

Salem Fellowship Groups



Praise the Lord
Know His Word
Share His Love

Salem Fellowship Groups

Fellowship groups are a vital part of our ministry at Salem. We want to do more than be a friendly church. We want to be a church of friends. Fellowship groups are where those friendships are made.

Fellowship groups are the part of our ministry that is almost entirely led and conducted by the congregation. The pastor doesn't run the groups. The pastor doesn't even plan the groups. The pastor will be available to mentor the group leaders as needed. But for the most part, this is pure *member ministry*. This is in accord with God's will expressed in Ephesians 4:11-12, which says, "*Christ himself gave...the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.*"

This document lays out our approach to Salem Fellowship Groups:

- ✚ what their purpose is
- ✚ what types of fellowship groups we want to offer
- ✚ how they are scheduled
- ✚ how you can plan to host a fellowship group

If you have any additional questions about fellowship groups not covered in this document, please don't hesitate to contact pastor.

What is a Fellowship 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

Fellowship groups are one of the ways that Salem carries out those Biblical directives. In summary....

The purpose of Salem's Fellowship Groups is to enable Christians to share their lives, knitting them together as a family, for mutual encouragement and strengthening.

The Three Types of Fellowship Groups

Fellowship groups are *not* synonymous with Bible study. The main purpose of Bible study is spiritual growth. The main purpose of fellowship groups is to knit the people of Salem 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 fellowship groups.

Growth Groups

Growth Groups are comprised of Christians who want to gather for the spiritual growth 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. Growth group members take portions of God's Word and apply them to their lives. There is no "teacher" in growth groups. There is a facilitator who keeps discussion moving and focused on the topic of the day.

Examples of growth groups might be: a growth group for women that studies the Word and discusses how it applies to their lives, a growth group for parents that studies the Biblical principles of raising children; a growth group that looks at some the Lutheran confessions; a growth group that studies a book of the Bible chapter by chapter.

Growth groups are the only one of the three types of fellowship groups where the pastor helps the leaders prepare. If you would like to be a growth group leader, pastor will help you find appropriate and meaningful Bible study materials.

Help Groups

Help groups are comprised of Christians who want to serve either Salem 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). Help 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 help groups: a help group that meets at an assisted living center to socialize with the residents; a help group of young people that meet at elderly or sick members’ homes to do yard work; a help group that works at a local food pantry; a help group that works on Salem property beautification and maintenance projects.

Play Groups

Play 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 play groups: a play group for young children and their caregivers (Mornings with Mommy); a play group that gets together to play basketball in the gym; a play group that brings young families together to explore a local adventure; a play group that goes out to eat once a month at a variety of “exotic fare” restaurants; a play group that meets once a month to go golfing at various courses around the area.

The Session Schedule for Fellowship Groups

There are three fellowship sessions each year. Thus, if someone joins a fellowship group, they are committing for approximately three months.

The Start Times

The three sessions are arranged around three logical times for people to jump into congregational life at Salem:

Winter/Spring 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 Eve, it gives us an opportunity to invite visitors who came to that special service to learn more about Salem and make some new friends.

Summer begins in mid-May. Therefore, it occurs not too long after Easter. Some of our Easter visitors will be considering joining Salem. This provides us an opportunity to those individuals to get to know some of the members of our church. The Growth Groups offered in this session also allow opportunity for Bible study at the time when adult Sunday Bible Class is on hiatus for the summer.

Fall 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 session.

	Groups Planned	Groups Promoted	Groups meet
January		Winter/Spring	
February			Winter/Spring
March			Winter/Spring
April	Summer		
May		Summer	
June			Summer
July			Summer
August	Fall		
September		Fall	
October			Fall
November			Fall
December	Winter/Spring		
		Winter/Spring	

Planning and Promotion

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

For example, if you want to facilitate a fellowship group for Winter/Spring, your work begins mid-November. You start planning out what type of fellowship group it is, who it's for, how often it meets, where it meets, etc. You put this information on the Fellowship Group Planning Form which you can find on a table in the Fellowship Wing at church. You will need to have that form submitted by the due-date, which will be in mid-December. A precise due-date will be listed on the Fellowship Group Planning Form. To submit the form, simply place it in the church secretary's (Donna Schmidt's) mailbox at church, or mail it in to church.

The information for your fellowship group and all the other Winter/Spring fellowship groups will then be published mid-December through mid-January. People will enroll by contacting you, the group facilitator.

Planning a Salem Fellowship Group

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

Are you going to facilitate a Growth Group, a Help Group or a Play Group? If you want to plan a Help Group or a Play Group, you can plan that on your own. If it's a Growth Group (small group Bible Study), pastor can help you locate good Bible study material.

How often is the fellowship group going to meet? Fellowship groups run approximately 12 to 13 weeks. We want fellowship 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 Fellowship Group Planning Form.

When is the fellowship group going to meet? Say you determine your fellowship group is going to meet six times throughout the session. 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 fellowship group meet when it assembles? If it's a Play Group that is meeting for game night which begins at 7PM on Fridays, does the night end at 9PM or midnight? People need to know exactly what they are committing to.

Where is the fellowship group going to meet? Salem fellowship groups might meet at multiple locations. For example, a monthly golf fellowship group might meet at three different courses. But many fellowship groups, particularly Growth 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, or in the home of other willing group members, is ideal. "*Practice hospitality*" (Romans 12:13).

Another possibility is to meet somewhere in the community. For example, A Growth 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 fellowship group meet at church or at Salem's Family Ministry Center. That must be coordinated in advance with the church secretary, Donna Schmidt.

For whom is the fellowship group intended? There is nothing wrong with creating fellowship groups for a certain demographic. Examples: a seniors' fellowship group that visits various historic sites, a women's fellowship book club, a singles' fellowship group. You limit the number of possible participants, but that's OK. In fact, in many circumstances it is good, because focusing on a particular demographic creates groups whose members have more in common, fostering an atmosphere where closer fellowship can take place. In addition to that, fellowship groups shouldn't have more than 12 people anyways, because studies have shown that when groups grow bigger than that, it becomes too difficult for individual members to participate and to develop the close-knit relationships that these groups seek to foster.

What are the costs (or potential costs) of participation in the fellowship group? It is not wise for there to be surprise expenses for fellowship group participants. Thus, if participants need to purchase materials or spend money for anything else in order to participate, please list those costs on the Fellowship Group Planning Form.

What is it called? It's entirely up to you to create a name for your fellowship group. Ideally, you want to strike a balance between having the name clearly communicate what your group is about, and also having your name be creative and catchy! Have fun with it!

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Are Salem Fellowship Groups just for Salem members, or may non-members attend?

A: Of course non-members may attend! That would be encouraged. Some churches even use fellowship groups as their primary avenue of outreach, encouraging groups to “grow and divide.” We do not do that at Salem. Our primary purpose is simply to knit people together into a true Christian family. But by all means, invite unchurched friends and family.

Q: Why don't Salem Fellowship Groups run year-round? Why break them up into sessions?

A: There are three compelling reasons to break groups up that are provided by most experts on running small groups in a church:

1. Without a definite beginning date, people assume they are “jumping into 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. It’s too intimidating, it makes them feel out-of-place, and it gives them the sense that they will be behind the rest of the group when they join.
2. Without a definite end date, people assume they are supposed to continue in the group indefinitely. People tend *not* to commit to something that is open-ended. They want to know that there is a natural “off-ramp” built in so that, if they decide to leave for whatever reason, they can do so without feeling guilty that they have “quit” or “abandoned” the group.
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 the fellowship 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 group may be scheduled for every session. That group may even meet in the off-month between sessions. But it will be promoted as three distinct sessions, for the reasons listed above.

Q: What happens if my fellowship group gets too big?

A: Remember that the primary goal of fellowship groups is the sharing of lives. Small group experts will say that is harder to do when you get above a dozen people. In a larger group, people can “hide,” not participate. A larger group also makes it more intimidating for people to

participate, and easier for them to get “lost” in the mix. The result is that they do not develop the close-knit relationships that your group is meant to foster.

If you realize that your group is getting too big, one way to address the issue would be to identify an individual (most likely one who is currently in your group) who would be willing and able to facilitate a second fellowship group that is identical to your current group. Then towards the end of the session, you could announce to your group that, for the next session, you plan to split the group into two, with you leading one group and the other person leading the other group. You can also let them know that each group will be capped at 12 people moving forward, for the reasons listed above.

Q: What if I plan to host a Salem Fellowship Group and no one signs up?

A: Small group experts will tell you that is likely to happen every time a church begins a fellowship 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 session. It’s not a lack of interest in you! Everyone who has hosted fellowship groups has it happen that, from time to time, one of their fellowship groups generates no interest. So give it a try! Don’t be afraid.

