

# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO LEADERSHIP.....	4
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## A VISION AND THEOLOGY FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS

MISSION.....	6
WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS AT VERITAS CHURCH?.....	7
WHAT IS A VERITAS COMMUNITY GROUP?.....	9
WHAT DOES A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP DO?.....	10
VERITAS CHURCH VALUES AND COMMUNITY GROUP CULTURE.....	12
COMMUNITY GROUPS AS OUR PRIMARY MINISTRY.....	15

## PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

WHAT DOES A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER LOOK LIKE? .....	17
HEALTHY SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN COMMUNITY GROUP.....	20
EXPECTATIONS OF A COMMUNITY GROUP AND ITS MEMBERS.....	21
MISSIONAL FOCUS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS.....	22
HOW TO DEVELOP A COMMUNITY GROUP APPRENTICE.....	23
HOW TO MULTIPLY A COMMUNITY GROUP.....	24
CHANGES OF LEADERSHIP & DISSOLVING A COMMUNITY GROUP.....	27

## RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS

A: WEEKLY PREP FOR COMMUNITY GROUP MEETING .....	30
B: SHARING TESTIMONY IN COMMUNITY GROUP .....	31
C: EFFECTIVE GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATION.....	33
D. HOW TO BUILD GOSPEL-FLUENCY .....	35
E. HOW TO DEVELOP A MISSIONAL GROUP .....	38
F: DEALING WITH PROBLEMS IN COMMUNITY GROUP .....	40
G: RECOMMENDED RHYTHMS WITHIN COMMUNITY GROUPS .....	41
H: VERITAS ELDERS' POSITION ON CLOSED/OPEN-HANDED ISSUES.....	42



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## INTRODUCTION



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## WELCOME TO LEADERSHIP

Veritas Church exists for the fame of Jesus.

Our mission is to glorify God by making disciples who Love God, Love People, and Advance the Gospel for the city, for the military, and for the fame of Jesus.

Within this packet, we will discuss how Community Groups work together as a ministry in the church to be used by God to make the above statement true.

Please know that you are now being prayed for in a new and unique way. As a leader within Veritas Church, there will be a lot asked of you, but you will see that it's all worth it. Let the following material be a catalyst that you continually come back to as you lead the people of God and those that don't yet follow Jesus.

We love you and are cheering you on!



## VISION AND THEOLOGY FOR COMMUNITY GROUPS



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## MISSION

Before we talk about the “what” of leadership, we always think it is important to remind you of the “why.” We pursue Community Groups as a church because it aligns with our mission to glorify God by making disciples that Love God, Love People, and Advance the Gospel, all for the city, for the military, and ultimately for the fame of Jesus.

We believe that our mission as a church is informed by and inseparably linked to God’s mission and the Church’s mission through Jesus.

### THE MISSION OF GOD

We love the Bible at Veritas and it tells us that all things exist and are being worked according to the triune God’s passion, pleasure, and plan (Ephesians 1:11), which is the demonstration of his own intrinsic glory. God creates, calls, rescues, redeems, saves, restores, restrains, and grants all to the end that he might be praised. His desire, which he will surely fulfill, is that the knowledge of his glory would cover the earth as the waters do the sea (Habakuk 2:14). God’s mission is the manifestation of his magnificence. His mission is glory. What is the glory of God? The glory of God is the gravity that draws in those who see and savor it and repels us from our sinful nature. God’s desire is that he might be known and enjoyed for his nature and character. He seeks to be recognized as supremely valuable, supremely worthy, and supremely splendid. God’s glory is sensed when we feel the reality of his presence, goodness, and superiority.

### THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The mission of the universal Church is to glorify God by making disciples through the gospel of Jesus Christ. God’s mission and the mission of his Church are inseparably linked. If God’s mission is to be glorified through the redemption and reconciliation of a people, the Church’s mission must orient around the glory of God, and seek to glorify him through redemption and reconciliation. The mission of the Church is highlighted in 2 Corinthians 5: as those who have been reconciled to God through the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are now ambassadors of reconciliation to a lost and broken world. We plead, urge, implore, reason, pray, serve, preach, teach and gather to see God glorified through reconciliation.

### THE MISSION OF VERITAS CHURCH

At Veritas, we desire to love God, love people and advance the gospel, and to be a church for the city, for the military and for the fame of Jesus.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## WHY COMMUNITY GROUPS AT VERITAS CHURCH?

Why is our church so committed to Community Groups? Why do we think that everyone who calls Veritas Church home should catch the vision of Community Groups and be a life-giving member of one? For two simple reasons:

1. Jesus commanded us to make disciples.
2. God created us to be in community, and his Spirit empowers us to be in healthy relationships with one another.

### 1. JESUS COMMANDED US TO MAKE DISCIPLES

In the Great Commission, Jesus gave us a mandate: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

What is a disciple? It's an apprentice, a “learning follower.” Or something we always say, “a disciple is someone who follows Jesus and helps others follow Jesus.” Jesus wants his disciples to observe all that he commanded. Disciples aren't those who merely *know* what Jesus taught, they are those who *do* what Jesus taught. Therefore, discipleship means bringing every area of our lives in line with the truth of the gospel. It requires the wholesale renovations of our thinking, willing, feeling, and acting.

Discipleship within Community Groups is a holistic experience; first, we read and discuss scripture to grow in our understanding of God. The more we come to know and love the Lord, the more our lives will reflect Jesus. Second, we live life together in a community which enables honesty and accountability. In gender-specific groups, we share our hearts, sin-struggles, fears and circumstances; this not only shares the burdens of life, but also hinders the influence of personal sin by practicing transparency. Lastly, we desire to equip people to go out from the group and help others explore the claims of Christ.

Becoming a disciple of Jesus - practicing a daily following of Christ- only happens within a network of close, purposeful, transformative relationships. This is why Community Groups matter. Because we want to be the kind of people whose actual lives are transformed by the gospel. Because we want to follow Jesus, not just know about him. Because we want to make disciples, not just converts.

While discipleship is seen as a life-long posture or mindset, for the sake of specificity, the process of intimate discipleship is best done within smaller, gender-specific groups of 2-3 people within the context of a Community Group. Community Groups should be the primary, but not sole means of discipleship within the life of someone attending Veritas.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## 2. GOD CREATED US TO BE IN COMMUNITY, AND HIS SPIRIT EMPOWERS US TO BE IN HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER.

We see from the very beginning of the bible that our triune God created people in his image, and it was His intention that we live in fellowship with him and each other. In our sinful nature, we desired to be godlike, and in doing so, broke that bond between us, God, and other image-bearers. (Genesis 1-3) This means that all people have the common problem of living in a fallen world, which breaks us from that fellowship with God and each other, so we need to become reacquainted with true belonging and reconciliation. This can only come through a relationship with Jesus, but our Community Groups are meant to be a place to live out and show to the world that true belonging and reconciliation.

The bible is also clear on how we are to interact with "one another." The phrase "one another" is derived from the Greek word *allelon* which means "one another, each other; mutually, reciprocally." Throughout the New Testament, people are told to: Love one another (John 13:34 - This command occurs at least 16 times) Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10) Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10) Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16) Build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11) Be likeminded towards one another (Romans 15:5) Accept one another (Romans 15:7) Admonish one another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16) Greet one another (Romans 16:16). These are just a few examples, with about 100 total uses of the word.

Community Groups offer us the opportunity to practice these many commands for the purpose of building up the church, growing in our faith, and attracting those who do not yet know Christ. It should be stated here that people are sinful and messy, so Community Groups will be imperfect and messy. This all speaks to God's grace in using fragile, broken vessels to serve his good will. When people are committed to Christ and to living life in community, over time the process of sanctification will help us to look and act more like Jesus. As we support each other and speak into each other's lives, we will recognize sinful, unhealthy patterns within ourselves and pray for the Lord to change them in us.





# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## WHAT IS A VERITAS COMMUNITY GROUP?

Community Groups (CG) are gatherings of ideally about 10 to 20 people in homes (around the city of Fayetteville and surrounding areas) committed to **gathering together regularly, growing together spiritually, and living together missionally**. These groups are led by vetted and trained Covenant Partners of Veritas Church, but the groups are open to anyone interested in learning more about Jesus and the Christian life. These groups provide a community of care, broad discipleship, and accountability to those who consistently and faithfully attend them. We often say we want people to 'live life together' in CG, and that means creating a network of interdependent individuals and families who look to each other for support and understanding in practical daily life.

### COMMUNITY GROUPS GATHER TOGETHER REGULARLY

Community Groups ideally bring together people of different ages, vocations, races, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds united around one thing: Jesus. CGs are meeting on a routine weekly basis, except during the Month of Rest, which allows time for our CG Leaders to sabbath from some of their responsibilities.

Along with meeting on their specific night of the week, people within the CG are encouraged to meet together outside of that night for fellowship and more intimate discipleship. Within a healthy CG, people are reaching out throughout the week, their children are playing together, and people can ask for support when needs arise.

### COMMUNITY GROUPS GROW TOGETHER SPIRITUALLY

Within CG, people are not only opening the word of God and discussing it, but are also speaking the gospel into each other's lives. Along with pointing each other to Jesus in what is said, CG members want their character and actions to reflect God's grace within their lives. "The group points its members to God as their source. It shows that personal growth, relational growth, and emotional growth are all spiritual growth." (Cloud & Townsend, 2013, p. 111)

### COMMUNITY GROUPS LIVE TOGETHER MISSIONALLY

Every Christian is called to share the gospel with others and be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). With that in mind, we want to invite others into their lives and CGs, especially those who do not yet know Jesus. People within CGs should be loving their neighbors, co-workers and friends, and persistently inviting them to come to CG. Also, CGs are encouraged to do missional service projects within their neighborhood, as well as those offered through our partnerships with Habitat for Humanity and Operation Inasmuch. Loving and serving others, and inviting them to live life with us is not only a command to followers of Jesus, but when we are empowered by the Spirit, this occurs as an outpouring of God's love in our lives!



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## WHAT DOES A HEALTHY COMMUNITY GROUP DO?

While we look to Acts 2:42-47 as the model of fellowship in Christ, many churches have different interpretations of this; these are often called small groups, home groups, missional groups, discipleship groups, etc. People coming from other church experiences may have different expectations for Community Groups. Because of this, we hope to clearly communicate the purpose and function of Veritas Community Groups.

Community Groups have three main components which speak to it's weekly, monthly and quarterly function:

### . Bible Discussion

We are a church that loves the Bible and believes it is the inerrant word of God. We deeply desire for our people to grow in their knowledge of God by engaging in scripture. "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Tim 3:16-17)

- . **Weekly:** CGs most often read and discuss the scripture preached during the Sunday sermon. CGLs receive a CGLGuide on a weekly basis with scriptural background and context, announcements for the group, and questions for theological depth, as well as application.
- . **Monthly:** Ideally, people within a CG are engaging with scripture outside of their weekly CG night, on an individual basis, as well as within smaller discipleship groups (2-3 same-gender groups.)
- . **Quarterly:** Veritas most often walks through books of the Bible, but from time to time we engage on a concept or topic to grow on our knowledge of God. While discussion will always be based in scripture, there may be times that CGs are encouraged to engage discussion in different ways.

### . Prayer

We love and serve a good God who desires that we come to him in prayer with all parts of ourselves, including our needs, fears, desires, and emotions. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." (1 John 5:14) We desire to be a church marked by prayer.

- . **Weekly:** CGs should begin their weekly meetings in prayer. This is opportunity to pray for things relating to their group, the church, the City of Fayetteville (and surrounding areas), or the country and/or the world. After Bible discussion, groups should break into gender-specific groups to share sin struggles, concerns, fears, praises, etc with each other. This is a time to build intimacy and support, as well as hold each other accountable.
- . **Monthly:** CGs may be directed or feel led to pray as a whole group for some portion of, or the entire, CG meeting. CGs members should pray for each other, but should also consistently look outward and pray for the entire church, the City of Fayetteville (and surrounding areas,) the country, and/or the world.
- . **Quarterly:** In the history of Veritas, we have had Nights of Prayer, in which the entire body is invited to come together for corporate prayer. There is great power in prayer, particularly when many voices are



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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lifted together. CGLs should encourage their group members to attend any church-wide prayer events, and the CGLs can decide if the regular CG will be held that week.

## · Missional Focus

Being on mission for God is a life-long intention which drives us to invite people to become a part of God's family. While only the Holy Spirit can change our hearts from stone to flesh, we are given the privilege of sharing the gospel and its influence in our lives. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

- **Weekly:** People within CGs should always be seeking and prepared to welcome newcomers into CG; those newcomers may get connected through a Veritas Connect Card, or from someone within the CG. CG environments should be hospitable and accessible for all.
- **Monthly:** The last week of the month, CGs are encouraged to have cook-outs, pot lucks, outings or any opportunity which allows people to socialize freely. Not only do these help to foster the culture within the CG, but they are also the perfect opportunity to invite neighbors and friends who may be uncomfortable with first coming to a bible discussion.
- **Quarterly:** At least once a quarter, CGs are strongly encouraged to complete some form of missional service together; that may be serving breakfast at or making lunches for Operation Inasmuch, building homes with Habitat for Humanity, or doing something like yard work for a few neighbors near where the CG is hosted.

## General Format of Community Groups at Veritas

On average, CG will be between two and two-and-a-half hours. CGLs should allow 15-20 minutes of free space at the beginning for people to arrive, chat and get children into childcare. Bible Discussion and Prayer should last about an hour each, with a little time to come back together and wrap up. Maintaining these components of CG require discipline and structure. While there is always grace, if groups do not have a stable routine or continually start late and end over time, this will hinder people from coming back. We desire for CGs to be a safe space for people to question, engage and share, and discipline and structure help to create that environment.

For additional resources relating to these three components, see the appendix of this handbook. Veritas Staff and Elders are also always a resource to CGLs in regard to leading and caring for CGs well.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## VERITAS CHURCH VALUES AND COMMUNITY GROUP CULTURE

The values of Veritas Church are Truth, Worship, Community, Leadership Development, and Mission. We believe that Community Groups speak to and serve all of those values. In developing, researching, and refining Community Groups, we have found six marks of a healthy CG culture.

- Gospel-Centered Conversations
- Formative Community
- Devoted Prayer
- Intentional Mission
- Effective Leadership
- Strategic Multiplication

### 1. GOSPEL-CENTERED CONVERSATIONS

In a healthy CG, people talk about Jesus and his gospel. We distinguish “gospel-centered” conversations from “content-centered” conversations because it’s possible to discuss true, biblical content without ever actually getting to Jesus. When this happens, we are like the Pharisees, who searched the Scriptures but missed Jesus (John 5:39-40). In a healthy CG, the Bible is not an end in itself, it’s a means to help people understand the truth of the gospel and apply it to actual life.

Discussions about biblical truth are not always neat and tidy, because we are messy people, living in a broken world. But in the midst of the mess and brokenness, Jesus is exalted as the perfect servant and sufficient savior. Our conversations point us to him for rescue, renewal, and healing.

Questions to help assess the health of your Community Group:

1. Are your conversations generally neat, tidy, and surface-level or is there real, honest authenticity and application?
2. Can everyone in your CG articulate, clearly and simply, the basic truths of the gospel?
3. Can you tell stories of conversion and/or significant spiritual formation (being made more like Jesus) within your CG?

### 2. FORMATIVE COMMUNITY

In a healthy CG, people experience real community. A healthy Community Group is a lot like a family. People get to know each other and take responsibility for one another. They know each other’s faults and flaws. And because of the sense of belonging and honesty that’s created, people are being shaped into disciples of Jesus. Their sinful and selfish habits, patterns, and tendencies are being revealed. Their areas of unbelief and idolatry are being exposed. Their evidence of sanctification is being encouraged and celebrated. People share each other’s burdens, pray for one another, and meet practical needs. New people are drawn in, not left out.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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Questions to help assess the health of your Community Group:

1. Are people in this community group connected outside of the weekly meeting time?
2. Is there a present and growing desire for people to pray for and serve each other?
3. Are people in this group instrumental in each other's spiritual formation?

## 3. DEVOTED PRAYER

In a healthy CG, prayer to God pushes the mission forward and reminds us of our inheritance as sons and daughters. Everything we do should be rooted in prayer; from counseling to preaching, from soul care to a family meal, it should all be saturated in prayer. Our God, our good Father, wants to hear from us. And as leaders, our people are relying on us and trusting that we are praying for them. Our lost and broken neighborhoods can only be reached with the gospel by begging God to do so in prayer.

Questions to help assess the health of your Community Group:

1. How is your personal prayer life?
2. Are you actively leading your group in individual and corporate prayer?
3. What are the prayers you're praying right now for your CG and the community that you're missionally engaged with?

## 4. INTENTIONAL MISSION

In a healthy CG, people live on mission together. Jesus sent us on mission to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). A healthy CG understands this mission and takes responsibility for it. In other words, they are on mission together. This doesn't necessarily mean everyone lives in the same place or shares the same relationships. It just means they're committed to the same mission. They exist to make disciples together, and they're willing to make the necessary sacrifices (in time, relational patterns, budget, resources, etc.) in order to see that mission fulfilled.

Questions to help assess the health of your Community Group:

1. Is there a shared commitment to mission? What is the mission? Can the average group member articulate it?
2. Are new people being added to the CG?
3. How frequent does someone in your group verbally share the gospel with a non-Christian?

## 5. EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

In a healthy CG, people aspire to leadership. A healthy Community Group is led by qualified, effective leaders who are faithful, humble, teachable, and vulnerable - and is continually producing more of them. It is a launching pad, not a holding tank. Every Christian is called to the work of making disciples. So a healthy CG consistently moves people toward greater ownership and involvement in discipleship. No one is a spectator



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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(this statement bucks against today's cultural Christianity). Everyone is encouraged to identify and use the gifts and abilities God has given them.

A healthy CG starts with a core group of 3-6 people or families who are committed to God, to each other, and to making disciples. Their goal is to grow the CG through conversion and discipleship until another 3-6 people or families are raised up to multiply and start a new CG.

Questions to help assess the health of your Community Group:

1. Are leaders being trained and developed?
2. Are people maximizing their spiritual gifts for the sake of the kingdom of God?
3. Would you feel satisfied if all CG's at Veritas resembled yours?

## 6. STRATEGIC MULTIPLICATION

In a healthy CG, multiplication is strategic and always on the table.

By God's grace, Veritas continues to grow numerically. This is a great opportunity for us to put gospel doctrine in front of more people. But if we are not able to care for the people, the church grows in vain. This is where multiplication becomes, not a sought-after metric, but a necessity to be able to care for the people of the church, and for those that Jesus chooses to bring into our fold from outside of her. The processes and timelines for strategic and healthy multiplication are listed in a separate section.

Questions to help assess the health of your Community Group:

1. Who are you currently praying for as an apprentice?
2. With the people God has given you, who has a burden to reach their neighborhood?
3. Are you prepared to plant within the next 18 months?



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS AS OUR PRIMARY MINISTRY

### THE CHURCH GATHERED AND CHURCH SCATTERED

When some of us think of church, we think of a building or an institution. But according to the New Testament, the church is a missionary people. We are called together by the electing grace of God through faith in Jesus, and we are sent on mission to live for God's glory (1 Corinthians 10:31) and to make disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20).

As God's people, the church gathers weekly to worship God together, to hear his word preached, and to celebrate his death and resurrection. But the church does not exist only on Sundays. We are not called to worship God merely one day a week, but to live all of life for his glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Therefore, the church scattered is as important as the church gathered. As God's people, when we go about our ordinary lives in the world, we are to live distinctly in ways that display and declare his glory. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9) And we are to do so in community. To say it another way, no one becomes a disciple or makes disciples alone. God's people are to be together in life and on mission. and that's the point of a Community Group.

### SUPPORTIVE MINISTRIES

Community Groups cannot not and should not be all things for all people. This would lead to unmet expectations for those within CGs, as well as put a crushing burden on CGLs. CGs are one of the primary means of discipleship and care within the church, but they are not the only means.

Veritas has growing ministries to address the distinct needs of our population; this includes:

- Men's/Women's Discipleship (seasonal bible studies)
- Prepare/Enrich (premarital/marriage mentoring program)
- Embrace (women's discipleship related to trauma, abuse and mental health issues)
- Military Ministry (support during deployment/extended trainings)

All of these, as well as any other ministry within Veritas should be seen as a support for CGs. We always desire for anyone who calls Veritas home to be a consistent, life-giving part of a CG, and we see these additional ministries as supportive means of discipleship and care for different seasons of life.



## PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP OF COMMUNITY GROUPS





# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## WHAT DO HEALTHY VERITAS COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS LOOK LIKE?

A strong Community Group begins with a prayerful, humble, confident, Christ-loving Community Group leader (or set of leaders.) CGLs are men and women who follow Jesus and help others to follow Jesus. CGLs can be a married couple, pair of married couples, a pair of singles (male and female), or combination of married and single leaders together. CGs need to have at least one male and one female leader, so that both men and women are able to be and feel led and cared for. Here we will address the character, qualifications and responsibilities of CGLs. Veritas has always sought people for leadership who are faithful, humble and teachable.

### THE HEART OF A LEADER

The one vital, essential aspect of spiritual leadership is a fully devoted heart. A spiritual leader must be a worshiper, first and foremost. He or she must love God above all else. This love is manifested in:

- A vibrant personal communion with God
- An active prayer life
- Joyful anticipation of the Sunday gathering
- A servant's heart
- A missionary spirit (longing for non-Christians to meet Jesus)
- Possess a passion for people growing to look more like Jesus
- A sense of responsibility toward others
- A growth mindset (desiring to learn more about God, ourselves, and the world to look more like Jesus)

### THE SKILLS OF A LEADER

In addition to a God-focused heart, a leader needs some basic skills. These include:

- The willingness and ability to gather people and facilitate group discussion
- The willingness and ability to relate naturally and winsomely to people (particularly non-Christians)
- The willingness and ability to navigate and resolve conflict biblically
- The willingness and ability to actively listen to people and process their thoughts
- Regular practice of spiritual disciplines (Bible reading, prayer and fasting, silence and solitude, giving to the local church, etc.) and the ability to train others in these disciplines

### QUALIFICATIONS

- Know the gospel and the implications of being a child of God
- Able to gather a group of people and lead them to look more like Jesus
- Passions for advancing the gospel all through Fayetteville, Fort Bragg, and the world
- A Covenant Partner in good standing
  - Baptized
  - Aware of and in agreement with Veritas' positions and beliefs
    - Hold to the close-handed issues outlined in the Partnership packet



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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- Permitted to have differing opinions about open-handed issues, but should be aware of Veritas' stance on these issues.
- Willing to submit to the Veritas Elders
- Said by others to be faithful, humble, teachable, and vulnerable
- Able to lead, and be led by, others and has a history of others following him/her
- Understands that leadership begins with the home before being transferred to the group
- Models Christ and the fullness of joy found in Him

## THE RESPONSIBILITY OF A LEADER

Community Group Leaders are responsible for creating and maintaining a healthy, Christ-centered, disciple-making community. This is a large responsibility within the church, and Veritas Elders and staff will offer any and all support to help maintain healthy CGs, but the health of a CG is the direct responsibility of the CGLs for that group. This is done through balancing truth, grace and time; the truth of the Gospel is the focus and guardrails of all conversations within CG, we emulate God's grace to each other, and we offer time for people to grow in Christ.

- Maintain your personal relationship with the Lord through spiritual disciplines
  - Be honest with the Veritas Elders and staff about any personal or sin struggles in your season of leading
- Care for the people in the group by engaging with them where they are
  - Keep Veritas Elders and staff up-to-date with prayer requests and spiritual and physical needs of group
- Lead people on the mission and vision set forth by Veritas leadership
  - Encourage non-Partners to partner with the church
  - Encourage Partners to faithfulness in their covenant with the church
  - About once a month, engage in missional meals for fostering community and reaching out to neighbors and friends
  - At least once a quarter, coordinate your CG's engagement with service opportunities with Veritas partners (Habitat for Humanity & Operation Inasmuch)
  - Actively work toward multiplication of CG
- Pray for and reach out to CG members
  - Communicate with entire group at least 1-3 times per week outside of CG time
- Maintain a healthy, consistent weekly CG experience
  - Communicate church-wide and group-specific announcements
  - Facilitate biblical and gospel-centered discussion
  - Lead whole group and gender-specific prayer; challenging people to be vulnerable, transparent and accountable
  - Start and end CG in a timely manner to be considerate of people's time
- At least 2 times a year, disciple with 1 or 2 same-gender CG members outside of CG time
- Encourage and facilitate connections and discipleship of smaller groups outside of CG time (you don't always need to be present for this, but you should be in the know of who is and isn't meeting with people)
- Attend Community Group Roundtables and annual retreat



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## A COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER IS NOT:

- Someone who has the weight of Pastor/Elder
  - CGL should not speak with the authority of a Veritas Elder, always feel the freedom to direct questions, concerns or issues to an Elder/Pastor
  - While CGLs do some level of shepherding their CG, CGLs should always feel the freedom to bring in an Elder/Pastor when problems become too heavy for their capacity.
- Someone who has all the answers
- Someone who can teach the Bible weekly
  - “A small group experience is not about one person teaching and the rest learning. It’s a shared discussion where we are all growing together.” (Surratt, 2019, p. 9)
- Someone who individually discipled every single member
  - “Our goal should be to find two or three same-sex people in the group we can disciple outside group time and help other people in the group to do the same.” (Surratt, 2019, p. 10)



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## HEALTHY SHARING OF RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN COMMUNITY GROUP

Being a Community Group Leader comes with a great deal of weight and responsibility, and it is good and right to share that burden with other Christians. The Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts to every Christian to be used “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7). God intends for every Christian to be active in the work of making disciples. And he has gifted each Christian uniquely for exactly that purpose; which means that every Christian who's part of a Community Group should be using their gifts to minister to others.

Good CGLs do lead, but they don't lead alone. A Core Team within a CG is a group of mature Christians (4-6 individuals or couples) who take responsibility together for the health and direction of the CG. They employ their spiritual gifts to serve and bless others with the goal of making disciples.

The requirements for being part of a Community Group Core Team are simple:

- They must be baptized and have a credible profession of faith (because we want them to be able to lead others along the same path of discipleship they are walking - see 1 Corinthians 4:15-16).
- They must be a Partner of the church (because we want them to be in submission to the Bible's vision of Christian maturity - see Hebrews 13:17). We also want them to be well-versed in our church's theology, mission, vision, values, and ministry practices.

CGLs should be seeking out, identifying and apprenticing the individuals or couples within their Core Team. A Core Team may gather together to pray and plan for discipleship in their CG, as well as evaluate the health of the CG and share the responsibilities of the weekly CG meeting. This may include:

- Taking attendance in Realm
- Coordinating meals or bringing main dish for CG
- Welcoming newcomers at the door
- Coordinating childcare
- Discipling with 1 or 2 CG members outside of CG
- Hosting CG at their homes, if necessary
- Occasionally leading gender-specific prayer time

One or more individuals/couples within your Core Team may become CGL Apprentices, and plan to plant their own CG. CGLs can apprentice those individuals on their own using the CGL Development Binder, or the Apprentice can go through the CGL Development process offered by Veritas staff. When it's time to multiply the CG, some of those who were a part of the Core Team will be planted in the new CG and the process of building a Community Group Core Team will begin again for both CGs.

A healthy CG begins with healthy CGLs, moving outward to their Core Team, and then going to the rest of the CG. It will take time to build this Core Team and foster these relationships, so patience is important in this process.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## EXPECTATIONS OF A COMMUNITY GROUP AND ITS MEMBERS

The more clear that Veritas and CGLs can be around what people can expect from a CG, as well as what is expected of them as a member of a CG, the easier it will be to form, maintain and correct the culture within a CG.

### THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A HEALTHY CG MEMBER:

- Attend CG consistently (missing every once in a while is understandable, but ideally someone is attending at least 3 of the 4 weeks within a month)
- Communicate with the CGLs and CG when you will be absent or late to group (this shows a consideration and respect to people)
- Arrive as close to on time as possible
- Be open to learning each week by asking:
  - What does God have for me tonight?
  - What does God have for me in this next year in this group?
  - How does God want to use this person in my life?
  - I have never seen or experienced this before, What can I learn?
- Engage with and support the people in your CG during CG and throughout the week
  - Actively listen to people without judgement
- Be Known
  - Confess and repent
  - Share: feelings, attitudes, behaviors, choices, values, limits, thoughts, tenderness, giving, sacrifice, talents, desires, loves, fears, passions, losses, pains, dreams, confrontations, hurts, opinions, feedback for others, needs, wishes, sexuality, anger, hatred, sin, failure, dark and ugly parts/secrets
- Engage in a smaller discipleship relationship outside of CG for intimate discipleship and accountability
- Pray for the people in your CG

### WHAT A CG MEMBER CAN EXPECT IF THEY HOLD TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES:

- A safe environment to process the bible, and personal thoughts and feelings
- A caring network of people
- Growing closer to God and others in their CG
- Becoming self-aware
  - Making positive changes
  - Discerning harmful patterns
  - Learning new skills
  - Discovering and developing gifts
  - Resolving conflict in a biblical manner



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## MISSIONAL FOCUS OF COMMUNITY GROUPS

One of the most challenging but necessary aspects of a Community Group is its missional focus. A Community Group is not a holy huddle; it's not a place of isolation from the world. It's not just a safe space for Christians to hang out with each other. Rather, it's a context for meaningful hospitality toward doubters, seekers, skeptics, and unbelievers. Therefore, the Sojourner - the outsider - is a key part of a Community Group.

We expect every Community Group to have within it a few people who don't yet profess faith in Jesus. Of course there is an ebb-and-flow to this inclusion; in some seasons, a Community Group will have many sojourners, in other seasons it may not have any (hopefully because non-Christians are becoming Christians). But if a Community Group goes through a long period without welcoming in any outsiders, something is amiss.

We use the word Sojourner because the outsider may not self identify as a non-Christian. He or she may be a churchgoer who doesn't really grasp the gospel. He or she may be a professing Christian who has become jaded and cynical toward God and church.

Rather than thinking in categories of Christian and non-Christian, it may be more helpful to think in categories of the disciple and non-disciple. A Community Group should include both committed disciples of Jesus and those who are not yet disciples of Jesus.

Including sojourners in a Community Group does not mean changing what we do to appeal to them. Rather, it means showing real hospitality. It means enjoying their presence. It means welcoming their questions, doubts, and hangups. It means inviting them to join us on the journey of understanding who Jesus is and what he has done. The gospel of grace levels the playing field and makes this possible. We are not those who have arrived, we are sinners who can help other sinners find grace, mercy, and healing from Jesus.

Outsiders are not targets for evangelism; they are people, made in God's image. Their questions help us clarify our faith. Their doubts help us identify and express our own. Their refreshing honesty helps us see our own subtle hypocrisy. Just like we are welcomed with grace, so are they.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## HOW TO DEVELOP A COMMUNITY GROUP APPRENTICE

As a Community Group Leader, you should consider how you can be developing (an) apprentice(s) within your CG. These will be individuals or couples from your Core Team. The goal of this section is to equip you as you identify, assess, and develop someone who will one day be leading a CG themselves.

### 1. IDENTIFY A POTENTIAL APPRENTICE AND TELL VERITAS STAFF

Pray and ask God for the wisdom and discernment to do this.

Characteristics and qualifications to look for:

- Loves Jesus (John 14:15), loves the Church (John 15:12), and loves the lost (John 17:8)
- Listens to others, includes others in conversation (James 1:19; Romans 15:1)
- Holds Scripture as their ultimate authority (2 Tim. 3:16)
- Eager to serve the needs of others through different means of hospitality (Rom. 12:1-13)
- Humble (James 4:6).
- Is a Covenant Partner who regularly attends Sunday gatherings and your CG (Hebrews 10)

### 2. INVITE THE POTENTIAL APPRENTICE TO CONSIDER IT

Ask your potential apprentice to consider coming alongside you to train for potential future group leadership. Most people will have some reservations and may even fear that they are unqualified for the responsibilities of leadership. Discuss any of their concerns with them and make sure they also understand that you will help them develop their skills and confidence as a Community Group Leader. Explain that the CGL Development process can be done within a group of other Apprentices led by Veritas staff, or you can take the Apprentice through the CGL Development process yourself. The process takes between 3-6 months, and the planting of a new CG will depend upon the circumstances of the group, as well as the discernment of Veritas Elders and Staff, the CGL and the Apprentice.

### 3. FORMAL INTRODUCTION WITHIN GROUP

Once there is agreement by the individual to become an Apprentice, and both you and Veritas staff believe the person is ready, share with the group that this individual is being recognized as an Apprentice and is being trained for future Community Group leadership.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## HOW TO MULTIPLY A COMMUNITY GROUP

One of the goals of the Community Group is multiplication. Multiplication allows us to establish more outposts of God's Kingdom in our city. This can be challenging at times, considering we are a transient population, but by God's grace we will continue to grow. When we have more CGs, we are able to love and serve more people by making room for them to be known in community.

### GROWTH FACTORS

Generally speaking, our goal is for each Community Group to multiply into two or more groups. The new groups are independent of one another, having their own leaders, gathering, people, etc.

There are a number of indicators that a group is ready to multiply:

- **SIZE:** when a group consistently has 20 or more people, the sheer size hinders the role of community in spiritual formation and minimizes the need to think missionally. The CGLs will need to focus more on the maintenance of the group, and new people will feel there is no room for them.
- **LEADERS:** even though a group may not be too big, sometimes there is a person or persons who are ready to lead a new group.
- **NEED:** occasionally there is an opportunity in a part of town or among a specific group of people that compels us to start a new community group focused on that area or people group.

### THE PURPOSE

Multiplication creates smaller groups, which are usually more conducive to genuine conversation, confrontation, hospitality, prayer, etc. Smaller groups also create a more missional atmosphere. Smaller groups give you a sense that there is room to grow; people are more likely to invite outsiders to a group of 8 than they are a group of 18. Finally, multiplications makes room for emerging leaders to step up, which increases the level of ownership and shepherding capacity of our church. This is why it is important to cultivate a Core Team with the intention that some of those people will apprentice and become CGLs.

We envision that anyone who attends Veritas Church will gather with the Community Group in his or her own neighborhood. Opportunities for discipleship and mission occur at the park, in the street, outside of school, and at the grocery store. We understand this isn't always the reality; some people choose a CG based on the night of the week it meets, which allows us to be an interconnected church and city.

### THE PROCESS

Veritas Church's process for Community Group multiplication follows five basic steps.

- **TALK REGULARLY ABOUT MULTIPLICATION.**

The CGL, the Core Team, and Veritas Elders/staff should be having regular conversations about multiplication. They should be paying careful attention to the indicators mentioned earlier: size of the





# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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group, emerging leaders, and specific opportunities. If they feel that a group is moving toward multiplication, they will move to step two.

- **ASSESS GROUP HEALTH.**

Once a group starts moving toward multiplication, we want to take some measures to formally assess it. The assessment process involves some or all of the following: Conversations between the Community Group Leader and the staff/pastors; a Veritas staff or a pastor visiting the group in person; and talking with various group members in the group. If the CG is healthy, then we move forward. If not, then we identify where we need to grow before moving forward.

- **ASSESS AND TRAIN POSSIBLE APPRENTICES.**

Ideally, the Core Team has grown to 6 to 8 people who share ownership and responsibility. If the group is healthy enough to progress toward multiplication, the Veritas staff and pastors will formally assess those leaders. Upon completion of the assessment, CGL Apprentices will walk through the 3-6 month CGL Development process.

- **MULTIPLY.**

The Community Group Leaders lead the group in the multiplication process. This should not be a surprise to the CG, because they have been planning for multiplication along the way! Multiplication may look roughly like this:

- **FOUR WEEKS OUT**

Explain and revisit often why we multiply groups, and how God will use this to help us grow and reach more people in our city. Identify who will be leading the new group. Field questions. Talk to the practical dynamics of multiplication. Ask people to pray about which group God would have them to be a part of.

- **TWO OR THREE WEEKS OUT**

Talk with the individual group members about this decision. Help them think in light of what would be best for their spiritual formation and mission of pursuits. Avoid making a decision based upon comfort.

- **ONE WEEK OUT**

Invite pastors and church leaders to come and celebrate the commissioning group. Multiplication is not a divorce: it is a new birth! Their group can spend the night rejoicing in the work of the Holy Spirit and celebrating how this change will result in more gospel, community, and mission with influence in the city.

- **BUILD MOMENTUM**

The launch of a new group brings excitement and momentum. Use this to your advantage to cultivate new relationships. The first few weeks in your new Community Group should be spent laying the



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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foundation that will lead to a deep, spiritually formative community. We encourage all new Community Groups to begin by doing the following:

- Have each person in the Community Group tell their stories using the how to tell your story framework.
- As a group, plan social and missional experience to build community and fellowship.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## CHANGES OF LEADERSHIP & DISSOLVING A COMMUNITY GROUP

There are times in the life of the church when a Community Group must go through a change of leadership or dissolve. There are a number of reasons this may happen, most often the CGLs are military affiliated and may be PCSing to a new location.

It may also be that the CGL and/or Veritas staff and pastors feel the CGLs are in a season in which they need to step back and receive care from the church. As we have mentioned, being a CGL is a large responsibility and weight, and CGLs can get burned out. Here are some signs (and causes) a CGL is getting burned out:

- You are keeping God's law to run from God.
- You are ignoring the emotions of anger, sadness and fear.
- You are dying to the wrong things.
- You are denying the past's impact on the present.
- You are doing for God instead of being with God.
- You are spiritualizing away conflict.
- You are covering over weakness, brokenness, and failure.
- You are living without limits.

### THE PROCESS

If a CG needs a change of leadership or to be dissolved, there are certain steps required in an effort to care for the members of that CG.

#### 1. CLEAR, HONEST COMMUNICATION WITH VERITAS STAFF/PASTORS

If a CGL is moving or stepping back from leading in Veritas for any reason, the sooner they can communicate with Veritas staff and pastors the better. This will allow Veritas to plan accordingly and prepare for a change in leadership or to dissolve the group.

If a CGL is feeling burned out, or deeply struggling with crippling sin, we desire to create an environment in which Veritas staff and pastors are always available for care and support. Before someone is a CGL, they are a child of God, brother or sister in Christ, and Covenant Partner of Veritas Church. It is admirable and dignified for someone to confess when they are not qualified or able to lead a CG. If another CGL or someone within the Core Team has concern about a CGL, they are welcome to express those concerns to Veritas staff and pastors, and the concern will be addressed in a loving, biblical manner; in extreme situations, if a CGL is walking in unrepentant sin, they will be asked to step down from leading and church discipline will be carried out.

#### 2. ASSESS THE HEALTH OF THE COMMUNITY GROUP

Veritas staff and pastors will talk with all CGLs and Apprentices from the group, as well as the Core Team to gauge the health of the CG. If necessary and possible, Veritas staff or a pastor may visit the CG before the group dissolves, before or after the leadership change.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## 3. CLEAR, HONEST COMMUNICATION WITH THE GROUP.

CGLs and/or Veritas staff/pastor will communicate to the group that they will have new CGLs or that the CG is being dissolved, and give a clear, honest reason for the change. If it is a sensitive subject relating to sin struggles or conflict, this should be communicated in a diplomatic way to protect the dignity of the CGLs as well as Veritas Church. As much as possible, we want to prevent wounding the CG members and causing dissension within the CG or Veritas Church.

If it is a change of leadership, explain who the new CGLs will be, and give time for them to share with the group. Ideally, the new CGLs have been Apprentices or a part of the Core Team, so the CG feels comfortable with them and confident in their leadership. If the group is dissolving, CGLs and Veritas staff and pastors will need to check in with each CG member; this will be to check on their heart, as well as see which new CG they will attend. This is a time we do not want people to fall between the cracks.

## 4. FOLLOW UP

Veritas staff and pastors desire to intentionally care for people within a CG, particularly those who are Covenant Partners with Veritas. Some level of follow up will be done during the CG next term; this will be close communication with the new CGLs, and may also include close communication with CG members or visiting the CG. The intention behind this oversight is not to micromanage the group, but to ensure the health of Veritas Community Groups.



## RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY GROUP LEADERS



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE A WEEKLY PREP FOR THE GROUP MEETING

In this example, the group meets on Thursday night, therefore, the leader's prep is built around meeting on that night.

**SUNDAY:** Try to seek out those in your group. Reach out to love and encourage them. Sit with them in the gathering and try to connect them with someone at the church they don't know. (Side note: When you see someone alone on a Sunday morning, whether you know them or not, consider that an opportunity to go to them and greet them.) [About 30 minutes]

**TUESDAY:** Take a few moments to pray for your group. Then, send out an email or text, reminding them that the group will be meeting that Thursday night. Remember to ask them to pray for your time together, remind them to bring their neighbors/co-workers, remind them of the time and place, and ask them for ways you can be praying for them. [15-30 minutes]

**WEDNESDAY:** Take an hour with your Core Team to prepare for the night of the group meeting. Pray, review sermon notes, re-read the Scripture, study the CGL Guide, and finally, pray again. If you have gender-specific communication methods, this is also another good opportunity to reach out to your people. [About 1 hour]

**THURSDAY:** Take time during your morning time with the Lord to pray for your group by name. Later on in the day, send out one last reminder of the groups meeting that night. [About 15 minutes]

**FRIDAY:** Send a follow-up email or text simply stating how much you love the people in your group and remind them one more time that they're prayed for. [5 minutes]

\* CGLs are also encouraged to be responsive to the needs and questions of their people. Some people may reach out and ask for your help; it may be inconvenient, but we desire to show Jesus to others. This required a delicate balance of personal and family boundaries, and self-sacrificing.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE B SHARING TESTIMONY IN COMMUNITY GROUP

A great way to build deeper community is to have each person in your Community Group tell their story. All of us are story-formed people. We have been shaped by life, for better or for worse. Below is a guide for telling your story in a way that glorifies God and invite others into your journey.

### WHY TELL YOUR STORY?

Everyone of us have been formed by life. Our families, our experiences, our struggles, and our joys have shaped each of us into a certain kind of person. God invites us to be reformed and transformed into a different kind of people: a gospel-shaped people. That happens, first of all, as we believe the gospel by placing our faith and hope in Jesus. And second, as we mature in the gospel, it does the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Telling your story is a great way to build maturity in yourself and in your CG. The Holy Spirit strengthens our grasp of God's love as we learn to recognize God's hand in our stories. For those who love God, all things work together for good as we are being conformed into the image of Jesus (Romans 8:28-30).

### WHERE TO BEGIN

Begin by seeking to answer this core question: "What have been the key events, experiences, or people that have shaped me up to today, for better or for worse?" Notice that what we're seeking is meaning, not just data. Many facts about your past may or may not be relevant to the meaning of your story. Don't plan on sharing facts that don't add meaning to your story.

Also, it's important that you don't edit your story. Often the most shaping of events in our lives involve suffering. So if you've experienced abuse, harm, trial, or severe suffering in your past, share it. On the other hand, don't add something into your past in an attempt to explain the present. Speculative explanations won't help, and may only distract you from getting to the core issues in your heart.

Maybe you're not sure how your story fits together. That's okay. Perhaps this experience of sharing your story with your CG will help you gain some clarity on what God is redeeming in you. Share what seems to be relevant, and be open to gaining more clarity overtime.

### COMMON SHAPING INFLUENCES

Here are some events that can have profound shaping influences on us:

- Your relationship to either of your parents and or siblings
- Moments of intense trauma; physical, emotional, financial, etc.
- Times of great joy and celebration
- Significant marks of success



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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- Harm, abuse, betrayal done to you whether it be once or many times
- Harm you have done to others
- Patterns of habitual sin
- Conversion to Jesus Christ

You may find some of the following questions helpful to guide your sharing:

- What do you want most deeply?
- What or whom do you love the most, or hate the most?
- What do you get the most excited about? What brings you the greatest pleasure?
- What do you especially want to avoid?
- Who must you please? Whose opinion of you counts? Whose value system do you measure yourself against? Who's love and approval do you need?
- Where do you find refuge, safety, comfort, escape, pleasure, or security?
- What or who do you trust?
- How do you spend your time? What are your priorities?





# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE C

### EFFECTIVE GROUP DISCUSSION FACILITATION

As CGLs, we do not expect you to be a bible study teacher, but rather bible discussion facilitators. Facilitation in the context of CGs is focused on the discussion process to allow all participants an equal opportunity to share about the content of scripture. Good facilitation of a group is both an art and a skill to cultivate. When someone facilitates a group well, the people involved feel heard and appreciated, as well as more open to exploring the scriptures and hearing from others. Here we will discuss a few guiding principles for CG bible discussion facilitation.

#### CREATE SAFETY THROUGH STRUCTURE

For people to feel comfortable to open up and share within a group, they need to feel safe within a space. Not only physically safe, but emotionally and mentally safe as well. This is done through setting boundaries and norms people can come to expect from their time at CG. Here are some ways to create safe structures:

- Be sure the environment is calm, clean and welcoming
- Begin and end on time by announcing to the whole group; it's helpful to give a 5-min warning
- Create and maintain a structure for the bible discussion
  - For example: pray, read scripture aloud, give a few minute explanation of any relevant information/group norms, ask a question, and open floor for discussion
- Affirm people's responses and participation
- Keep conversation on topic and relevant
  - If conversation starts to derail, simply notice out loud "it seems like we are a little off topic/in the weeds" and repeat the question for someone else to answer in the group
- If someone says an offensive or hurtful comment, gently but firmly correct by restating the norm and expectations for discussion (this may also require a one-on-one conversation with the person after CG)

#### QUESTIONING

Overarching questions are provided in the CGLGuide, but the ability to ask good follow up questions provides for a more rich dialogue within the group. This will help people to dig deeper within the text, as well as their own beliefs, thoughts or feelings about a topic. Here are some examples of good follow-up questions to ask:

- What does this scripture tell us about God?
- Where do we see Jesus in this scripture?
- What does this scripture tell us about mankind overall?
- What stands out for you? What do you see in the text?
  - Can you show us where you see this in the scripture?
- Where do you have difficulty applying what we just read or talked about? Why?
- What thoughts and emotions come up around this?
  - Where do you think those stem from in your personal history?
- Does anyone have anything they'd like to share or add to that idea?



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## ACTIVE LISTENING

When people feel that the facilitator is actually listening and engaged with them, it encourages them to speak more. Active listening is the practice of attentively listening while someone else is speaking, and here are certain traits and practices associated:

- Making eye contact
- Nodding your head or leaning in
- Without interrupting, affirming what the person is saying (quietly saying 'um hmm' or 'yeah')
- When the person is finished speaking paraphrasing what they said back to them
  - What I heard you say was.... is that correct?
  - It sounds like you think/feel...is that correct?
  - I can tell that you think/feel... is that correct?
- Ask clarifying questions
  - Did you mean...?
  - Did I hear you correctly that...?
  - Can you explain.....?

## FOSTER AUTHENTIC INTEGRATION

Integration is the capacity to share our authentic selves and experience the authentic selves of others. When we are able to share thoughts, feelings and experiences and enter into other's lives, God is able to heal wounds and bring insight into our lives. "When a person is not integrated, he experiences division, splitting, and conflict within himself and his relationships. Like the man who both asks and doubts God at the same time, 'he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does' (James 1:8)" (Cloud/Townsend, Making Small Groups Work, 177) Here are some ways to foster authentic integration within the group:

- Keep the Gospel as the focus and guardrails of the conversation
  - Point people back to what Jesus has done on the cross
- Present it as a group norm
  - Model this through example, share honestly and deeply about your personal experiences and struggles
- Provide grace for all parts of a person
  - Do not condemn anyone for their sin struggles; especially making any sin feel worse than another (all sin is equal in the eyes of God)
- Help people lead with weakness, not strength
  - Allow CG to be a place for people to not be okay, and remind them they are empowered by the Holy Spirit, not their own strength

## MAKING SPACE FOR SILENCE

Silence is often something people feel uncomfortable with, but it can be a useful tool in group discussion. Allowing 6-15 seconds of silence allows people time to ponder and process a question. At times, you may even want an extended period of silence for people to journal or pray through their thoughts before discussion. Always filling silence with your voice can often rob people of the opportunity to engage in a deeper way.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE D HOW TO BUILD GOSPEL FLUENCY

In order to effectively equip your CG, you will need to create a culture where it is normal to speak the gospel to each other regularly. Every sin and issue that stands in the way of our faithfulness to Jesus' commands is ultimately a gospel issue, since sin is the outcome of unbelief in Jesus (John 16:9). One of your key jobs will be to equip your people to know the gospel, apply it to all of life, and speak it to each other.

### START WITH YOU

Sharing a gospel fluent culture starts with you being regularly shaped by the truth of the gospel. This means you have to know it and apply it to everyday stuff, while asking others to speak it into your life.

Do you know the gospel? Can you articulate it? Can you address everyday issues with the gospel?

If you know it and can articulate it, the next question is this: are you experiencing ongoing repentance and growing faith in the gospel? This will look like you taking every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ. It means questioning your motives, feelings, attitudes, and actions to see if they reflect faith in Jesus or faith in someone or something else. This includes inviting others to have the freedom to speak openly into your life as well.

Then, when it is apparent that your faith is in something other than Jesus and what he accomplished for you through his life, death, and resurrection, you need to be reminded how the gospel shows Jesus to be the sufficient one for you in that issue, repent of unbelief, and put your faith for that thing in Jesus and his sufficiency. The more you are actively applying the gospel to all of life, the more normal it will become to both speak about it and to assist others in this process.

### LEADING YOUR GROUP INTO A GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE

You will need to lead in gospel engagement in a variety of ways in order to make gospel conversations normative for your life together and your mission to make disciples of others. There are several ways you can make gospel conversations more normative, here are a few suggestions to start with:

### REHEARSE THE GOSPEL REGULARLY

Ask your group to regularly restate the elements of the gospel out loud together to see how well they are getting it. You may have to lay it out for them a couple of times until they begin to remember it. Here are four questions to help people remember:

#### WHO IS JESUS?

He is the perfect man who lived the perfect life fully submitted to God the Father in all things. He is the God man who is God in the flesh, so that we could know what God is like and that God would be near



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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to us. He is the Messiah sent by God to save us from our sin, death, and rebellion.

## WHAT DID JESUS DO?

On the cross, he exchanged his perfect obedience for our sins, so that those who have faith in Jesus get Jesus's righteousness credited to their account and their sin credited to his account. When he died on the cross, not only were my sins removed, but they were paid for. He rose from the dead to show his power over sin and death. He sits at the right hand of God the Father from where he sends his Spirit to bring faith to us, empowering us to live lives of obedience.

## WHAT MUST WE DO?

Repent. Have a change of mind about who God is. Believe. By faith, put our trust in who Jesus is and what he has done, believing it was accomplished for us. Be baptized. Publicly express our faith that our lives are now united and identified with God in Christ.

## WHAT HAPPENS TO US?

We are forgiven and cleansed of our sins. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are included in the forever family of God. We are commissioned to make disciples of Jesus.

## APPLY THE GOSPEL TO PERSONAL STORIES

Give each person in your CG the opportunity to share their personal story. Before they do, encourage them to detail, in light of what they believe about Jesus, how the gospel has affected all of life. Also, encourage the group to listen with gospel ears and pay close attention for areas the gospel has redeemed and rightly informed their story, as well as where the gospel needs to be spoken into their story.

For example, if their story recounts a life without a father present or maybe a life with an abusive father, listen from where they came to see that they have a perfect heavenly father who is always present. If that doesn't come up, the group should ask them how they perceive the father in heaven, and how knowing the truth about him sending the son to save us shapes how they see this part of their story.

## REGULARLY ASK, "HOW DOES THE GOSPEL ADDRESS THIS?" AND, "WHAT ABOUT THE GOSPEL ARE YOU NOT BELIEVING?"

Whenever life's challenges or difficulties come up in the group's conversation, instead of giving quick advice, ask how does the gospel address this? Train your CG to regularly consider who Jesus is, what he has done, and how that shapes the way we handle life. A couple of things will happen if you do this regularly: Firstly, you will teach the group that the gospel really can and does address everything in life. Secondly, the group will become much more fluid in gospel conversations the more they have them. Lastly, you'll learn over time if the group is coming to know and believe the gospel fully.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## SLOW DOWN TO IDENTIFY IDOLS AND COMPARE THEM TO JESUS

As the group gathers, listen closely to the conversations and the stories. Listen for who/what their ultimately putting their trust in. Ask yourself, what idol are they putting their trust in? Sometimes the best way to identify the idols of the heart is by calling people to ministry and mission. Idols become easiest to see when we are calling people to be faithful in Jesus' mission. Listen for the excuses or reasons for not being willing or able to obey. Is it fear, insecurity, selfishness, pride, approval of man issues, worship of children, worship of family, worship of work, etc?

Then, as you or the group becomes aware of the people or things that have become idols or little gods, take the time to compare them to Jesus, showing Jesus to be the resolution to what they are seeking elsewhere, the opposite of what they're experiencing, or the deeper reality of what they're searching for.

## IDENTIFY KEY DESCRIPTIONS OF JESUS' WORK AND DISPLAY THEM ON MISSION

Take some time to talk through what is true about Jesus and the gospel, and then discuss how the group might display this truth about Jesus in the midst of the missionary context, being prepared to share how this work is really a result and picture of what Jesus is doing.

Adapted from an essay by Jeff Vanderstelt, GCM collective, 2010, accessed at [www.gcmcollective.org/article/gospel-fluency](http://www.gcmcollective.org/article/gospel-fluency)



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE E

### HOW TO DEVELOP A MISSIONAL GROUP

Mission is not an event we tack on to our already busy lives, it is our life. We can be missional in everyday ways without overloading our schedules. Here are a few suggestions:

#### EAT WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

We all eat three meals a day. Why not make a habit of sharing one of those meals with a non-Christian or with a family of non-Christians? Go to lunch with a coworker, not by yourself. Invite the neighbors over for a family dinner. If it's too much work to cook a big dinner, just order pizza and put the focus on conversation. When you go out for a meal, invite others. Or take your family to family style restaurants where you can sit at the table with strangers and strike up conversation. Cook out and invite Christians and non-Christians.

#### WALK, DON'T DRIVE

If you live in a walkable area, make a practice of getting out and walking around your neighborhood, apartment complex, or campus. Instead of driving to the mailbox, convenient store, or apartment office, walk to get the mail, groceries, and stuff. Be deliberate in your walk. Say hello to people you don't know. Keep track of conversations. Attract attention by walking the dog or bringing the kids. Make friends. Get out of your house! Take interest in your neighbors. Ask questions. Pray as you go.

#### BE A REGULAR

Instead of hopping all over the city for gas, groceries, haircuts, eating out, and coffee, go to the same places. Get to know the staff. Go to the same places at the same times. Smile. Ask questions. Be a regular.

#### HOBBY WITH NON-CHRISTIANS

Pick a hobby that you can share. Get out and do something you enjoy with others. Play city league sports. Join local running and cycling teams. Be prayerful. Be intentional. Be winsome. Have fun. Be yourself.

#### TALK TO YOUR CO-WORKERS

How hard is that? Take your breaks with intentionality. Go out with your team or task force after work. Show interest in your coworkers. Pick a co-worker and pray for them. Form mom groups in your neighborhood and don't make them exclusively Christian. Schedule play dates with neighbors kids. Work on mission.

#### VOLUNTEER FOR NON-PROFITS

Find a nonprofit in your part of the city and take one Saturday a month to serve your city. Bring your



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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neighbors, friends, or Community Group. Spend time with our church serving your city. Once a month. You can do it!

## PARTICIPATE IN CITY EVENTS

Instead of playing Xbox, watching TV, or surfing the net, participate in city events. Go to fundraisers, festivals, cleanups, summer shows, and concerts. Strike up conversation. Study the culture. Reflect on what you see in here. Pray for the city. Love the city. Participate with the city.

## SERVE YOUR NEIGHBORS

Help a neighbor by weeding, mowing, building a cabinet, fixing a car. Stop by the neighborhood association or apartment office and ask if there's anything you can do to help improve things. Ask your local police and fire stations if there is anything you can do to help them. Get creative. Just serve!

Don't make the mistake of making mission another thing to add to your schedule. Instead, make your existing schedule missional.

Adapted from an essay by Jonathon Dodson, GCM Collective, 2010, accessed at [www.gcmcollective.org/article-8-easy-ways-to-easily-be-missional](http://www.gcmcollective.org/article-8-easy-ways-to-easily-be-missional)



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE E

### DEALING WITH PROBLEMS IN COMMUNITY GROUPS

If we are not intentional in our oversight of the CG, certain problems can develop which will hinder the growth of the group, or even cause the group to die. Here are a few potential pitfalls and how to mindfully avoid them:

- People Not Returning
  - Newcomers as outsiders: If a group is large and close-knit people may not feel there is room for them. If a specific, designated person reaches out and connects with the newcomer, the CG member can become a bridge into the group for the newcomer.
  - Lack of community: If no time is spent to regularly foster and build community, people will not feel invested and connected with the group. Allow time for people to socialize at the beginning of the evening, and plan for fellowship outside of CG structured evenings.
  - Unbalanced leadership: If a CGL is not prepared for discussion, it will show. Also, if a CGL dominates the discussion, people will disengage. When a CGL is willing to work and receive feedback from their Core Team, this will allow them to grow in their facilitation abilities.
- Relationship breakups: At times you may have people in your group who form strong friendships or even romantic relationships. When they have a falling out, this can disrupt the culture of the group.
  - Don't take sides, help one or both of them to find a new group, be honest and open with the group, and allow God to strengthen remaining relationships in the group.
- Gossip: Gossip within a group will sow mistrust and dissension within the group. It's important to recognize the signs and correct gossip
  - Recognize when a prayer need is turning into gossip, continually remind the group of the group's mission, and, as a last resort, ask members to leave if they persist in gossip after being corrected.
- Down seasons: It can be hard to rebuild momentum and culture after holiday seasons or Month of Rest. While Month of Rest is intended to give CGLs a time to sabbath from their official roles, it is encouraged to still stay engaged with people during that time.
- Challenging personalities: Because we live in a sinful, broken world, that means you will encounter sinful, broken people within your CG. All people require grace from the Lord and from us, but certain people will feel more taxing upon your time and energy.
  - Deep, intentional prayer is always the place to start, and at times you may need to engage in biblical confrontation.
  - For a more extensive list of challenging personalities and strategies to handle them, see the CGLDevelopment Binder, or ask Veritas staff for resources

\*This content is resourced from [Lead Small Groups](#) by Chris Surratt and [Making Small Groups Work](#) by Henry Cloud and John Townsend For more information about these topics, see CGLDevelopment Binder excerpts.





# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE F

### RECOMMENDED RHYTHMS WITHIN COMMUNITY GROUPS

**WEEK 1 - PRAYER:** Because we want to be a church marked by prayer, we encourage groups to set aside time to pray in as a whole group. This may be for half or even an entire CG meeting for a night. Veritas Elders and staff at times may provide prayer points, and there may also be church-wide prayer opportunities outside of CG meetings.

**WEEKS 2-4 - BIBLE DISCUSSION:** A CGL discussion guide will be provided each week, written to reflect the teaching from the past Sunday the groups met. We believe that the Holy Spirit is speaking through God's word to the people of Veritas. One of the ways he does this is through the preaching of the word. Then as a group, we get to take that passage, discuss it, and work together to see how it applies to our lives as followers of Jesus.

**WEEK 4/5 - MEAL:** Coming together around a meal was huge in the life of Jesus. Within the context of Community Groups, we call this a family meal. At least once a month, the group should come together and eat. Like we've mentioned before, every night the group is meeting is a time where those outside the church should be invited in, but the most non-threatening of those is the family meal time. Most people won't say no if you invite them in for dinner!

Examples of rhythms for your Community Group outside of normal meetings could be:

- Sitting with your Community Group at the Sunday gathering
- Getting lunch or dinner around that gathering that you all attend
- Having breakfast 1-2 times a month, possibly as a neighborhood outreach
- Gender-specific accountability times like coffee, dinner or breakfast (1-2 times a month)
- A standing reservation dinner for whoever can make it (1-2 times a month)



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## RESOURCE G

### VERITAS ELDERS' POSITION ON CLOSED/OPEN-HANDED ISSUES

#### CLOSED-HANDED AND OPEN-HANDED ISSUES

Many people debate the finer points of doctrine all the time. Our biggest goal as a church family, in regards to doctrine, is to be biblically faithful in what we teach. We break doctrine into two main categories: closed-handed doctrine and open-handed doctrine. Closed-handed doctrines are unchangeable teachings that all Christians should hold to be true. Open-handed doctrines are teachings that are either not explicit or essential to true faith in Christ. As Christians we hold these loosely and accept disagreement.

We will hold complete unity as the Partners of the church on the essentials of our faith (Closed-handed issues) and we will discuss and dialogue, but not divide, over the non-essentials of our faith (Open-handed issues).

#### CLOSED-HANDED ISSUES

- To be a member at Veritas Church you must agree with the following:
- Scripture is inspired by God and we submit to the authority it has in our lives
- Everyone is born broken and sinful and is therefore born under God's judgment, but believers in Jesus Christ have been saved by God's grace
- Faith is a gift of God, provided under his grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus
- The Holy Spirit has been sent to all believers to regenerate and provide full justification, sanctification, and glorification; the Holy Spirit actively engages believers in progressive sanctification and empowers them with certain gifts to glorify the body of Jesus
- Jesus will return and we will stand before him in judgment

#### OPEN-HANDED ISSUES

While the Elders of Veritas Church do hold particular viewpoints on the open-handed issues, it is not required that you agree with our position regarding these biblical concepts. We do expect, however, that you will not be divisive on any of these issues and that you will actively study Scripture to understand these things more fully. The following are a few examples of open-handed issues at Veritas:

- Predestination/Election (limited vs. unlimited atonement)
- Extent of God's sovereignty (Arminian vs. Calvinist)
- Views on Eschatology (end times study)
- Views of Creation (literal days vs. periods of time; old-earth vs. young-earth)
- Ecclesiology (Philosophy of ministry and structure of church government)
- Gender roles (complementarian vs. egalitarian)
- Certain spiritual gifts (We believe every Christian has been gifted by the Holy Spirit to fulfill ministries and service in and through the church (1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:7-13). All gifts of service are embraced by Veritas and should be exercised by each and every member. There is a diversity of opinion among Christian regarding the so-called "sign gifts" (i.e. tongues and prophecy) so we will remain open on this issue. Those



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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who believe in the continuance of the gifts may practice them in private and for the good of the church when the gifts are practiced in obedience with 1 Corinthians 12-14.)

## WHAT VERITAS CHURCH WILL PREACH AND TEACH

We think it will be helpful to explicitly lay out how the Pastors/Elders will preach and teach on open-handed doctrines so that leaders can know what will be taught at Veritas. Again we do not expect every leader at Veritas to align perfectly with the elders on every issue, but rather, if they hold a different view, to not be divisive by teaching things contrary to the view of the elders.

When open handed issues naturally arise from the passages of scriptures that we walk through as a church, we will not hesitate to address them, yet we desire to not unnecessarily make open-handed issues the main point of our sermons and teachings. As we address open-handed issues in a preaching and teaching environment we will often address the spectrum of orthodox belief we recognize as healthy, while also addressing common heresies related to that particular doctrine.

### Predestination/Election (limited vs. unlimited atonement)

The Pastors/Elders align with the reformed tradition affirming the limited view of atonement often using the more nuanced term of “definite atonement”. Every theological position on atonement limits its scope in some way except universalism, which we would denounce as heresy.

Definite atonement expresses the purpose of the atonement. Jesus died not just to make salvation possible, he died to secure the salvation of his people. He purchased their faith and died for their sin of unbelief.

### Extent of God’s Sovereignty (Arminian vs. Calvinist)

The Pastors/Elders align with the reformed tradition affirming the Calvinist view of the sovereignty of God. Simply put God is sovereign over all things, including salvation.

### Views on Eschatology (Study of the “end times”)

The Pastors/Elders affirm the eschatological view commonly known as Amillennialism. Amillennialism rejects the idea of a future millennium in which Christ will reign on earth prior to the eternal state beginning, but holds:

- that Jesus is presently reigning from heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father,
- that Jesus also is and will remain with the church until the end of the world, as he promised at the Ascension,
- that at Pentecost (or days earlier, at the Ascension), the millennium began, citing Acts 2:16-21, where Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 on the coming of the kingdom, to explain what is happening,
- and that, therefore the Church and its spread of the good news is indeed Christ's Kingdom and forever will be.



# COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER HANDBOOK

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## Views of Creation (literal days vs. periods of time; old-earth vs. young-earth)

There is a wide variety of orthodox views on creation. Veritas Elders would emphasize that the opening chapters of Genesis are primarily theological in nature. The Bible seems to be more interested in making a theological point in why God created the world rather than exactly how and when the world was made. The elders each have differing views on the exact age of the earth and the exact interpretation of the word day in Genesis 1 and 2.

## Ecclesiology (Philosophy of ministry and structure of church government)

We acknowledge that many churches are structured in varying ways and we would not want to speak poorly of them because of differences in convictions or terminology. The Pastors/Elders hold to a structure of church governance commonly known as elder-led. Our particular expression of this type of ecclesiology is characterized by the following statement: we are Jesus-ruled, elder-led, deacon-served, and congregationally responsible. This means that the Pastors/Elders accept and practice the responsibility of making decisions for the church, while seeking to hear the voice of the congregation. While Veritas may often poll the congregation, we do not do congregational votes. We hold to this view convictionally and will preach and teach that our church and those that we plant should be governed in this manner.

## Gender roles (complementarian vs. egalitarian)

The Pastors/Elders of Veritas adhere to what is now known as generous complementarianism. The difference between this and classic complementarianism would be that we believe that women can and should speak in Sunday Gatherings, community groups, and various mixed-gender, church-wide trainings. However, we still retain that the function of authoritative teaching/preaching during the Sunday Gathering of the church is reserved for elder-qualified men.

## Spiritual Gifts (tongues and prophecy)

The Pastors/Elders of Veritas are continuationist, which means that we believe all the spiritual gifts mentioned in the New Testament are still active in the life of Jesus Church through the power of the Spirit. We believe every Christian has been gifted by the Holy Spirit to fulfill ministries and service in and through the church (1 Corinthians 12-14, Ephesians 4:7-13). All gifts of service are embraced by Veritas and should be exercised by each and every member.

We acknowledge the diversity of opinion among Christians regarding the so-called "sign gifts" (i.e. tongues and prophecy) and we want to affirm their usage in the gathering in accordance to scripture. Those who believe in the continuance of the gifts may practice them in private and for the good of the church when the gifts are practiced in obedience with 1 Corinthians 12-14.

