

Welcome to the pastoral team!

Home groups are the foundation of Riverside Church. They are the primary place where people are welcomed into our church, connected with each other and holistically cared for. In our home groups, we ask, learn and grow; we eat, laugh and play; we care, share and serve; we celebrate, worship and pray. These are the things that make a church!

Because home groups are so central to our mission, we want to be sure that home group pastors receive adequate preparation and on-going support. This manual is designed to introduce you to the mission of home groups and responsibilities of home group pastors. A manual cannot prepare you to be a home group pastor. Therefore, we ask that everyone first spend time simply being in an existing home group before being invited to serve in an “apprentice” role in the leadership of that home group. Finally and most significantly, all home groups pastors are required to attend a leadership training meeting on the first Monday of each month. This meeting is where we can be encouraged and continually equipped with knowledge and practical skills for pastoring God’s people.

We are grateful for your faithfulness and willingness to serve. We will be praying for you as you follow Jesus, love people, and impact the world!

Sincerely,

Keith and Ryan (on behalf of all home group pastors at Riverside Church)

INTRODUCTION TO HOME GROUPS

Home groups are smaller communities of the church that meet in local neighborhoods where we can most naturally and meaningfully live out the mission of Riverside Church:

Follow Jesus. Love people. Impact the world.

Our mission is very simple, much like Jesus' most famous commands, and it's a process. Jesus first called people to follow him (Matthew 4:19), then taught them to love people (Matthew 22:36-40), and finally sent them to impact the world (Matthew 28:19-20). In the Acts of the Apostles it's clear that they employed the same process in the explosive growth of the early church. Therefore, we look to the example of the early church for the guiding passage of Riverside home groups:

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

- Acts 2:42-47 (NLT)

INTRODUCTION TO HOME GROUPS (CONTINUED)

“All the believers...”

Anyone who wants to experience “church” will want to be in a home group. Home groups are the foundation of our church, and the primary place where ministry happens. We are not hesitant to say they should even take precedence over Sunday celebrations.

“...devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...and to prayer...”

The apostles taught what they heard and learned directly from Jesus. Home groups are where we learn to **follow Jesus** together, as He speaks to us through the Bible, prayer, each other, and the Spirit He gave us. Members are committed to following Jesus in every day situations on a life-long journey of becoming more like Him.

“devoted themselves... to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper... They... met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity - all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people...”

The home is the safest and most non-threatening place for people to meet Jesus and be loved. Home groups are where we **love people**, as Jesus loves us. Home groups are small, family-like communities where we care for each other, share our diversity and find unity as we experience life together. People are loved in close relationships, characterized by trust, openness, honesty, mutual accountability and commitment.

“They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need... And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.”

God forever changed the world, in part, because of what happened in and through a single home in Jerusalem after Jesus ascension. Home groups are a launching pad to **impact the world!** Our love for people is directed outward into our neighborhoods and surrounding community in tangible ways. Home groups partner with others in the community to restore the poor and neglected, reconcile divisions, and care for creation. Home groups are committed to reproducing new Christ-followers and new home groups on a similar mission.

ORGANIZATIONAL COMPONENTS OF A HEALTHY HOME GROUP

1. **Home Group Leader(s)** work with the Spirit to create an environment conducive to the mission.
2. **Apprentice leader(s)** gain experience alongside the home group leaders with a goal of producing a new group in the future.
3. **Host(s)** open their home and help organize logistics (e.g., meals). Host(s) may also be Leader(s).
4. **Worship Leader(s)** are optional, but very helpful to encourage worship in song, readings, prayer, etc.
5. **Impact Leader(s)** are optional, but very helpful to organize the group's commitment to serving in the community.
6. **Child care** is optional, but often very helpful to remove potential distractions from parents with children.
7. **Participants** include anyone and everyone, preferably in close geographic proximity. We love and accept whomever God brings without precondition. Leaders do not get to pick and choose. Diversity is desirable but cannot be forced or programmed. Groups should only be "closed" to new people in very specific (limited) seasons/instances.

QUALIFICATIONS OF HOME GROUP LEADERS

1. FOLLOWER of JESUS
 - a disciple of Jesus Christ, growing in his or her faith and Christ-like character (Mark 1:16-17; Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 6:40).
 - exemplified by a positive family environment (Ephesians 5:33-6:4; I Timothy 3:4)
2. FAITHFUL
 - committed to the mission, values, and other leaders of Riverside Church (Ephesians 4:3,11-16; Hebrews 13:17).
 - has participated in a home group for at least six months and served as an apprentice leader.
3. ACCOUNTABLE
 - willing to accept responsibility for the general health of the home group.
4. TEACHABLE
 - willing to follow and learn from/with other leaders. (Mark 3:13-15; II Timothy 2:2).
 - participates in the Home Group leadership training.
5. PASTORAL
 - demonstrates a calling and ability to lead (Proverbs 1:1-7; Titus 1:9; 1 Timothy 3:1-13).
 - willing to sacrificially love and care for people (John 21:17; Ezekiel 34; Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:9-15).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF HOME GROUP LEADERS

Follow Jesus as an individual.

- Model the Christian life and true discipleship. Home group leaders don't have to "have it all together" or "figured out," but they must have an active faith and pursuit of Jesus. In this sense, home group leaders should be able to say:

"And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1 (NLT)

- **Attend the Home Group Leader Training and Nehemiah Nights on the first Monday of every month.** Home groups are the foundation of Riverside, and leading a group is a major commitment. Therefore, we want to be sure that home group leaders receive on-going support. All home groups leaders are required to attend this meeting where we can be encouraged and continually equipped with knowledge and practical skills for pastoring God's people.

Follow Jesus together in the group.

- Oversee the Bible study and lesson preparation.
- Encourage group discussion and participation.
- Encourage each person in their areas of giftedness.
- Actively pursue 1-on-1 discipleship/accountability relationships with 1-2 people in the group.
- Recognize where people are at in their spiritual journey, identifying and encouraging them in their next step.

Love people.

- Show hospitality and set the example in serving each another.
- Encourage/lead the group to pray for each other.
- Plan activities beyond weekly meeting; share life experiences together.
- Be aware of what's going on in people's lives and call on MIAs.

Impact the world.

- Lead the group to share Christ's love in practical ways to others outside the group.
- Plan mission trips and evangelistic outreaches.
- Always have as a goal to reproduce yourself, with the vision for planting a new group.