

ALL SAINTS CHURCH

Facilitating Small Groups

Training Materials

Prepared by the Leadership Support & Development Committee

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Welcome from the Rector



Dear Ones,

Welcome to the training to facilitate a small group at All Saints Church.

Small groups are about close relationship. Supporting each other. Sharing our lives. Learning, working and playing together. Building trust with one another. Small groups are where we connect with each other more deeply than we can when we are in the larger church community. Through our small groups our community life of prayer, worship, study, service and giving take specific form. Small groups are love lived out loud in the reality of our lives.

This training will focus on the importance of your role as leader and facilitator of a small group. You will learn skills you will need to fill this role and the network of support on which you will be able to depend.

Thank you for being an important part of this transformative ministry. You are a blessing!

Con el amor de Cristo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Mike' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike

Core Values and Mission Statement at All Saints Church

All Saints Church is committed to excellence in its many ministries, building on these foundational values:

Radical Inclusion

We believe that all beings on earth are equally loved and valued by God, and are all irrevocably interdependent with each other. Enriching ourselves by embracing the diverse identities of others, we actively invite all to share God's love within the All Saints community, whoever you are and wherever you find yourself on the journey of faith.

Courageous Justice

We believe no person or group has an inherent right to hold power over another or to distort the fundamental balance of nature. We are committed to audacious examination and challenging of power and privilege in the world and in our church; to pursue truth relentlessly, not for retribution but toward trust and reconciliation. We choose love over fear to overcome prejudice and promote healing, to redress oppression and to restore environmental equilibrium.

Joyful Spirituality

We believe God is love. Our trust in God's love makes us whole, worthy just as we are, and able to experience the deepest joy in life from loving each other as God loves us. We continually strive to develop a personal understanding of the nature of God within us and our unique path of fellowship and faith. Through God's grace we discover the silent essence of communion and the exuberant joy of being.

Ethical Stewardship

We believe that with God's gift of freedom to make choices comes the responsibility to make them wisely. We are committed to thoughtfully and rigorously nurturing the healthy, sustainable development of our financial resources, our people, and our planet.

Mission Statement

We are an Episcopal Church, walking with a revolutionary Jesus,
Loving without judgement
Doing justice courageously
Embracing life joyfully
Reverently inviting all faiths and peoples into relationship
For the healing and transformation of ourselves, our community, and the world.

Purpose of Small Groups

To provide an opportunity for friends and members of All Saints Church to develop deeper connections and wider service within the church and community – with a primary emphasis on caring for each other.

Description of a Small Group Facilitator

We are so grateful for your commitment to lead a Small Group here at All Saints Church. We hope that you will find it a rewarding experience and that you will find personal and spiritual growth through this work. We are committed to supporting you through this process.

Although our leadership styles and techniques vary, we share qualities that seem to provide a foundation on which leaders and group facilitators build. These include:

- Creating and nurturing a safe environment that builds an atmosphere of trust and comfort which permits everyone to be able to share openly and honestly, ensuring that all voices can be heard, and allowing all sides, perspectives and viewpoints to be considered. The key word is “safe.” Such sharing may be more likely to occur if we use the “Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Differences” (See Appendix).
- Remaining focused on process and participation, and therefore avoiding advocating for an idea while facilitating: the facilitator is not the teacher. During discussions, the facilitator may have strong ideas about the topic being discussed, but those ideas must be shared as though from a participant’s viewpoint, not a leader’s.
- Directing/redirecting the conversation as needed to ensure inclusion and efficiency are balanced: as the facilitator, you must make sure that everyone is treated fairly, given equal amounts of air time, and that the conversation keeps going. That’s not to say that moments of silence are to be avoided. Silence can be a valuable tool for allowing people to think and ponder what they’ve heard before jumping into the fray.
- Listening actively, paying close attention to the dynamics of the group and aiding in facilitating discussions with sensitivity to individual needs.
- Humbly evaluating our performance regularly. A facilitator seeks positive and constructive feedback in order to discern what is and isn’t working, and when change is necessary, works to implement modifications. The facilitator seeks help from the support team when there are questions or when confronting a difficult situation.

Creating an Effective Small Group Atmosphere

Establish a tone of hospitality as people come into the space each time you meet. Hospitality helps people feel welcomed, valued and relaxed. The facilitator will arrive early to greet group members and will faithfully attend all meetings.

Engage in the richness of the content without advocating for a position. As the facilitator, you may have to put your ideas aside until the appropriate moment.

- Encourage discussion among all the members of your group. Don't let your ideas or comments inhibit the flow of discussion.
 - Here's an example from the classroom: in discussing a poem, a class member might say something the teacher considers brilliant. Avoid at that moment giving a judgment—"That's right; that's exactly it." Such a comment immediately silences all the rest of the students.
 - Instead, as facilitator, you could say, "Tell me more about that. How did you come to that idea?" or "Does anyone have a response to the that idea?"

Characteristics of a Healthy Small Group

Most of us recognize an effective small group when we experience it. We may have found one in a group of friends, a small group at church or a team-building experience at work. Such groups do seem to share some characteristics. They generally seek to do the following:

Affirm and support each member

- A small group is a place to practice the Christian model of concern and care for others. In healthy small groups, each person feels accepted, affirmed, and supported. The group practices inclusion, affection, acceptance, support and trust. A small group provides an opportunity to connect with others.

Explore faith

- Whether in an affinity group, a Lenten book group, or in a group with another purpose, small groups at All Saints allow and encourage dialogues questioning and affirming issues of faith.

Take care of one another

- In a healthy group, everyone feels included and participates in ways appropriate to their needs and roles in the group. Group worship and prayer remind the members that God's spirit is powerfully present in each person.

Serve outside of the group

- Though it might not be evident when a group forms, members may look for opportunities to participate together in community activities and actions.

First Session - Establish a Covenant

A covenant implies a deeply understood, shared agreement about how we will be together.

- Identify the behaviors that you need in a small group discussion, ones that support your talking, listening, and thinking. One tool is “Think, Pair, Share” which is described in the Appendix (Sharing in Small Groups).
 - Be transparent about these instructions and why you are using them. Give group members time to think about their answers; make a chart of the ideas the group comes up with.
- Make copies and hand out the “Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Differences Handout”. Explain each briefly. (Located in Appendix.)
 - Ask the participants to locate their needs that they thought about in the ten guidelines and discuss those possible additions in groups of 4.
 - Invite questions for clarity.
 - Ask what needs are not met by these Guidelines. Add to the Guidelines any additional ideas; chart these.
- Ask the group for agreement on their covenant. Talk about the importance of a covenant and the importance of honoring their agreement.
- Be transparent in modeling the Guidelines whenever the group meets. Maybe even name the Guideline as you purposefully use it: “I’m trying on what you just said. Here’s what I think.”
- In your meetings of your small group, periodically get out the list and ask participants how they are doing in using the guidelines.
- Establish a process observer for each meeting. (See Appendix – Sharing in Small Groups for explanation of a Process Observer.)

Guiding Effective Small Groups

Building Inclusive Conversation

Encourage the inclusion of all voices present and ensure sufficient time is allowed for desired topics to be discussed.

- Open with clear, simple, general questions, preferably open-ended rather than those easily answered with a "yes" or "no".
- Follow with clarifying questions to understand specifics or probing questions to encourage the group to think further.
- Invite individuals to ask questions of one another.
- Encourage participants to look at and speak with the whole group rather than address responses to the facilitator.
- People tend to ask informational or closed questions. Open questions help others tell things about themselves they want to tell. Here are examples of four kinds of questions:

Closed	Open	Informational	Feeling Level
Leads to a one-word answer and does not invite a person to expand.	Allows a person to talk about reasons, feelings, history etc.	<i>When did you move to California?</i>	<i>How do you feel about living in California?</i>
<i>Do you like to cook?</i>	<i>Why do you like to cook?</i>		
<i>How long have you been cooking?"</i>	<i>What was an unusual experience with food?</i>		

- Be aware of body language: tension, averting eye contact, and other nervous gestures. Be discreet about asking participants if they are feeling uncomfortable.
- Use process to include the members who are less likely to participate. Here are some suggestions:
 - Stop the discussion to create space for less assertive members.
 - Use Round Robin to give each person a time to talk. (See Appendix – Sharing in Small Groups)
 - Watch for clues: "bright eyes" and "breathing in."
 - Ask, "Whose heart is beating fast? If it is, you need to share."
 - Before concluding, check in to see if there are any other ideas that didn't get discussed.

Modeling Active Listening

“Being heard is so close to being loved that for the average person, they are almost indistinguishable.” — David W. Augsburger, Caring Enough to Hear and Be Heard

As a facilitator working to create an environment conducive to deep connection, it is important to model active listening. Active listening is an attitude as well as a set of skills. It begins with the listener’s willingness to set aside for the moment their own agenda, including an initial reaction to what they are hearing, and instead to prioritize understanding the speaker’s point of view. Seek to:

- Adopt an attitude of openness and respect.
- Focus on the person speaking.
 - Be attentive; make eye contact.
 - Pay close attention to both the verbal and nonverbal aspects of the speaker’s communication.
- Listen with acceptance, even if you disagree.
- Try to empathize with each speaker’s perspective and feelings. Nod “yes” when appropriate.
- Work for mutual understanding.
 - Clarify what you hear by asking questions to be sure you understand what words mean.
 - Paraphrase when appropriate and ask for agreement from speakers that you have understood what they’ve said.
- Give positive feedback where possible.
- Remind speakers that silent moments are acceptable.

To communicate acceptance of speakers and what they have to say, active listeners avoid:

- Problem-solving
- Advice-giving
- Judgment
- Rescuing
- Comparison
- Equating one’s own experience with that of the speaker
- Teaching
- Labeling or simplifying what the speaker is saying
- Agreeing with one speaker over another

Handling Difficult People

“Difficult” comes in many flavors. Here are some specific situations and issues that may be detrimental if they arise:

- The naysayer – who shoots down every proposal or suggestion.
- The “know it all” type.
- The one who talks too much.
- The one who fails to honor confidentiality.
- The “loud voice” or “interrupter” – who shuts down other inputs.
- The sideline/secret conversationalist, who talks behind others’ backs – or conducts “parking lot conversations.”
- The chronically late arriver, or one who lacks follow-through on assignments.

Remember the Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Differences.

In a private setting, use a “compliment sandwich” – begin and end with a positive stroke and place the issue of concern in the middle.

Sometimes pastoral care is the answer; talk to your Small Group Coordinator if the issue seems serious.

During a meeting, remind the group and the individual of the ground rules:

- Give everyone a chance to talk.
- Thank the person for her/his input, and suggest that “we hear from others who have not had the opportunity to speak yet.”
- Look to your process observer – check in after meeting to make sure your perception is validated.

Evaluating Sessions

At the end of each session:

- Ask the process observer for feedback; agree to what will be the focus for the next meeting.
- Assess group health and interest: Plus/Delta Charts, Appreciations and Regrets, Check In, Quick Write. Explanations for each of these are in the Appendix – Sharing in Small Groups.
- If it doesn’t get mentioned, talk about the facilitator’s on-going self-assessment:
 - Are our vision, purpose, and intention clear?
 - What is needed to foster wholeness and balance at this moment?
 - Are people truly present?

- Is there a sense of freedom and playfulness? Is the energy alive, vibrant, and moving?
- Does something need to be healed or addressed before the group can move forward?
- As facilitator, am I remaining neutral?

At the end of the final session, do a more extended assessment to be used in developing future programs. This could include content, logistics, facilitation, group work, etc.

Facilitator Support – Small Group Coordinator

Purpose: The Small Group Coordinator (volunteer) supports, resources, encourages and empowers Small Group facilitators, so that they are enabled to serve their small group with confidence and skill. Each Small Group facilitator will be assigned to a Small Group Coordinator. Each Coordinator will:

- Attend and participate in the Initial Small Group Training provided by Leadership Committee
- Communicate directly with assigned facilitators after first meeting and either at the end of the small group (for those groups with short durations, i.e., 6 weeks or less) or a minimum of once per quarter (for groups that meet for a longer duration), or as needed/requested.
- Contribute to the online Small Group Resource Library with the help of Staff
 - *Identify, develop and assess small group content for those groups assigned, as necessary.*
- Schedule and provide leadership for ongoing mentoring sessions in coordination with the Small Group Steering Committee. *(These sessions are always customized; the first few sessions are more skill oriented, becoming more of a mutual support as facilitators gain confidence.)*
- Communicate at least monthly with Small Group Steering Committee, providing an assessment of health of Small Groups under one's care.
- Be responsible for no more than five to seven Small Groups
- Work with facilitators to administer standard small group assessment/evaluation—either when the Small Group ends (4-5 months) or quarterly for on-going groups.
- Support formation of Small Groups that are either: a) start-ups or b) generated when an existing small group comes to its (initial) end. Such support could include finding a new facilitator, generating content, facilitating merger with another group, etc.
- Support identifying and assessing new Facilitators
- Support and facilitate transition of facilitators within a Small Group

Appendix

Sample Pre-, During & Post- Agenda for Small Group Meeting

Pre Gathering

- Meet by phone / email / in-person with your staff liaison
- Determine date / time / location of your meetings. Staff liaison will book the rooms
- Send an introductory email via My All Saints to your group to inform them of date, time and location of your gatherings.
- Learn your group members' names
- Correct and update your group frequently with your staff liaison who will make the updates in My All Saints
- Prepare and send to your group an agenda for each gathering

During

- Welcome, Opening Prayer, introductions
- Check in
- Overview of the agenda
- Guidelines for Recognizing and Valuing Differences (or another set of “group norms” to adopt)
- Discussions, Questions, and Activities for your meeting
- Closing Prayer, Appreciations & Regrets

Post Gathering

- Take attendance for each meeting in My All Saints
- Report any concerns or issues to your Small Group Coordinator

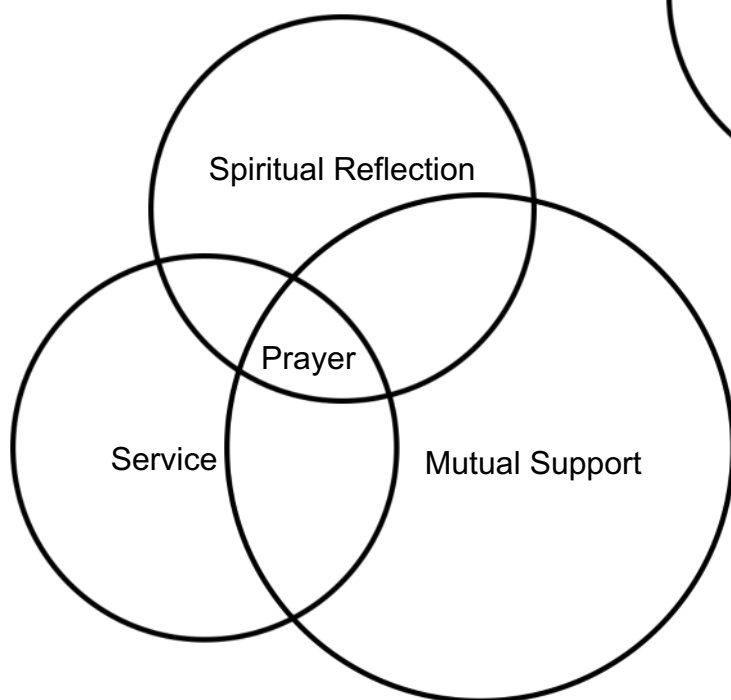
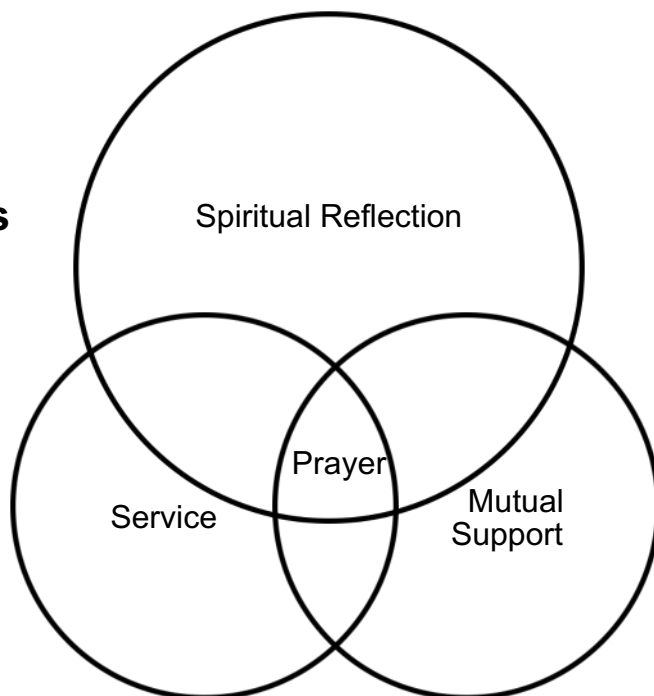
Four Components of All Small Groups

All small groups emphasize four components of each session or gathering. The names given to these components may vary but the general content is similar.

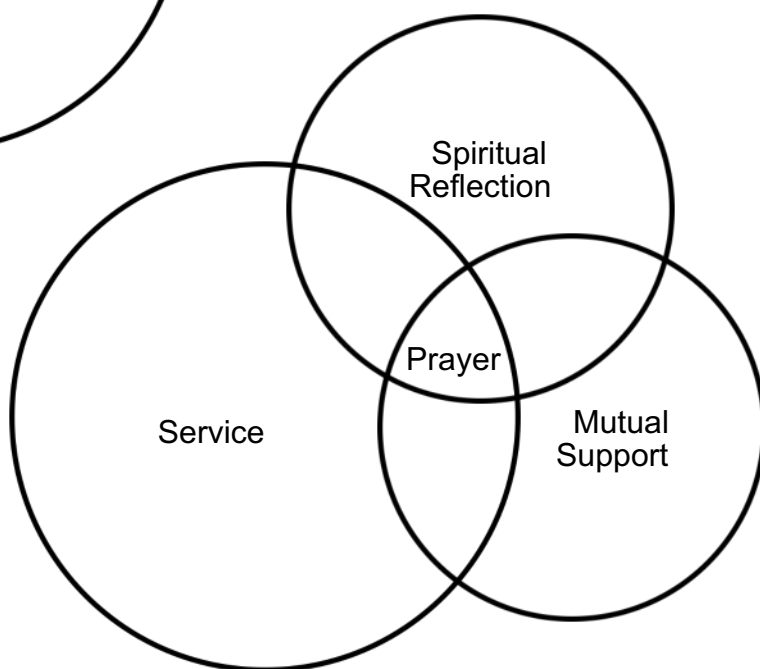
1. **Spiritual reflection** is a part of small group gatherings. The reflection time may be resourced in a variety of ways...Bible verses or study, a quote, or a reflection on the previous week's sermon. Depending upon the type of small group, biblical reflection may be the group's main focus or simply a brief devotional time that begins a task-focused meeting.
2. **Mutual support or community building** happens through intentional activities, discussion, and informal ways members "connect" with each other. As the group gathers, various activities enable the members to relax and feel comfortable with each other—building TRUST over time. As the group moves into its time of reflection, mutual support develops as personal stories and insights are shared. A caring community is built and strengthened as group members work together on a common ministry task (#4).
3. **Prayer** binds the group to God and to each other. Most small group gatherings begin and end with prayer, which may take on a variety of forms.
4. **Ministry Service** refers to outward-directed service that group members undertake together. Some groups make this their primary purpose. All types of small groups can benefit from putting their experiences and discoveries into action on behalf of others.

All Saints Church - Small Group Ministry 'different groups have difference emphases, but the same Spirit'

Spiritual Growth Groups



Support/Recovery Groups



Ministry Task Groups

Guidelines for Recognizing & Valuing Differences Handout

1. “Try on.”

Try on each other's ideas, feelings & ways of doing things for the purpose of greater understanding. Keep what you like & let go of the rest at the end of the work session. “Try on” is like trying on clothes without necessarily buying them.

2. It's OK to disagree.

Let go of the idea that we need to be, think & act the same. Disagreements about ideas offer a chance to see an issue through the eyes of someone looking at it from a different angle. Diverse ideas enrich our thinking

3. Practice “both/and” thinking; watch the use of “but.”

Look for ways to fit ideas together & not set up an “either/or” process or a competition between ideas. This is a different world-view where people claim multiple truths. The Western mind is comfortable with claiming an either/or truth. Look for the existence of many truths from the perspective of the many cultural backgrounds involved.

4. Notice both process & content.

Content is what we say, while process is how & why we say or do something & how the group reacts. Notice who's active & who's not, who's comfortable & who's not, who's interested & who's not. Ask about it.

5. Maintain confidentiality.

Confidentiality with regard to personal sharing is important. You can convey the work of the group, your own stories & perspectives, your own learning, & the public work from the group. Allow others to tell their own stories. It is ok to share your personal stuff outside the group—but not someone else's personal stuff.

6. Assume 100% responsibility to take care of yourself.

Ask yourself: If I am uncomfortable or feeling unease, what do I need to do to take care of that? And what assumptions are keeping me from doing it?

7. Practice self-focus (“I” statements & specific references.

Talk about your own experience. Use “I” statements when speaking about yourself & your experience. Avoid the vague “you,” “we,” or “one.” When referring to others, be specific about who those others are—by name or group. This allows discovery of our own internal processes & comfort with our self & how we think & feel. We own it.

8. It's not OK to blame, shame or attack anyone else or myself.

Practice self-awareness. Be aware when you are tempted to blame, shame or attack anyone, including yourself. Shake it off; let it go. Move back to problem solving.

9. As questions of self & others.

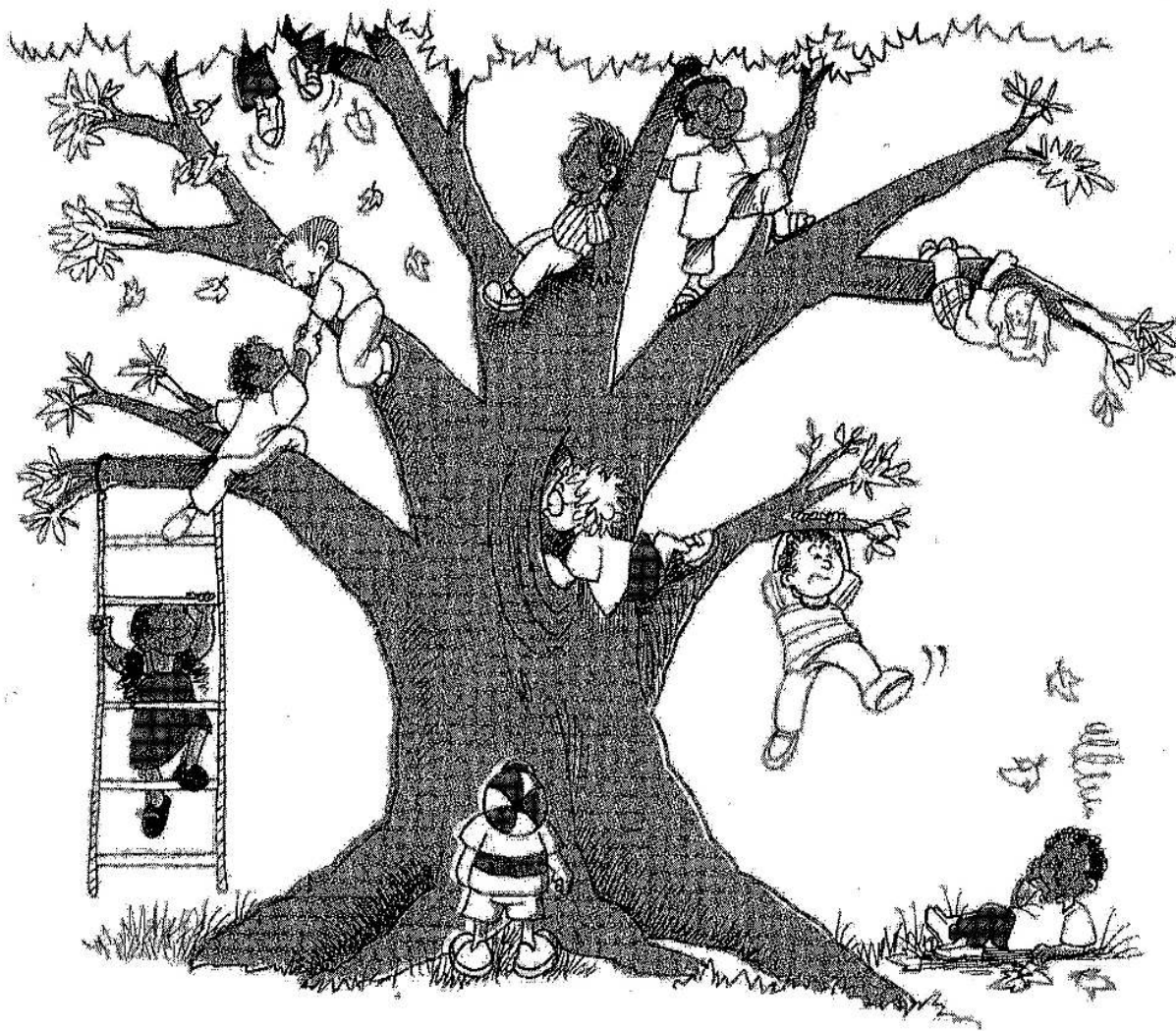
“What does this (what is happening) mean for me? Am I in a place of discomfort? It is ok to be in a place of discomfort. The invitation is not to move to an unsafe place. Check this out with yourself & others. Discomfort allows you to look at other options; feeling unsafe can shut down learning & consideration of other options.

10. Be aware of intent & impact.

Watch for where intent & impact are not the same. Look for nonverbal signs that do not match the intention you wanted. People tend to be well intended. The issue is impact. We cannot control of the impact, maybe 50%. When intent is not matched to impact, work to bring impact in line with intent.

Tree of Small Group Leadership

- Study the picture
- Choose the child that reflects how you feel about facilitating a small group
- Share your choice with a partner
- Depending on size of group, share your choice and explanation with the whole group



Prayer in Small Groups

Prayer is an important component in small groups. Don't neglect praying just because it isn't easy to please everyone. People are at different places in their prayer lives. Some have never prayed aloud in their own words. Avoid rewarding or judging those with more or less experience.

Some methods to use:

- **Prayers that are read:** You can use written prayers, poems and blessings found in many books and online. Call on volunteers to read these prayers or read them in unison.
- **The facilitator prays:** The facilitator can set an example by preparing a prayer and helping others to learn how to do it. Don't use long prayers that intimidate those who are beginners in praying aloud.
- **Silent Prayer:** Set aside two or three minutes for this. You may suggest topics to pray about or let participants decide on their own. Let them know how you will end this time.
- **Written Prayers:** Give people a time to write a short prayer on a piece of paper. Then suggest that those who are willing can read it aloud.
- **Circle Prayer:** Sit or stand in a circle. Invite volunteers to share a brief prayer. Use the silent moments for prayer as well. Assign someone to close with a prayer.
- **Prayer Request:** Ask the participants to share special needs that can be remembered in a prayer. They can be personal or communal needs. The participants may prefer to write them on a sheet of paper. Then call for volunteers to take one and say a simple prayer about that request. Tell them that the mention of a request was a prayer.
- **Sentence Prayer:** The facilitator begins with a brief prayer such as, "We are thankful for..." or "Help me be more..." and the group participants randomly complete the sentence.
- **Specific Prayer:** As the trust level grows and the participants become more comfortable with prayer, you can ask them to share specific concerns or personal needs. Then ask each participant to pray for the one on their left. Let them know ahead of time so they can listen carefully.
- **Praying While Singing:** Once in a while suggest that your prayer time be a song.
- **Prayer Journal:** Encourage participants to write down prayer requests that are shared in the group. Encourage participants to jot down feelings or ideas about prayer as they come to them.

Sharing in Small Groups

Participating in conversation with other members of the group is the surest way to build community and for members to get to know each other. Conversation includes sharing one's own ideas and listening to others share theirs. In order to get sharing from everyone, here are some methods to use:

- **Check in** with all participants at each meeting. Give participants a check in topic that can be briefly answered, and then model it. E.g., Describe a moment of economic challenge this week.
- **Think, Pair, Share:** Give participants time to think about an open-ended question; then give them time to share their thinking with a partner. After sharing with each other, they can share with the whole group.
- **Break into smaller groups:** In order to make sure everyone is involved and has opportunity to speak, let them work in small groups of 3 – 5.
- **Round Robin:** Take turns and let everyone speak to an issue or topic.
- **Socratic Seminar:** Socratic seminars are named for their embodiment of Socrates' belief in the power of asking questions, prizing inquiry over information, and discussing rather than debating.
 - Start out by posing open-ended questions that require participants to revisit the texts or topics for that night's session.
 - The participants should share their ideas with the rest of the group.
 - You may find it useful to limit your intrusions to helpful reminders about procedures (e.g., "Maybe this is a good time to turn our attention back to the text or topic." "Do we feel ready to explore a different aspect of the text or topic?") Resist the urge to correct or redirect, relying instead on other participants to challenge their peers' interpretations respectfully or offer alternative views.
- **Jigsaw** (for book groups): Divide the reading assignments into sections and assign one section to each small group or pair. The groups become "experts" on their sections and share out what they think is important.
- **Use short writing assignments:** Make the point that sometimes we don't know what we believe or are thinking until we have opportunity to write our thoughts. Some methods to use:
 - **Quick Write:** After giving the participants an open-ended (opinion) question, allow them to write a timed response. Have them share their written responses to a small group. Then ask for the sharing of ideas the participants heard or wrote.
 - **One Minute Essay:** Like the Quick Write, participants are given a fixed amount of time to write, summarizing what has been most important for them in the night's

discussion or reading. When it is done at the end of the session, it can be used again at the beginning of the next session to bring participants back to where they were at the earlier meeting.

- **On-going assessments of the group experience**—some methods to use:
 - **3 – 2 – 1:** At the end of a session, ask participants to write down, on an index card that you'll collect, three most important points, two questions, and one worry or misgiving. Collect the cards and use them to do a quick whole group assessment. The questions can be addressed at the following session.
 - **Plus Delta:** Just before closing the meeting, ask participants to share what was positive about the meeting (the +’s) and what they would like to see changed (the Δ’s).
 - **Appreciations and Regrets:** At the end of a meeting or at the end of the final meeting, ask participants to share what they have appreciated and what they regret.
- **Process Observer:** Appoint a process observer for each meeting who will, in addition to participating in the group, watch and listen.
 - The observer reports usually at the end of the meeting without mentioning names or shaming participants about how well the participants are using and adhering to the Guidelines in their covenant, how some participants are speaking more often than others, how some participants are not joining in discussion.
 - The facilitator will attend to the issues in the report and remind the participants gently of their covenant.

Resources for Leaders

Using Survey Monkey and Doodle.

Both of these web applications can be used to take a quick survey of your group and are especially handy for picking a meeting date or helping members to sign up to work at an event, for example. Both are easy to use and the main page has straight-forward instructions that walk users through signup and implementation. These are examples and are endorsed due to familiarity and the availability of “free” versions.

[SurveyMonkey](#)

[Doodle](#)

Creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals

Specific

Measurable

Attainable

Realistic

Timely (or time-bound)

There are a multitude of resources on the web for setting goals. You may want to start at [Wikipedia](#) or this brief summary at the [MIT Human Resources page](#).

My All Saints

You can access [My All Saints](#) using the Login ID and Password that was sent to you. If you do not remember your password, follow the online instructions to generate a new password. If you need a reminder of your Login ID, please email ArenaHelp@allsaints-pas.org. That also is the address to send any other questions, concerns or feedback.

[Click here](#) to access a YouTube video that walks you through the process.

Use My All Saints to take attendance at your meetings. [Click here](#) to view a step-by-step My All Saints Ministry Leader How-to Guide