

COMMUNITY GROUP
Leadership Manual



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Welcome Letter

Hello!

It's a joy to welcome you into this journey of Community Group leadership at Orangewood. I want you to know how deeply grateful I am for your willingness to step into this calling. By opening your home, your heart, and your time, you are giving others a priceless gift: the chance to step into the life-changing story of Jesus in the context of community.

Unspoken or mismatched expectations can quietly erode a group before it really begins. But when we share a common vision, mission, and purpose, groups become places of cohesion, love, and unity.

Remember the television show *Dancing with the Stars*. Each week, a professional dancer was paired with a celebrity, and together they learned to move in step with one another. Without alignment, the dance collapses into chaos. But when the steps are shared, beauty emerges.

Community Groups work the same way. To “dance together” in community, we need to know the steps—the shared commitments that shape how we walk with Christ and with one another.

This guide will help you and your group:

- ▶ Embrace the vision and mission of Orangewood's Community Groups
- ▶ Grow in unity through a shared direction and purpose
- ▶ Live as gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved communities

And here's the encouragement I want you to carry as you read: you are not stepping into this alone. At Orangewood, pastors and elders will walk alongside you, offering prayer, encouragement, and wisdom.

My prayer is that this guide will not only equip you with tools but also encourage you with vision, so that you—and those you lead—will taste the joy of Christ's kingdom breaking in through community.

Gratefully,
Curt Moore
Coordinator of Local Impact and Connections



Section 1: Foundations of Community



1. The Purpose of Community Groups

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY GROUP?

A Community Group is a small group of disciples walking together in the life-changing story of Jesus. These groups are gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved.

- **Gospel-Grounded:** Rooted in Christ's life, death, and resurrection.
- **Formation-Focused:** Shaped by the Spirit through Scripture, prayer, fellowship, and worship.
- **Mission-Moved:** Sent on mission to serve and bear witness in neighborhoods, workplaces, and the world.

Community Groups grow in grace together and demonstrate grace in acts of love and service. They exist for more than themselves—they exist for the sake of others, joining God in His mission to restore all things.

WHY IS COMMUNITY IMPORTANT?

Why pursue community at Orangewood? It's not about creating more programs. It's about becoming the people God has designed us to be.

Isolation leads to fear, self-focus, and disconnection. But in Christ, we are invited into His family. The foundation for Community Groups is not busy activity, but living as disciples shaped by the Gospel.

The Gospel is the very center of God's plan for humanity and for the world—and so it must be the center of our life together.

BY DESIGN

We are created in the image of the triune God—made for relationship with Him and with one another. But because of sin, humanity has been fractured. Sin separates us from God, from each other, and even from ourselves, leaving us with isolation, alienation, and division.

Yet through Jesus Christ, God has acted to reconcile us to Himself and to restore us into fellowship with one another. Community Groups are one way we live into this restoration story—becoming the people God has designed us to be, together.



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE GOSPEL-GROUNDED COMMUNITIES?

Through Christ, God has established and carried out His plan to reconcile the world to Himself. At the very heart of that plan is the Church—the community of Christ. A gospel community declares and displays the overwhelming love of God: that Jesus Christ has reconciled us both to the Father and to one another.

The Church is more than a gathering; it is the communal reenactment of the gospel. Week after week, in worship and in community, we live out the story of God’s redeeming grace.

As Mark Dever reminds us in *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*,

“Christian proclamation might make the gospel audible, but Christians living together in local congregations make the gospel visible.”

Though it is easy to treat Christian community as optional or secondary, scripture makes it clear: the Church is central to God’s plan and to our growth in grace. Community Groups at Orangewood are one of the key ways this truth takes shape. They are designed to be gospel-grounded—rooted in Christ, formation-focused—shaped into His likeness, and mission-moved—sent into the world for His mission.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FORMATION-FOCUSED COMMUNITIES?

Formation happens as we open our lives to the transforming presence of Jesus. We are shaped by the Spirit through scripture, prayer, sacrament, and fellowship. This kind of transformation rarely happens in isolation.

C.S. Lewis once wrote:

“If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them ... They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you.”

Community Groups help to keep us anchored in Christ, the fountain of true life. They are places where the gospel is planted and grows, where formation takes shape through spiritual practices, and where discipleship is lived out together in real and tangible ways.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE MISSION-MOVED COMMUNITIES?

Spiritual formation always leads to mission. As we are shaped by Christ, we are also sent by Him. Community Groups are not holy huddles but launchpads—training us to live as everyday witnesses in our families, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.



This is mission-moved: a community that turns outward, embracing God's mission in the everyday places of life. Whether on the soccer field, in the office, or across the backyard fence, we live as people sent by Jesus to bring His love, mercy, and truth to others (Acts 17:26–27).

To stop short of this movement is to embrace an incomplete gospel. When we are truly formed in Christ, His life naturally flows outward. As Jesus said, *“Whoever believes in me... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water”* (John 7:38).

When you lead your group, you are doing kingdom work. You are giving people a place to encounter Christ, to be formed in His likeness, and to be sent as witnesses: gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved.

Don't underestimate it; when ordinary people gather around Jesus in ordinary places, the Spirit of God does extraordinary things.



2. The Six Values of a Community Group

Every healthy community needs guiding values. They are like vital signs in a patient's chart or mile markers on a highway — they show life, keep us on track, and reorient us when we drift. At Orangewood Church, our six values shape the culture of our Community Groups:

1. ALWAYS TRUTH, ALWAYS LOVE

We believe God's Word is true, and we strive to share it with gentleness and respect. Truth without love can crush; love without truth cannot save. In Community Groups, we seek both conviction anchored in Scripture and compassion that reflects the heart of Christ.

2. WELCOME & WANTED

Everyone longs to belong. In Christ, we are welcomed into God's family, and so we extend that same welcome to others. Groups are places where every person, no matter where they are in their journey with Jesus, is wanted and invited into meaningful relationships.

3. BETTER TOGETHER

Life is not meant to be lived alone. God has designed His people to grow, serve, and encourage one another in community. Groups are where we share life, celebrate joys, carry burdens, and spur one another on toward Christlikeness.

4. NEIGHBORS NEAR & FAR

Jesus sends us out to love our neighbors and the nations. Groups look for ways to bless their neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces, while also supporting Orangewood's mission partners around the world. We live as people sent, not settled.

5. 168 LIVING

We were created to glorify God and enjoy Him not just for an hour on Sundays, but for all 168 hours of each week. Community Groups help one another see all of life — work, rest, family, and play — as worship, lived in the presence of God.

6. EXTRA-MILE GENEROSITY

God has given generously to us through Christ. Out of that abundance, we gladly share our time, resources, and gifts with others. Groups practice generosity together, caring for needs inside the group and blessing those outside.



Section 2: Practices of Community



3. The Structure of Community Groups

Because Orangewood is a gospel-grounded, Presbyterian, and Reformed church, the structure of our Community Groups will not look exactly like other small groups you may have experienced.

Brad House, in his book *Taking Your Group Off Life Support*, makes this point: “The structure of community groups should be the overflow of your biblical conviction on community and the ecclesiology of the church.”

In other words, every church’s group life flows out of its theology and mission. At Orangewood, that means our Community Groups are shaped by our calling: to invite every person into the life-changing story of Jesus by being gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved.

Think of moving into a home. Most of you probably didn’t pour the foundation or frame the walls, but you did choose the colors, the furniture, and the landscaping. You made it your own while still living within its structure.

That’s what Community Groups are like. Orangewood provides the biblical foundation and missional framework, but each group brings its own personality through the gifts, passions, and relationships of its members. Your group will look like *your people*—because the Spirit uses the unique mix of gifts in the room to shape both fellowship and mission.

SERMON-BASED CURRICULUM

At Orangewood, our Community Groups use sermon-based curriculum. The passage preached on Sunday is the same text your group studies during the week. Each week, leaders receive a study guide with Scripture references, questions, and prompts for reflection and application.

Why sermon-based?

1. **Deeper Impact** – Sermons are brief, but their truths gain depth when processed in community.
2. **Shared Focus** – When the whole church is walking through the same passage, it sharpens unity and discipleship.
3. **Stronger Leaders** – New leaders can step in with confidence, knowing their group’s content is grounded in Sunday’s preaching of God’s Word.



OTHER CURRICULUM

Some groups may want to explore additional resources, but not every book or study is biblically faithful, so leaders must shepherd carefully. For your convenience, you can also see a list of recommended studies and resources in the appendix of this Leader's Guide.

HOW ARE GROUPS FORMED?

The healthiest Community Groups begin through organic relationships—friends, neighbors, and fellow church members gathering around the gospel. Often, a leader or host invites others into their group.

At the same time, Orangewood staff actively connect new individuals and families. If someone is looking for a group, the staff will prayerfully help place them where they can be known, discipled, and equipped. Our goal is not simply to fill slots but to help people find a spiritual family where they can grow in Christ.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL GATHERING LOOK LIKE?

Groups meet with 12–16 people for 2–3 hours, usually two to four times each month. While every group has its own rhythm, gatherings typically include:

- ▶ Fellowship and sharing life together
- ▶ Bible study and sermon discussion
- ▶ Prayer for one another
- ▶ Occasional outreach or service opportunities outside of regular gatherings

WHERE DO GROUPS MEET?

Most Community Groups meet in homes throughout Central Florida—Maitland, Winter Park, Longwood, and beyond. Because hosting and leading require different gifts, we encourage these roles to be shared:

- ▶ **Hosts** provide a warm, welcoming environment in their homes.
- ▶ **Leaders** shepherd the group through study, prayer, and care.

In addition, men's and women's groups meet during the week on the Orangewood campus. Ministry-specific details can be found on the church website.



HOW LONG DOES A GROUP LAST?

Community Groups are not bound by an expiration date. Many continue for years as relationships deepen. However, we encourage every leader to keep **multiplication** in view.

The best way to multiply is by identifying and developing an apprentice leader. Apprentices learn to shepherd alongside you and may eventually start a new group—sometimes with a few members from your original group, sometimes with new members helped by Orangewood staff.

This approach keeps groups healthy, creates space for newcomers, and ensures that Orangewood continues to grow as a church of gospel-grounded, formation-focused, mission-moved communities.

WHAT ABOUT CHILDCARE?

Each group decides how to incorporate children. Some options include:

- ▶ Children participate in fellowship and prayer, then move to an age-appropriate activity with rotating parents.
- ▶ Parents pool resources to hire a babysitter (Orangewood can recommend trusted students).
- ▶ Families design group rhythms that intentionally include children in creative, age-sensitive ways.

The goal is to ensure that both parents and children experience the blessing of community life.

COACHING FOR LEADERS

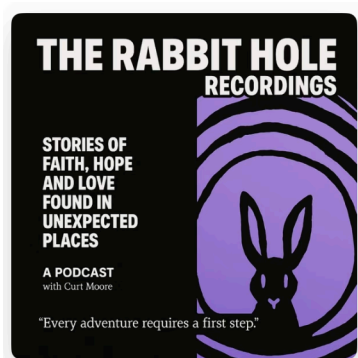
Remember, you are not alone in this calling. Pastors and elders at Orangewood stand with you, providing prayer, encouragement, and guidance so that you can lead your group with confidence and grace.



SUPPORT FOR LEADERS

Orangewood is committed to equipping Community Group leaders and hosts with the tools, encouragement, and support they need to shepherd well. Throughout the year, you'll have access to multiple opportunities:

- ▶ **Quarterly Gatherings** – Four times a year, all leaders and hosts come together for fellowship, worship, and training. These gatherings provide space to share best practices, celebrate how God is working through Community Groups, and be refreshed in the mission together.
- ▶ **The Rabbit Hole Recordings Podcast** (Equipped to Lead Series) – A podcast created to equip, encourage, and inspire Community Group leaders. Most episodes are about five minutes long and follow the Leader's Guide, offering practical tips for overcoming challenges, building healthy group dynamics, and applying leadership principles in real-life situations. In addition to short equipping episodes, the podcast also features interviews with local ministry partners and foreign missionaries. These stories broaden perspective, highlight God's work in different contexts, and spark ideas for how your group can live missionally—both in your neighborhood and around the world.



The Rabbit Hole Recordings

therabbitholerecordings

CHRISTIANITY · UPDATED BIWEEKLY

The Rabbit Hole Recordings is a show that explores the upside down nature of the Kingdom of God and the unexpected places and pathways where we meet Jesus and experience [MORE](#)



Together, these opportunities help leaders grow spiritually, sharpen their leadership, and shepherd their groups with wisdom and grace.



4. The Agenda for a Community Group

Community Groups are small expressions of the church gathered together. A healthy rhythm of gathering includes fellowship, worship, Bible study, sharing, and prayer. These elements, practiced over time, help disciples grow in Christ and live as His witnesses.

Groups should expect to spend 2–3 hours together. How often you meet, what night of the week, and how your time is ordered will be determined when you establish your group's covenant together.

FELLOWSHIP (30–45 MINUTES)

At the heart of the Gospel is reconciliation—first with God, then with one another. Fellowship is essential to forming community.

Every gathering should create space to connect relationally—whether through a meal, dessert, or coffee. This time is not wasted; it is kingdom work, building the kind of trust that allows discipleship to flourish. Many groups find it helpful to begin and end with fellowship.

OPENING VISION AND WORSHIP (20 MINUTES)

It is important to remind the group why you gather: not simply for yourselves, but for Christ and His mission. Begin your time with a vision-setting reminder:

“A Community Group is a circle of disciples walking together in the life-changing story of Jesus. We are gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved. We live life together for the purpose of growing in grace and demonstrating grace in acts of love and service to one another, our neighborhoods, and to the nations.”

This anchors the group in Orangewood's vision and keeps gatherings from drifting into self-centeredness. Instead, your group stays mindful that it exists **for God and for others**.

This time might also include:

- ▶ Singing – If someone is musically gifted, consider opening with one or two songs of worship.
- ▶ Icebreakers – Not necessary every time, but useful for new groups or when welcoming new members.



BIBLE STUDY (45 MINUTES)

Life-change happens when God's truth and the Spirit's power shape our hearts together. The clearest place to encounter that truth is in Scripture.

Since Orangewood uses sermon-based curriculum, your group's study will normally flow from the Sunday text and sermon. The weekly guide will provide Scripture, questions, and prompts to help the group dive deeper and apply God's Word.

The goal is not simply to cover content but to let the Gospel take root in our lives and lead us toward transformation.

SHARING (15–20 MINUTES)

Fellowship involves more than small talk. It means sharing what God is teaching us, how He is at work in our lives, and where we need Him most.

This is a time for vulnerability and care—bearing one another's burdens, encouraging one another, and applying God's Word to real situations.

Leaders, be attentive here. Allow space for people to share, but also gently guide the conversation so that one voice does not dominate. The purpose is not to turn sharing into a counseling session, but to make space for the Spirit to bring encouragement and accountability.

PRAYER (10–15 MINUTES)

Prayer closes the circle of community. This includes praying for personal needs, but also for the mission of God—neighbors, co-workers, the city, and the nations.

Prayer helps groups look upward (to God), inward (for one another), and outward (to the world). It keeps Community Groups gospel-grounded, Spirit-dependent, and mission-minded.



TWO IMPORTANT CAUTIONS

► **Balance Over Time**

Not every element will receive equal weight in every gathering. Some weeks will lean heavily on Bible study, others on prayer or fellowship. That is normal. Over time, however, a healthy group will find balance. Leaders should regularly ask:

- Are we living as a gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved community?
- Do our rhythms reflect the purpose of our group, or have we drifted into imbalance?

► **Group Dynamics Matter**

Even the best agenda cannot overcome unhealthy group dynamics. If a group is dominated by one voice, fractured by conflict, or shaped by passivity, the leader must shepherd wisely. Otherwise, frustration will grow, energy will wane, and the group may lose sight of its purpose.

Awareness of group dynamics, paired with steady vision-setting, will help your Community Group flourish as a living picture of God's kingdom.



Section 3: Roles & Responsibilities



5. Expectations for Community Group Leaders

Leading a Community Group at Orangewood Church is both a privilege and a calling.

Scripture reminds us that Christ gives shepherds and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” (Ephesians 4:11–13). Community Group leaders step into that shepherding role at a very personal level—walking with a smaller “flock” within our church family.

A SHEPHERDING ROLE

While pastors and elders provide oversight and teaching for the whole church, Community Group leaders are frontline shepherds. You declare and demonstrate the Gospel to your group, modeling what it means to follow Jesus.

With 8–14 members meeting regularly for 2–3 hours, leaders often spend more direct time with group members than pastors do in sermons. This makes your role in spiritual formation deeply significant.

Leaders are not called to have all the answers but to faithfully shepherd by:

- ▶ **Guiding** — leading discussions centered on God’s Word and prayer.
- ▶ **Caring** — noticing needs and providing encouragement and support.
- ▶ **Equipping** — helping group members discover and use their gifts.
- ▶ **Modeling** — living a life that reflects Orangewood’s vision and values.

CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR LEADERS

As a Community Group leader at Orangewood, you are expected to:

- ▶ **Live Orangewood’s Vision** – “To invite every person into the life-changing story of Jesus.” Shape your leadership around being gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved.
- ▶ **Cultivate a Healthy Group Environment** – Foster a space that is safe, welcoming, and marked by Orangewood’s values: Always Truth, Always Love; Welcome & Wanted; Better Together; Neighbors Near & Far; and 168 Living.



- ▶ **Lead Through God's Word** – Prioritize Scripture and sermon-based discussion, while encouraging personal application in everyday life.
- ▶ **Pray Regularly for Your Group** – Intercede for members individually and for the group's mission together.
- ▶ **Shepherd, Don't Solo** – Partner with your host (if applicable) and lean on Orangewood's coaching structure for support, encouragement, and accountability.
- ▶ **Develop Future Leaders** – Identify and invest in potential leaders so that groups can multiply and the mission can expand.
- ▶ **Stay Connected to the Church** – Participate in quarterly leader gatherings and equipping opportunities to remain aligned with Orangewood's direction and to receive encouragement.

THE HEART OF LEADERSHIP

At its core, leadership is about serving. Jesus reminds us: “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Community Group leaders follow His example by leading with humility, love, and a heart for mission.



6. Designing a Group Covenant

Because Community Groups bring together people with different experiences, desires, and expectations, a group covenant is essential. Without it, groups often drift or struggle with competing agendas. With it, groups gain clarity, unity, and shared purpose.

As David Stark writes in *How to Launch and Lead a Small Group*:

“A covenant is an agreement reached by a group of people about their interactions and activities together. In terms of a small group, it is the agreement between the members, leaders, coaches, and pastors about what a group will do and how it will do it.”

At Orangewood, every covenant begins with the mission and vision of the church: “To invite every person into the life-changing story of Jesus by being gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved.”

Some elements of group life are non-negotiable—shaped by Scripture and Orangewood’s mission. Other elements are negotiable and should be decided by the group itself. These negotiables give ownership, identity, and direction to your unique community.

When we covenant together, we move beyond good intentions. We make a commitment to love one another, to take group life seriously, and to hold one another accountable to grow as disciples.

WHAT A COVENANT PROVIDES

A covenant helps your group:

- ▶ Clarify purpose and identity
- ▶ Express the needs, hopes, and expectations of members
- ▶ Prevent misunderstandings before they happen
- ▶ Bind the group together in commitment
- ▶ Serve as a tool for communication with others
- ▶ Provide a basis for evaluation and growth
- ▶ Establish norms for handling conflict or renegotiating expectations

When leaders guide groups in shaping a covenant, they are really guiding them in designing their life together. Remember: *people own what they help create.*



ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN A GROUP COVENANT

- ▶ How often the group meets
- ▶ How long the group meets (2–3 hours is typical)
- ▶ Commitment to attend faithfully and arrive on time
- ▶ Commitment to confidentiality
- ▶ Commitment to pray for one another
- ▶ Commitment to care for one another
- ▶ Childcare arrangements
- ▶ Breaks for holidays and school schedules
- ▶ Whether to provide refreshments
- ▶ Defining the group's local missional focus
- ▶ Defining the group's global missional focus

HOW TO CREATE A COVENANT

- ▶ Set aside a full evening. Make the covenant the focus of one gathering, without other activities competing.
- ▶ Pray together. Ask God to lead you in honesty, trust, and unity. Begin by reading Orangewood's mission, vision, and values, and discuss how your group can live them out.
- ▶ Gather expectations. Ask each member to write down what they hope for in the group. Share these openly and record them where all can see.
- ▶ List past experiences. What has worked well in other groups? What has not? Write down both, so you can pursue what's helpful and avoid what's harmful.
- ▶ Identify priorities. Looking at the group's shared expectations and Orangewood's mission, decide what practices will best help you grow as a gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved community.
- ▶ Commit together. What will you realistically agree to? Aim for commitments that are both achievable and stretching.
- ▶ Write it down. Record your covenant and revisit it as needed.



- ▶ Build in phases. Begin with the essentials—meeting rhythms, prayer, study, care. Over time, add missional commitments as your group discovers its unique gifts, passions, and opportunities. For example:
 - Serving a neighbor or family in need
 - Partnering with a local ministry that Orangewood supports
 - Adopting one of Orangewood’s global mission partners

From the very beginning, make it clear: Community Groups do not exist only for themselves. They exist to be formed in Christ and to join Him in His mission to the world.



SAMPLE COMMUNITY GROUP COVENANT

As a Community Group, we desire to live out Orangewood’s mission and vision: “To invite every person into the life-changing story of Jesus by being gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved.”

Our Commitments to God and One Another

- ▶ Scripture & Prayer
 - We will gather around God’s word, using the sermon-based study as our main guide.
 - We will pray together each week for one another, our neighbors, and God’s mission.
- ▶ Presence & Participation
 - We will meet every other week for 2–3 hours.
 - We will be present, arrive on time, and come ready to engage.
 - If we must miss a meeting, we will communicate with the group.
- ▶ Care & Confidentiality
 - We will care for one another in practical ways—celebrating joys, supporting needs, and bearing burdens.
 - We will honor confidentiality. What is shared in the group stays in the group.
- ▶ Mission & Service
 - We will look outward as a group, identifying one local missional opportunity and one global mission partnership to support through prayer, giving, or service.
- ▶ Hospitality & Fellowship
 - We will create a warm, welcoming environment where everyone feels wanted and safe.
 - We will share meals, coffee, or dessert regularly as part of our gatherings.
- ▶ Multiplication
 - We will pray for and encourage an apprentice leader within the group, trusting God to multiply His work and make room for others to join the story.

Our Covenant

We understand that this covenant is not a legal contract but a spiritual commitment. By God’s grace, we will love one another well, live in light of the gospel, and pursue Jesus together.

Date: _____ Group Leader(s): _____

Host(s): _____ Apprentice Leader (if applicable): _____

Group Members: _____



7. Expectations for Community Group Hosts

The role of the Community Group host is critical to the success of the group. People need to feel secure, comfortable, and relaxed before they are willing to share their lives. That's why environments matter. A prepared, welcoming, and relaxed setting fosters openness and strengthens community.

THE GOSPEL AND HOSTING

By agreeing to host, you are offering your gifts to bless others, advance the mission of the church, and glorify God. Hosting is not about showing off perfection—it's about creating space for people to encounter the life-changing story of Jesus.

Our identity is not rooted in how “perfect” our home looks, but in who we are in Christ. If we try to find our worth in approval from others, we will feel like failures whenever things aren't perfect. But when we rest in the gospel, we are free to love and serve without anxiety. Hosting becomes less about performance and more about pointing people to Jesus.

UNITY WITH THE COMMUNITY GROUP LEADER

As a host, you are part of a leadership team. While the group meets in your home, you are not the leader of the group. Hosting naturally brings a sense of authority, so it's important to support—not overshadow—the group leader.

By agreeing to host, you are committing to Orangewood's mission, vision, and values and to working in unity with the Community Group leader. Hosting requires humility, deference, and alignment so that the group flourishes as a gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved community.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS OF A HOST

Your role as a host is just as important as the leader's role. Both are essential to group health, but they require different gifts. Hosts are often gifted in hospitality and service, creating a safe and welcoming environment where relationships can grow.

A Community Group host may demonstrate gifts such as:

- ▶ Hospitality – knowing the difference between entertaining and true hospitality.
- ▶ Creating Atmosphere – recognizing how physical space and ambiance contribute to community.



- ▶ Welcome & Care – helping every member and guest feel seen, safe, and valued.
- ▶ Stewardship – being willing to use personal resources (space, time, possessions) to bless others.
- ▶ Practical Preparation – keeping the meeting area clean and comfortable.
- ▶ Diversity & Openness – welcoming a wide range of people with warmth and humility.
- ▶ Servant-Heartedness – reflecting Philippians 2:3, putting others before yourself.

DUTIES OF A COMMUNITY GROUP HOST

The objective of hosting is to promote a welcoming environment where people feel free to open up and connect.

BEFORE THE MEETING

- ▶ Be prepared to welcome members 20–30 minutes before the meeting. This allows leaders, apprentices, and helpers to arrive early for prayer and setup.
- ▶ Eliminate distractions whenever possible:
 - ▶ Children – If the group is not a family group, agree together on childcare plans. As host, ensure your children can safely and quietly play or sleep without disrupting the group.
 - ▶ Pets – Unless you know everyone enjoys them, keep pets in another room. Be mindful of allergies or fears. A good vacuuming before the group may be necessary.
 - ▶ Telephones – Encourage silencing of cell phones. Allow voicemail to pick up house calls so the group isn't interrupted.
 - ▶ Odors – Avoid cooking strong-smelling foods like fish or cabbage right before group. Empty litter boxes. If you use candles, choose smokeless ones and confirm no one has allergies.

DURING THE MEETING

- ▶ Provide Space – Make sure seating is arranged so everyone feels included.
- ▶ Refreshments – Provide simple drinks or snacks, or coordinate with the group to rotate responsibilities.
- ▶ Atmosphere – Small touches (a cleared table, tidy room, warm lighting) communicate welcome without striving for perfection.



- ▶ Share the Load – Hosting doesn't mean doing everything yourself. Invite group members to help with setup, cleanup, and refreshments.

HOSTING WITH GOSPEL CONFIDENCE

Ultimately, hosting is a ministry of presence. You don't have to be perfect—you simply have to be available. By opening your home, you are creating space for people to be known, cared for, and formed in Christ. You are helping to embody Orangewood's values: Welcome & Wanted, Better Together, Always Truth, Always Love, Neighbors Near & Far, and 168 Living.



Section 4: Group Dynamics & Care



8. Understanding Group Dynamics

Community Group leaders need to be aware of what's happening in the lives of their people. What's causing them pain and anxiety? What's making them question—or celebrate—their faith? What circumstances outside their control weigh them down? What gives them joy or stirs them to action?

Attentiveness to these questions is critical for helping people grow in Christ. To minister effectively in a diverse group with diverse needs, leaders must grasp the basic dynamics of group life. Understanding these principles will prepare you to shepherd well and adjust as your Community Group matures.

There are five key rules of group dynamics:

RULE 1: ALL GROUPS HAVE MULTIPLE AGENDAS

Every Community Group holds four agendas in tension:

- ▶ Learning – studying God's word, sermon discussion, and applying truth.
- ▶ Caring – praying for one another, supporting needs, bearing burdens.
- ▶ Doing – serving together, living on mission, practicing obedience.
- ▶ Being – simply enjoying one another's presence and building relationships.

Typically, one agenda will dominate at any given time. That is natural—but if the others are consistently neglected, the group becomes unbalanced. For example, a group that only studies scripture without caring for one another will feel cold, while a group that only shares and cares without learning together will lack depth.

The goal is not rigid balance at every meeting but long-term health across the life of the group. When someone experiences a loss, “caring” may take the forefront for a season. When studying a challenging passage, “learning” may rise in focus. Healthy groups flex in the moment while keeping the bigger picture in view.



RULE 2: ALL GROUPS HAVE A LIFE CYCLE

Like people, groups change and grow over time. At first, relationships are fragile, and leaders must be directive. Over time, trust grows, and leadership becomes more facilitative.

A wise leader adjusts to the group's changing dynamics:

- ▶ Directive Leadership – moving the meeting forward, making decisions, setting tone and pace.
- ▶ Facilitative Leadership – opening space for members to participate, encouraging contributions, drawing others in.
- ▶ Modeling Leadership – demonstrating faith, honesty, and love by example. Leaders set the standard by living what they teach.
- ▶ Coaching Leadership – helping members identify their gifts and step into responsibility, gradually delegating roles to others.

Think of a leader like a pilot. A pilot sets the flight plan, checks the health of the aircraft, communicates with passengers, and adjusts to changing weather. Similarly, leaders guide their group toward its purpose, monitor the spiritual and relational health of members, and adjust as circumstances shift.

RULE 3: ANTICIPATE THE LIFE CYCLE OF YOUR GROUP

Groups typically move through several stages. These stages overlap and are fluid, but awareness of them helps leaders respond wisely.

1. Bonding (First 3–5 meetings)

- ▶ Members are asking: Do I belong? Will I be safe here? Can I trust these people?
- ▶ Leaders should be directive and modeling, setting clear purpose and tone.
- ▶ Use light sharing, icebreakers, and “acquaintance activities” to help people relax.
- ▶ Don't force intimacy too quickly—trust grows slowly.
- ▶ The leader's preparation and warmth are critical here.

2. Growing Deeper

- ▶ Once the “honeymoon” ends, differences in personality, maturity, or expectations emerge.
- ▶ Some members may leave if the group doesn't meet their “needs.” Don't take this personally. Follow up, but realize not every group is right for every person.



- ▶ Members are asking: How honest can I be? Can I really share my life here?
- ▶ Conflicts may surface—overly talkative, critical, or needy members may need gentle guidance.
- ▶ Leaders should facilitate, model, and coach, encouraging honest but respectful dialogue.
- ▶ At this stage, the group begins to feel like “our group” rather than “the leader’s group.” Writing a group covenant can help.

3. Mutual Ministry & Service

- ▶ Members have committed to one another and are practicing the “one another” commands of scripture.
- ▶ Fellowship, worship, study, prayer, and service are all present in balance.
- ▶ People begin caring for one another without relying solely on the leader.
- ▶ Leaders delegate responsibility and invest in an apprentice.
- ▶ The group starts to look outward—serving neighbors, supporting Orangewood’s partners, or joining in local outreach.
- ▶ Leaders continue to evaluate and adjust, avoiding stagnation by introducing variety (special meals, retreats, or service projects).

4. Transition & Multiplication

- ▶ As groups grow in size and maturity, multiplication becomes necessary. Leaders should prepare the group by identifying and equipping an apprentice leader.
- ▶ A healthy multiplication sends a few members with the apprentice to form a new group, making space for others to join the story of Jesus.
- ▶ Not every group multiplies, and some come to a natural end due to moves, life changes, or shifting needs. That is not failure—celebrate what God has done and help members transition well.



RULE 4: SIZE AND SETTING ARE SIGNIFICANT

Group size directly affects dynamics. Ideally, a Community Group should be 8–12 members. Too small, and the group may feel fragile; too large, and only a few voices dominate while others disengage.

When a group consistently exceeds 12 members, it's time to pray and plan for multiplication. Two smaller groups are healthier and more fruitful than one oversized one.

Physical space matters too. A circle where everyone can see and hear each other fosters participation. A warm, uncluttered room signals welcome and inclusion.

RULE 5: TRUE COMMUNITY REQUIRES SHARED LIFE

Community doesn't form in 2–3 hours once or twice a month. It grows as members share life beyond the scheduled gathering—over meals, coffee, service projects, or casual time together.

Brad House writes in *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support*:

“What if your community group was a people rather than an event? The body of Christ should be like that.”

Healthy groups don't just “meet”; they become spiritual families who love, serve, and walk with each other in everyday life.



9. Handling Difficult Moments with Grace

Community Groups are designed to be gospel-grounded, formation-focused, and mission-moved. They are places where discipleship is lived out in the ordinary moments of conversation, prayer, and fellowship. But no matter how well you prepare, every leader will face difficult moments in a group setting. Instead of fearing these interruptions, you can approach them as opportunities for God's Spirit to deepen trust, refine character, and display the love of Christ.

This section builds on the core practices of good leadership—preparing thoughtfully, encouraging balanced participation, guiding discussion with clarity, and closing with purpose—by equipping you to respond when things don't go according to plan.

1. NORMALIZING THE UNEXPECTED

Every group faces challenges. A moment of silence, a dominating voice, or an emotional outburst does not mean you are failing as a leader. In fact, they often signal that people feel safe enough to be real.

- ▶ Silence – Remember, silence can mean reflection. Don't rush to fill the gap. Wait patiently, then try one of the strategies from facilitation: rephrase the question, reread the passage, or ask someone specifically, "What are you hearing in this verse?"
- ▶ Dominating voices – Aim to balance participation in the group. Redirect gracefully by saying, "Thanks for sharing. Let's pause and hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet."
- ▶ Tangents – Meetings can drift. Affirm contributions, then gently steer: "That's good—let's come back to the main theme for tonight."
- ▶ Emotional tension – Tears, frustration, or confession can change the tone of a meeting. Pause, thank the person for their honesty, and consider praying right then.

2. LEADING WITH ORANGEWOOD'S VALUES

When difficulty arises, our values become more than words on paper—they are guardrails for action.

- ▶ Always Truth, Always Love – When correction is needed, do so with humility and gentleness (Gal. 6:1). When comfort is needed, be present with compassion.
- ▶ Welcome & Wanted – Guard against cliques or insiders/outside dynamics. Every person should feel they belong, even in tension.



- ▶ Better Together – Disagreement doesn't destroy community; it sharpens it. Frame moments of tension as iron sharpening iron.
- ▶ Neighbors Near & Far – Sometimes tension points to deeper needs outside the group (family stress, work burdens, relational wounds). Be attentive to those needs and look for ways to serve.
- ▶ 168 Living – Remind the group: how we handle conflict here shapes how we live Christ's love in the other 167 hours of our week.

3. SHEPHERDING PRACTICES FOR DIFFICULT MOMENTS

Drawing from *Facilitating a Meeting*, here are extended practices you can use in real time:

- ▶ Reframe – If a question stalls, try asking it in simpler language.
- ▶ Use names – Invite quieter members with gentle prompts: "Sarah, how do you see this passage speaking into everyday life?"
- ▶ Summarize and redirect – If conversation veers off-course, summarize what was said, then pivot: "That's interesting. For our study tonight, let's look again at what Paul says in verse 12."
- ▶ Pause for prayer – Don't be afraid to stop discussion and pray, especially if emotions run high.
- ▶ Close with clarity – End every meeting with a summary, prayer, and a reminder of your shared purpose.

4. FOLLOWING UP BEYOND THE MEETING

Often, what happens *after* a difficult night matters most.

- ▶ Check in individually – Send a text or call a member who seemed hurt, quiet, or dominant.
- ▶ Offer pastoral care – If deeper issues surface (marital conflict, grief, doubt), connect members with pastors, deacons, or counseling resources.
- ▶ Affirm the group – Encourage the group by naming growth: "Last night was stretching, but God is using even that to grow our love for one another."



5. REFLECTION AND APPLICATION FOR LEADERS

- ▶ How do I usually respond to silence or awkwardness—by rushing to fill it, or by allowing space for reflection?
- ▶ When someone dominates discussion, am I confident enough to redirect in love?
- ▶ How can I keep Orangewood's vision and values in front of my group, even when tension arises?
- ▶ Which shepherding practices from this section do I want to practice in my next meeting?

LEADER'S REMINDER:

Difficult moments are not interruptions to ministry—they are ministry. Every silence, tangent, or disagreement can become a window for grace. If you stay prayerful, calm, and anchored in scripture, God will use these moments to knit hearts together and to draw people deeper into the life-changing story of Jesus.



SAMPLE LEADER STATEMENTS FOR THE 4 D'S

1. Dominators

When one person talks too much, it discourages others from sharing.

- ▶ “Thanks for sharing so thoughtfully. I’d love to hear from others, too—what do the rest of you think?”
- ▶ “That’s a great perspective. Let’s pause here and invite someone who hasn’t spoken yet.”
- ▶ “I appreciate your insights. For tonight, let’s make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute.”

2. Distractors

Side conversations, rabbit trails, or irrelevant comments can derail discussion.

- ▶ “That’s an interesting point. Let’s circle back to tonight’s passage, so we stay on track.”
- ▶ “I’d love to chat more about that afterward, but for now let’s keep focused on our study.”
- ▶ “Good thought—maybe we can put a pin in that and revisit if we have time at the end.”

3. Debaters

Some group members love to argue or push their viewpoint strongly.

- ▶ “I can see you’re passionate about this. Let’s also hear how others are processing the passage.”
- ▶ “This is an important issue, but our goal tonight isn’t to win an argument—it’s to grow together in Christ.”
- ▶ “Thanks for raising that. Let’s return to what the text says and see what we can learn together.”

4. Dropouts

Some people disengage—physically (skipping often) or emotionally (quiet, withdrawn).

- ▶ “I noticed you’ve been a little quieter tonight—anything you’d like to share?”
- ▶ “We’ve missed you the past couple of weeks. How are you doing?”
- ▶ “Your presence matters here. Is there any way we can support you better?”

LEADER’S TIP:

When you address the 4 D’s, do it with warmth and humility. The goal is not to embarrass but to re-open the circle of conversation so everyone feels valued and connected.



Section 5: Mission & Multiplication



10. Life on Mission

Community Groups are not holy huddles—they are launchpads. They exist not only for those already inside but for neighbors, coworkers, and friends who have yet to hear and experience the gospel. At Orangewood, one of our core values is Neighbors Near & Far, and this means that life together is always designed to overflow into life on mission.

MISSION BEGINS WITH CARE

Mission doesn't happen by accident. It starts with intentional care inside the group. When someone in your group faces a challenge—illness, financial strain, family conflict—the first line of care isn't church staff. It's the group itself. Meals are brought, prayers are spoken, encouragement is offered, and practical help is given.

But care doesn't stop at the edge of the group. As we notice and serve one another, we're trained to notice and serve others—friends, neighbors, coworkers. Mission begins with care, and care naturally flows outward.

MISSION NEAR: LOVING OUR NEIGHBORS

Missional living doesn't require starting something new. It's living your everyday rhythms with gospel intentionality.

- ▶ **Neighborhood:** Be a regular at the same coffee shop, grocery store, or gym. Learn names. Build trust. Bless neighbors through small acts of service—sharing a meal, mowing a lawn, babysitting, or simply listening.
- ▶ **Workplace:** Invite coworkers to lunch, offer encouragement, pray quietly before the day begins. You may be the only Christ-follower some coworkers ever know. Your presence and kindness become a living witness.

Mission isn't about adding new tasks. It's about doing what you already do—shopping, working, resting—with a gospel lens.



MISSION NEAR: SERVING OUR CITY

Mission also means looking outward together as a group. Orangewood partners with ministries that serve Orlando, and your group can come alongside them:

- ▶ Choices Women's Clinic – host a baby shower, provide meals, help with repairs, or join in prayer.
- ▶ Hungerford Elementary / Orange Bag Campaign – collect groceries for families experiencing food insecurity.
- ▶ Orlando Children's Church – volunteer a Saturday morning to mentor and serve children in vulnerable neighborhoods.

These partnerships are “on-ramps”—simple, tangible ways your group can step into mission together. For more ways to seek opportunities of service, see the appendix of this leaders guide where you will find, “Simple Ways to Be Missional.”

MISSION FAR: SUPPORTING GLOBAL PARTNERS

The story of the gospel is a global story. Orangewood supports missionaries and ministries around the world, and Community Groups can share in that mission by:

- ▶ Praying for global partners by name in your gatherings.
- ▶ Writing letters or sending care packages.
- ▶ Hosting missionaries when they're in town.
- ▶ Sharing their stories with your group.
- ▶ Connecting over Zoom for real-time encouragement and prayer.

Mission Far reminds us we are part of something much bigger than our living rooms—we're joining a worldwide movement of God's mission.



SIMPLE MISSIONAL RHYTHMS FOR GROUPS

Mission doesn't need to be complicated. Here are small practices that turn groups outward:

- ▶ Leave an empty chair at gatherings as a reminder to pray for someone not yet in the group.
- ▶ Share stories weekly of missional steps—conversations, invitations, acts of service.
- ▶ Host simple neighborhood events: an ice cream night, a block party, or a moms' group that welcomes everyone.
- ▶ Serve together monthly through a local ministry partner.
- ▶ Practice “pastoring one another” inside the group—showing forgiveness, encouragement, and care—so outsiders see the gospel lived out.

LEADER ENCOURAGEMENT

Mission doesn't have to be overwhelming. It begins with prayer, grows as you notice, and builds through small steps of love. Remind your group often: we are sent people. Ordinary people, in ordinary places, with an extraordinary Savior.

Mission is not an optional add-on. It's the natural overflow of the gospel. As Jesus said: “*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you*” (John 20:21).



11: Multiplication

Healthy Community Groups don't simply grow larger in number; they multiply in depth and leadership. Multiplication ensures that the gospel moves outward, that discipleship continues from one generation to the next, and that new leaders are always being raised up.

In this section, we'll explore three essential aspects of multiplication: adopting a mindset of multiplication instead of addition, multiplying leaders, and developing apprentices.

MULTIPLICATION INSTEAD OF ADDITION

The Shift in Thinking

Most leaders are conditioned to think in terms of *addition* — one more person in the group, one more event on the calendar, one more responsibility on their shoulders. Addition is good, but it's slow and limited.

Multiplication, on the other hand, is exponential. Instead of only gathering more people, you invest in one person who can lead others. You're creating a ripple effect that moves far beyond your own group.

Biblical Picture

2 Timothy 2:2 gives us four generations of leadership in one verse: Paul → Timothy → reliable people → others. Multiplication is God's design for discipleship and leadership.

Jesus' Model

Jesus ministered to crowds, but He poured deeply into twelve disciples, and even more intentionally into three. Through them, the world was changed. Multiplication begins with investing deeply in a few.

Leader Application

- ▶ Identify two people in your group with leadership potential.
- ▶ Begin praying for them by name.
- ▶ Invite them into small steps of ownership.

Remember: when groups multiply, it's not a loss — it's fruit.



MULTIPLYING LEADERS

The “Do-It-All” Trap

Leaders often believe that if they don’t do it, it won’t get done. So they prepare the study, lead the prayer, send the reminders, and handle all the details. But if one person does everything, the group becomes dependent instead of equipped.

Equipping vs. Doing

Ephesians 4:11–12 reminds us that leaders are called to equip others for works of ministry, not to carry the entire burden themselves. A leader’s role is not to be the only shepherd, but to raise up more shepherds.

Practical Ways to Multiply Leaders

- ▶ Share responsibility: prayer, facilitation, hosting, childcare, communication.
- ▶ Spot potential: notice who asks thoughtful questions, who shows compassion, who includes others naturally.
- ▶ Name potential: call out gifts you see. People often don’t believe they’re leaders until someone says it out loud.

Leader Application

At your next gathering, ask: *Who could I invite into a small step of leadership?* Don’t wait for someone to feel ready. Apprenticeship begins with opportunity.



DEVELOPING APPRENTICES

What Apprenticeship Is (and Isn't)

Apprenticeship is not just delegating tasks. It's walking alongside someone with the goal of shaping both their skills and their heart. Apprenticeship is relational, intentional, and patient.

Biblical Pattern

- Moses → Joshua
- Elijah → Elisha
- Paul → Timothy
- Jesus → His disciples

Leadership in the kingdom is always relational. Apprenticeship is how leadership is passed on.

Philosophy of Apprenticeship

- ▶ Apprenticeship reflects the gospel: discipleship with a leadership focus.
- ▶ Apprenticeship ensures continuity: future leaders are always in the pipeline.
- ▶ Apprenticeship is slow but powerful: it's not about cloning yourself but forming Christlike leaders.

The Four Stages of Apprenticeship

- ▶ *I do, you watch* — observation and explanation.
- ▶ *I do, you help* — small contributions.
- ▶ *You do, I help* — they lead with your support.
- ▶ *You do, I cheer* — you release them to lead.

Practical Ways to Apprentice

- ▶ Let them prepare with you.
- ▶ Debrief after meetings.
- ▶ Share the “why” behind what you do.
- ▶ Give stretch assignments: leading prayer, facilitating, caring for group members.
- ▶ Model humility and dependence on the Spirit.



Leader Application

This week, identify one potential apprentice. Give them a small responsibility, then debrief and affirm their growth.

Leader Encouragement

Multiplication isn't about growing bigger groups. It's about raising up new leaders and planting new communities of disciples. It's slower at first, but it creates lasting impact.

Remember:

- ▶ Addition gathers people.
- ▶ Multiplication equips people.
- ▶ Apprenticeship develops leaders.

Leader, don't underestimate what God can do through the people you invest in. Ordinary men and women, apprenticed in Christ, can become extraordinary disciple-makers.

As Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). You are part of the answer to that prayer.



Appendix

