus.

BE A MEMBER OF THE TABLE CHURCH | Community Ministry leaders are asked to hold membership at The Table Church. This keeps leadership stable through transitions and reduces the risk of a group losing its leader when life takes them to another congregation.

ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY | Sunday service is the primary time we gather as an entire church body to connect with each other and with God. When we're there, we have the opportunity to meet newcomers and

invite them into our community, whether that means asking them to join our group (whether a Community Group or Affinity Group) or referring them to the one closest to them.

GIVE GENEROUSLY AS GOD CALLS US | Generosity is a spiritual discipline that helps us live a more loving and wholehearted life. Where our treasure is, there our hearts are also. When we make giving a priority, we give God control of our resources, financial and otherwise, and strengthen our faith in God's ability to provide for us. Giving is a tangible way to join God in the renewal of all things as God continues to work through The Table.

Furthermore, Community Ministry leaders are expected to abide by The Table's Leadership Agreement, which, in addition to the above, include living the values of the church, praying for your group, and setting an example for the church in order to grow our community.

What does a Community Ministry leader do?

Community Ministry leaders are responsible for ensuring that the group is well-run each meeting. However, leaders are not responsible for doing everything on their own. They can and should seek out group members to share the responsibility of leadership. Shared leadership builds our capacity for sustainable leadership and creates opportunities to develop new leaders within your group.

Three Avenues to Group Leadership

There are three recognized paths to becoming a group leader:

- Launching a new group from scratch.
- Joining a current leader or leadership team of an already-established group.
- Onboarding to take the helm of an already-established group from a leader who is offboarding.

Hosts Are Group Leaders

Because a primary host carries out so many of the responsibilities in the Group Leader Role Description, anyone serving as a group's primary host is functioning as a leader of that group. Primary hosts must formally register as group leaders through the Community Formation Team so they receive proper training, support, recognition, and accountability.

Leadership Opportunities

At The Table, we seek to create cultures of shared leadership within our community ministry. Shared leadership enables us to co-create spaces of connection and belonging. It also provides a more sustainable model of leadership so that no one will burn themselves out trying to do too much. At least two leaders are the goal for each group.

One way to embed shared leadership within your group is by going over the following roles during your first meeting and asking for leaders to serve in these roles. Not every group will have each role, but this list will get you started.

Host | Either host a group at your own home or ensure that there is a consistent place for meetings on a regular basis (for Community Groups: weekly or bi-weekly; for Affinity Groups: at least monthly, more frequently if decided by the group).

Meal organizer | Ensure that there is a meal or refreshments. This may look like cooking the meal yourself or coordinating a potluck. You could also ask an aspiring leader to handle the logistics and work with this leader to develop a meal schedule.

Discussion facilitator | Foster an atmosphere of curiosity and inquiry through facilitating an authentic and thoughtful conversation. Help group members take the next step in their spiritual journey by asking good questions and listening well. Discussion topics and questions will align with a curriculum from the sermons or another similar resource, including books or video series. You will not be responsible for coming up with your own discussion questions unless you choose to.

Scheduler | Create clear channels of communication by sending out weekly reminder emails about the date, time, and other relevant information about the meeting, such as building entry protocols, potluck sign-up sheets, or prayer requests. Take attendance during the meeting.

Child care coordinator | If your group has parents with children, come up with a plan to either provide for childcare or create avenues for children to be involved, depending on the dynamics of the group. Setting up a plan for childcare can be as simple as creating a sign-up sheet and asking one volunteer to take care of the children during that time.

Leading the Vision

As Community Ministry leaders, you are able to create a space where everyone feels seen and known, like they have a place to belong. There are three primary actions that will carry forward our vision for Community Ministry. These are steps that anyone can do—and you can teach others to follow your example!

1. Pray together.

Our relationship with God is built upon rhythms of talking to God and hearing God's voice. Community Ministry leaders listen to the prayer requests and praises of their group. They ensure that everyone is prayed for and commit to praying for their group regularly. They don't need fancy words or lengthy monologues; all they need is a willingness to speak to God like they would a friend.

2. Build relationships.

Community Ministry leaders get to know the people in their group. They communicate with their group members outside of the weekly meeting and check in on their well-being. They provide or coordinate opportunities for everyone to feel connected, whether this is their first meeting or 100th.

3. Develop new leaders.

Community ministry, both within Affinity Groups and Community Groups, allows us to see and develop the leadership potential of others in our group. By sharing our lives with others and inviting people to share their lives with us, we are able to recognize and affirm the unique gifts and talents of people within our group. We recognize that God will eventually call us and others to new things. As leaders, we should be on the lookout to see who would be good leaders in the future. It is the goal of our groups to multiply into other groups so everyone finds their place to belong in the family of God.

When a group is ready to multiply, bring it to the Community Formation Team before announcing anything to the group. A sudden announcement, even with good intentions, can fracture trust that takes seasons to rebuild. A useful signal that it's time for that conversation is a group approaching 12–15 regular members.

Sharing Leadership Tips and Tricks

Leading a group is incredibly rewarding, but there are also many moving parts in successfully coordinating a group. Sharing leadership constructs a sustainable model for Community Ministry and enables the development of new leaders once individuals have to step down for various reasons. Here are some ways to embed shared leadership into your group from the start.

- **Start with at least two leaders.** Having at least two leaders when you begin a group ensures that there is delegation of responsibilities from the beginning. It also encourages collaboration and partnership.
- **Communicate the desire for shared leadership from your very first meeting.** Make it clear that the group requires everyone to participate, in both large and small ways. Communicating the desire for shared leadership can begin as simply as asking people to bring something to share during the meeting. It can also communicate the desire for people to eventually take responsibility over different aspects of the gathering, such as facilitating discussion or sending out group emails.
- **Observe and affirm the gifts of your group.** Is someone great at asking really good questions? Does someone always bring a delicious dessert to share? Is someone a pro at administration and organization? Be sure to celebrate those gifts. Invite them to participate in ways that affirm those gifts for the sake of the group.
- **Follow up with people who may be good leaders of the group in the future.** Often, we must be able to take the long view of our group. As much as we wish that we could lead a group forever, sometimes life gets in the way and we are simply unable to lead in a certain season. Think about the members of your group to determine who may be good leaders of the group in the future, and then follow up with them. Laying the groundwork early can help people feel more comfortable taking on this responsibility in the future.
- **Delegate well.** Once someone agrees to take on a certain responsibility, they then “own” that task. Delegating is hard because often we want to take back control and do things our way, but allowing people to coordinate a task in their own way builds leadership capacity and strengthens the group as a whole.
- **Remember it's all about what we create together, not what a couple people create on their own.** Instill the value of co-creating the space, and people will respond to it through participation.

Stages of Group Development

This model for group development was first developed by Bruce Tuckman in 1965. It has been utilized for everything from project development to community formation. It is crucial to understand where your group is on this square to facilitate growth and development.

- **Forming.** This stage is the very beginning of your group. People are beginning to get to know one another. Generally, people in this stage are trying to determine if they belong, if this group is the right fit for them. Leaders during this stage will facilitate introductions, set expectations, and determine the initial purpose and vision for their gathering.
- **Storming.** This stage occurs once the group has been running for a period of time and everyone in the group knows one another. In this stage, leaders and members determine the meaning behind their gatherings. This stage is characterized by increased intimacy and trust. Leaders during this stage will facilitate appropriate feedback opportunities and successfully resolve conflicts that may arise during this process of “meaning-making.”
- **Norming.** This stage is characterized by increased commitment and engagement by the members of the group. Members begin to develop norms and hold each other accountable for following them. During this stage, it may be appropriate to close your group to newcomers so that you can continue to develop as a group. Leaders will facilitate the creation of a Group Covenant and encourage increased engagement.
- **Performing.** This stage is when the group really begins to live into its identity. Members are “all in” and acting in accordance with the fundamental values and expectations of the group. During this stage, leaders will begin to foster an atmosphere of collective decision-making and conflict resolution.

- **Adjourning.** This stage can occur naturally, such as when a group dissolves, or purposefully, when the group begins to look beyond itself. During this stage, leaders will encourage members to create new groups. This process is known as multiplication, and it allows the group to move beyond insularity and toward inclusivity.

Hosting

Create a warm atmosphere.

Hosting begins before people get to your gathering space! Not every group will meet in a home (though most will), but the gathering space should be warm and welcoming. It should also help facilitate the purpose of your group.

Communicate early about what people can expect. Date, time, address, nearby transit options, and building entry protocols are all good things to share. If you are not physically hosting the group, ensure all of this is communicated by you as the leader and ensure that what is listed below happens.

Physical space | Clean up! It makes a difference when people walk into a clean space.

- Do a quick sweep and/or vacuum, pick up the mail from the table, or re-arrange the furniture to create an environment that fosters a group gathering.
- Your home does not have to be spotless. That's not an authentic or lived-in space! But it should be a place where people walk in and immediately feel welcome.

Families | Proactively communicate with families about what they can expect if they attend your group.

- Make your space kid-friendly by putting away breakable or dangerous things or placing them out of reach.
- Don't worry about toys. Simple things like pots, pans, or spoons can go a long way toward entertaining young kids. Board games and puzzles are great for older kids.
- Stay in touch with families after they visit. Parents know their kids best, and they will be able to help you identify ways to make your home more hospitable.

As people arrive | Welcome people when they come in. Offer to take their coats, purses, umbrellas, etc. and place them in a safe place to be retrieved later.

- Make a point to get to know newcomers. Introduce yourself, then introduce them to the hosts (if it's not you) and others in the group.

Organizing the Meal

Sharing meals together is a key part of our identity at The Table. Incorporating food, whether it's a meal or just some light refreshments, can help set the tone and encourage sharing and fellowship.

Planning a meal can be a stressful endeavor for some ("What if I'm not a good cook? What if I don't have time to make a meal?"). There is no "right way" to host a meal, but here are some ideas that can lift some of the burden and make group members feel more invested.

Discuss how you will provide meals | It is a good idea to talk about this during your first meeting to set expectations. Ideas include potluck style, rotating chefs, or reimbursing one individual or couple who purchases and/or prepares the food.

- If you do a potluck, be sure to develop a system where people can sign up for what they bring ahead of time. That way you won't have six loaves of bread and no salad!

Coordinate the meals | You don't have to cook every week, but make sure there is a meal plan or delegate this responsibility to an aspiring leader. Plan meals that people can easily contribute to. Don't forget to consider allergies and dietary restrictions (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc.).

- Some groups have found a lot of success in planning “themed” meals. Some theme ideas are: Mexican, breakfast for dinner, surf and turf, vegetarian, “signature” dishes, food from each person's home state, etc.
- Common easy meals are: tacos, enchiladas, baked potato bar, stir-fry, soups, pizza, salad bar, lasagna, pasta, etc.

Best practice | If you love to cook, then cook! Don't feel like you have to stymie your passion for the culinary arts. But do allow other people to participate. Most people are committed when they feel like they are needed and valued. Allow members to bring sides, desserts, drinks, or even reimburse you. Also, if you are spending the majority of time cooking, make sure another leader is welcoming people into the space and mingling with others.

Facilitating an Excellent Discussion

Community Group leaders typically follow a curriculum that provides questions to help them facilitate an excellent discussion. Affinity Group leaders are free to use their own structure or format within their groups, but the same principles for facilitating an excellent discussion apply.

During the discussion, there are facilitator actions that can be used to support the conversation.

Acknowledge everyone | In every discussion, there will be people who talk a lot and people who don't speak at all. If people are silent, invite them to participate by asking, “Hey, Lily, I'd love to hear your thoughts on this” or posing it more generally, like “Would anyone who has been silent like to speak?” Be sure to give them the opportunity to say no. But knowing they're seen can make a big difference in their willingness to contribute!

Clarify what is said/felt | Say, “Let me see if I understand what you're saying.”

Turn it back to the group | Don't be the answer person. Ask, “What do others think?”

Summarize | Offer statements like, “So far, it seems like we've been saying...” or “Kelly, would you like to summarize what we've talked about so far?”

Your response to group members' comments determines whether discussions thrive or fizzle.

Affirm | This response acknowledges each person's value and promotes intimacy and openness. They tell members that they have been heard, understood, and respected.

Invite participation | This response recognizes everyone and invites engagement. Usually, the more people who participate, the more engaging the discussion.

Be flexible | As much as we'd like to remain perfectly focused on the discussion questions, the reality is that discussions rarely go quite as planned. If someone brings a concern to the table that needs to be addressed, or if the conversation goes in an unanticipated direction, be attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes, the unexpected conversation is where groups begin to flourish and deepen their connection with one another.

Prayer

“The sense of petition, asking for things, is a small part of prayer; confession and penitence are its threshold, adoration its sanctuary, the presence and vision and enjoyment of God its bread and wine. In it God shows himself to us.” C. S. Lewis

Prayer is an essential part of our time together as a community. Prayer is more than just bringing our petitions before God. It is the process of getting to know God better. Just like talking to a friend builds a relationship, talking to God builds our relationship with God and aligns our heart with God's heart.

James 5:16 tells us that healing happens when we confess and pray in community: "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."

How do you pray in a way that is accessible to everyone?

Prayer can sometimes be intimidating to people, both for those who have grown up in the church and for those who have never prayed out loud before. But prayer doesn't have to be.

Opening | Always begin your group with a general prayer (a good place would be before digging into the food!). Focus on gratitude for the time together and pray that God would use this time to build relationships with each other and with God.

Ask for praises | Ask group members for things they are thankful for this past week.

Ask for prayer requests | Ask your group members if they have things they would like prayer for. If something from a previous week hasn't been addressed, like a family illness or an upcoming exam, ask the group member how things are going and if prayer would still be helpful. This can sometimes turn into a praise report that they weren't planning to share!

Closing | There are multiple ways to pray over your group. Ask people what they are comfortable doing.

- One person prays over the whole group. A leader should always be prepared to pray if there are no volunteers.
- Two or more individuals divide up the prayer requests and pray for the whole group.
- One person offers to open and one person offers to close, leaving space between them for other members of the group to pray for the group or reflect in silence. Note that silence is okay and getting comfortable sitting in silence can build toward other practices, like meditation.
- Break off into small groups of 3-4 and pray in those groups.
- Break off into pairs and pray for each other.

Based on how your group feels about prayer, it may be helpful to rotate through different kinds of prayer. Some weeks, try leading your group through the Lord's prayer or other written prayers. Other weeks, hold an open space for people to pray as they feel called. Still other weeks, break up into small groups. Each option has benefits. Varying the structure can also help your group gain comfort in individual, small group, and corporate prayer.

Best practice | Send out prayer requests (with everyone's consent) promptly following your meeting so that group members can be praying for each other throughout the week.

Logistics

PlanningCenter is your one-stop shop for all things related to coordinating and running a group at The Table. The Table uses this service to facilitate effective and efficient group member management. It's our primary tool for making sure people don't fall through the cracks and successfully find community here at the Table. PlanningCenter is available through a web browser (groups.planningcenteronline.com). It is also accessible via mobile. Reach out to a Co-Director of Community Formation for training materials and more information about PlanningCenter.

A shared drive of training materials including PlanningCenter training guides, meeting notes, the Group Covenant Builder, and communication templates is being set up alongside PlanningCenter at table.center.

Title | Make sure your group name accurately corresponds to your group, including location. All Community Groups should resemble “[Intersection] on [Day/Night].” Example: 14th and Columbia Road NW on Thursday nights. All Affinity Groups should indicate who the group is for.

Group description | Go into detail and let people know what to expect. Make sure to let folks know if you have any pets, any mobility considerations, etc.

Meeting times | Make sure your group's calendar is up to date in the system with the future dates and times for meetings. Include the location in each recurring event in case your group members decide to sync this schedule with their calendar.

Attendance | Taking attendance and tracking group membership is mandatory. It is your responsibility to make sure these two tasks are happening every week, although you are welcome to delegate it to an aspiring leader within your group.

Editing/managing membership | Check your alert tabs! This is how people sign up for new groups. By responding promptly, you will already make the individual feel welcomed.

Our church calendar runs in three seasons: Feb-Apr, June-July, and September-November. We offer short-term classes (4-5 weeks) every January and May. August and December are rest months, because we believe practicing Sabbath is essential to our identity. These seasons:

- Help you intentionally rest from the burdens of leading
- Create natural on- and off-ramps for hosting or leading a group

Since your group will not meet during these times, thoughtfully prepare your group for the new church season and get them excited about the opportunity for Sabbath!

First Week To-Dos

What does a leader need to do during the first week of the season?

- Check your email regularly.
- Check the sign-up page on PlanningCenter and approve new member requests (ideally within 24 hours!).
- Over-communicate time, location, building entry details, and other details.
- Plan on doing an ice-breaker for the first few weeks. I know, they're not always the most organic way to get a conversation going, but they do work!
- Set expectations. It's not enough to have a clear vision for what the group looks like. You need to make sure to communicate that vision to the members as soon as possible, and set up structures for the group that will move people toward that vision.
 - Take some time to think about the kind of space you want to create. What do you need to be true in order for that to happen? How do you want your group to contribute to setting the expectations? Set a clear purpose for your gatherings.
 - If you have a formal co-leader, make sure to discuss this with them before you start meeting.
 - If you are starting a new group, set up some general expectations about the group in that first meeting. If you are continuing an existing group, be sure to communicate expectations about continued involvement (such as preferred attendance and level of commitment) during your first meeting of the season.

- Some sample expectations:
 - Arrive on time.
 - Commit to attending a minimum number of meetings.
 - Treat everyone with respect and welcome.
 - “What is shared in the group stays in the group. What is learned in the group leaves the group.”

Following Up and Staying in Touch

CONNECT WITH INDIVIDUALS | Communicate regularly with individuals in your group.

- Send email announcements with reminders of upcoming meetings, prayer requests, potluck sign-ups, and upcoming church events.
- Set aside time (if your schedule allows) to have one-on-one conversations with people in your group. (Even 30 minutes can go a long way.) If you can't meet with people yourself, encourage members to find time to connect with each other or direct them to pastoral care if appropriate.
- Text people messages of encouragement or offer prayer throughout the week.
- Organize informal outings. Better yet, have someone else organize outings so they feel empowered to lead!

TAKE ATTENDANCE | Use PlanningCenter to take attendance every week (or delegate to another leader!) so that you can remember who was there and who wasn't there. Taking attendance is mandatory. Text people who weren't there and remind them that they were missed. If someone misses multiple weeks in a row and they were previously attending regularly, check in with them to make sure they're okay. Reach out to the Co-Director of Community Formation for more information on Group Member Stewardship protocols.

SET EXPECTATIONS | Be clear about when group members can hear from you. Pick a day to send announcements and reminders and stick to it.

TEXT PEOPLE | To many people, texts feel more personal than emails. Even something as simple as a midweek “Hey, I'm thinking about you. Hope you are well!” can go a long way toward making people feel seen and loved. You can find phone numbers in PlanningCenter.

RESPOND | Respond to people when they reach out to you. Don't forget to answer emails or respond to texts promptly.

CONSIDER TEXT CHAINS | Your members should feel comfortable and committed to reaching out to each other, not just to you, throughout the week. Consider setting up a text chain or Whatsapp so that your group can maintain communication throughout this week. A private channel is a wonderful way to have more casual conversations, share prayer requests and praises, and keep connecting throughout the week!

Add your Co-Director of Community Formation as a creator-admin to Affinity Group WhatsApp group chats from the start. This keeps the group stable if a leadership transition happens and the original creator becomes hard to reach.

*We hope that your faith will grow
and that the boundaries of our work
among you will be extended.*

2 Corinthians 10:15

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