

Covenant Groups.

Size. Ideal size is 4-6, including facilitator(s). People are able to go deeper in discussions and bonding in smaller groups.

Roles. The group may designate a facilitator, who acts as the contact person and may even lead the conversation. The facilitation of sessions may also be shared within the group. If the group opts for shared facilitation, please designate one person as the contact person. Please share that person with your minister. The minister's role is to support and advocate for the group; provide leadership in areas of group selection and development and session plan development; ensure support for facilitators individually and as a group.

Selection. Participants join a covenant group by interest. This may be a group that is compatible at the outset. Members are assigned to groups by the minister.

Covenant. These groups are intended for community and spiritual development, but there is no particular way that the group must relate. When the group gathers, their first task is to establish a shared covenant. A covenant provides relational ground rules. It is a promise that participants make to create a safe environment for spiritual exploration. A covenant typically includes time management, commitment, respectful listening, confidentiality, and speaking from one's own experience ("I" statements). It is strongly encouraged that this document is recorded on paper. In that covenant, the group discerns what they hope to focus their energy upon. In that covenant, the group may also want to determine:

- the length of time the group intends to be together
- whether or not new participants can join the group
- when the group's work will be concluded
- whether or not food is allowed in the meetings
- whether or not the group wants to meet in the church or in homes.

Frequency and Length of Meetings. Groups should meet frequently enough to maintain continuity personal connection. A session lasts long enough for significant check-in and exploration of the topic (usually 1.5 to 2 hours per meeting). It is up to the group to decide if that frequency is weekly, monthly or otherwise.

Format of Meetings. As the group articulates their covenant, it will become clearer how the meetings will structure themselves. The minister will offer support and guidance to the facilitator about how to structure meetings. The basic structure is as follows. Start with a prayer. Make sure that everyone knows each other's names. Use the remainder of the gathering for activity, program or discussion. This time is the focus as it is the common interest of the group. End the gathering with a brief "check-out" - each person responding to questions like, "How did this feel? What did you learn? What will you take from this time together?" Finish the meeting with a brief prayer. However you decide to structure the meeting, be prepared with a loose plan to allow for the Spirit to guide you.

If this brief description of a covenant group sounds interesting to you, express your interest to Elsa.