

## **Frequently Asked Questions for Small Group**

1. [What is a small group?](#)
2. [What does a small groups do?](#)
3. [What is the role of a Small Group Leader?](#)
4. [Am I Qualified to be a Small Group Facilitator?](#)
5. [How do I set the Expectations for the Group?](#)
6. [How do I Facilitate Group Discussions?](#)
7. [How do I Handle Challenging Situations?](#)
8. [Should we accept new members?](#)
9. [How do I order study resources?](#)
10. [How do I reserve a Conference Room at Glen Mar?](#)
11. [What are some other helpful items that I should know?](#)
12. [Where Can I Go for Help?](#)

**What is a small group?** Dr. Kevin M. Watson of the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, defines a small group as “A group of people who gather together on a regular basis with the goal of becoming more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, to attend to the ways that God is at work in their lives and the extent to which they are cooperating with God’s grace, and to watch over one another in love and mutually challenge, support, and encourage one another in the pursuit of deeply committed Christian discipleship.” This definition works well to define the small groups at Glen Mar.

### **What does a small groups do?**

It is suggested that all small groups at Glen Mar perform the following activities. Not all of these activities are required for each group meeting, but when performed periodically, can help the group grow not just spiritually and emotionally, but also as friends and as a support structure.

- Pray/Study together
  - Start and close each meeting with prayer.
  - Attempt to find studies that meet the needs/desires of the group based on the mix of people and the level of study they desire. Visit the Small Group Resource Center (room 143) or email [smallgroupresources@glenmarumc.org](mailto:smallgroupresources@glenmarumc.org) for suggestions of studies.
- Care for each other
  - Share Joys/Concerns and offer to pray for one another.
  - Allow time at the beginning or end of the group to get to know one another. Examples of ice breaker activities are as follows: <http://glenmarumc.org/wp-content/uploads/SmallGroupIceBreakers.pdf>
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- Perform Service together
  - Promote participation in service activities. As people serve together, they grow closer and learn what it means to be God’s servants.
  - Examples of Ministry activities available at Glen Mar: <http://pdfs.glenmarumc.org/MinistryGuide.pdf>
- Have Fun together
  - Provide opportunities to develop closer relationships with fellow believers.
  - Activities such as celebrating the end of a study by going out to a restaurant, or watching a Christian movie during one of your group meetings while munching on snack create opportunities to have fun while building friendships.

### **What is the role of a Small Group Leader?**

The small group leader “facilitates” the discussion, but is usually not the teacher. The leader creates an environment where people feel comfortable sharing ideas, where no one monopolizes the conversation or tries to solve another's issues or concerns, and where disputes are resolved while respecting all opinions.

### **Am I Qualified to be a Small Group Facilitator?**

A small group leader is not a teacher and doesn't have to have all of the answers. The main responsibilities of a small group leader are to create a welcoming and safe environment for challenging, thinking, growing and discussion. Some of the skills that are helpful in facilitating a small group include: being open and welcoming, planning and leading group meetings, summarizing where the group is, asking questions, coping with conflict, being comfortable with group silence, keeping the group focused on issues, and delegating responsibility.

### **How do I set the Expectations for the Group?**

Guidelines: It is helpful if you develop [guidelines for your group](#), identifying when and how long the group will meet, goals, what type of studies are desired by the group, and standards of conduct for the group. It works best to have a list ahead of time, then have the group discuss and refine if needed.

Confidentiality: One important guideline for the group should be confidentiality. It is critical that people feel the group is a safe environment to enter into discussion without being concerned that personal information may be spread to others outside the group. The group should be reminded that everything that is discussed should remain confidential and not passed on to anyone outside the group. This point should be reiterated when a new person joins the group, and if any personal information, such as prayer requests, are shared by electronic media.

### **How do I Facilitate the Group Discussions?**

There are a number of resources available through the Resource Center dealing with leading small groups; also, material can be found on-line. Asking good questions is critical to facilitating discussions. Open-ended questions work best, with follow-up questions to get deeper, such as "why do you believe this?" Most small group studies have a leader's guide that provides a series of questions that can be used in your meetings.

Even with the best questions, some people may be hesitant to contribute to the discussion until they trust that the group is a safe place to contribute. They need to know that shared thoughts or personal experiences will be accepted without judgement, and not shared outside of the group. Building this type of trust can take time. See the question on setting expectations for help in creating a safe environment in your group.

Welcome all insights, recognizing that people have different backgrounds and may be at a varying levels of their faith journey.

Have FUN! Sometimes the discussions become clearer when you do some exercises or projects that expand on the point. There are many suggestions for these types of activities on-line. Role

playing, breaking into smaller groups or doing an arts & crafts project may take the seriousness away and may bring the point home even fuller, while you have some fun.

Remember—the end goal of a group discussion is life change, not perfect discussions or getting through all the material, so stay open to the Holy Spirit during each group meeting and follow where he leads.

### **How do I Handle Challenging Situations?**

The hard part of small groups is that they involve people, and sometimes that means dealing with challenging personalities. The Pastor of Community Life ([anna.foster@glenmarumc.org](mailto:anna.foster@glenmarumc.org)) and other [small group facilitators](#) are a great resource in helping you work through issues of challenging situations. Another suggestion is to include in your group guidelines specific codes of conduct which may assist in minimizing behavior that could create a challenging situation, and review the guidelines with the group periodically. Below are some other tips that may help you deal with some issues that may arise:

**Conflicts:** When a conflict arises, it is important to stop the conflict and remind people that it is ok for people to have differing opinions. It needs to be made clear that not everyone has to agree, but everyone should have the opportunity to voice an opinion without being judged.

**Trying to solve a person's problem:** It is important to stop unrequested advice when a person is sharing. When you hear other group members start to do this, remind the group that you are there to listen and share ideas, not to give advice.

**One person monopolizing the conversation:** When a person continues to monopolize the conversation in your group meetings, you may want to talk to the person outside of group. Explain to them that you appreciate their contributions, but you need their help in getting some of the other people in the group to open up and share. You may want to ask them to commit to not being the first person to answer a question, or to only answer when you call on them.

**Tangents:** Sometimes it is ok to go off on tangents, but if it is impacting the discussion, bring the group back on track. If the problem becomes excessive, talk to the person outside of group. Affirm what they do contribute, and let them know about the challenge you have in trying to make certain points each week, and how the tangents make your job harder. Ask them if they can help you.

**Insensitive person:** When a person continuously gives advice, makes fun of answers and people, cuts people off, or does offend members within the group, it can be dangerous to the health of your group. You will need to have a one-on-one conversation outside of group to let the person know how important a safe group is, and what they can do to help make that happen.

**What is the optimum size of a small group?** Studies have indicated that the optimum number of people in a small group is 8 to 12, but a smaller or larger group can work; it all depends on the make-up of your small group. If the group gets too large you can split into smaller groups to facilitate discussions, or you can create two groups that meet separately.

**Should we accept new members?** You need to decide as a group if you will accept new members. As a group meets over time you create relationships and a rhythm to the group. You may prefer not to make any changes to the group at this time. It is also great to have new people join your group to bring new ideas and insights, while assisting that person on their faith journey. The important point is that if you decide to accept new members, your group needs to commit to creating a welcoming environment where every member intentionally takes the responsibility of welcoming new members.

### **How do I order study resources?**

Small group study materials normally are comprised of a DVD, leader's guide and participant's book. The cost of these materials, particularly the DVD & leader's guide, can be costly. The Small Group Resource Library is available and contains the DVD & leader's guide for many good studies. You can see what studies are available and how to borrow materials at the following link on the Glen Mar website: <http://glenmarumc.org/church-life/small-group-resource-center/>

To order resource materials your group can either order them yourself, or the church can place the order for you. Sometimes the church can obtain the materials at a reduced amount due to group discounts and tax free status. Normally the cost of the DVD and leader's guide, if purchased for the study, will be divided among the members of the group to make it more affordable.

- Church Orders – If you would like the church to place the order for your resource materials, please provide to Laura Dreibelbis ([laura.dreibelbis@glenmarumc.org](mailto:laura.dreibelbis@glenmarumc.org)) the materials you desire, quantities of each, and the on-line site where they are available. The order will be made & you will be notified when they are received, along with the per person cost for the materials. Each member should reimburse the church for this purchase. Checks should be made payable to Glen Mar. Reimbursement envelopes are available in the resource center. The payment envelopes can be dropped in the check slot next to the Welcome Center.
- Group Orders – You may find it easier and faster to place an order directly for your group. By checking a variety of resources you can find the best price for the resources. If the leader's resource materials are not available to borrow through the Small Group Resource Center, the cost is normally distributed to all of the members of the group. Some helpful sites to find Christian Small Group Studies include: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.christianbooks.com](http://www.christianbooks.com), [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)

- Christian Bookstores – You can also find some great resources at Christian bookstores, such as Family Christian. Having the opportunity to browse through the resources also helps.

### **How do I reserve a Conference Room at Glen Mar?**

Group meetings can be held at Glen Mar or another venue (i.e., home, Panera, Barnes & Noble, restaurants). If you would like to reserve space at Glen Mar for a meeting, you must complete a Facilities Scheduling request. Instructions for the request are: Go to [www.glenmarumc.org](http://www.glenmarumc.org); go to the “MY GLEN MAR” tab on top of home page, then “Facilities Scheduling” option, then complete & submit the room request form. The link for this scheduling request is as follows: <http://glenmarumc.org/myglenmar/facilities-scheduling/>.

Be sure to identify whether this is on-going request, and whether you need a DVD player in the room. You will be notified when the request is approved.

### **What are some other helpful items that I should know?**

Nametags – When people are new to a group, it is helpful for people to wear nametags. Some groups use name tents, which are easier to read during discussions. The name tags/tents can be collected and reused each week.

Name & Address Listing – Preparing and sharing a list of the names and addresses for the people in the group is helpful. Be sure all agree to have the information dispersed within the group.

Suggestions for Resource Materials – You can find a listing of small group study resources that are available to borrow on the website at the following link: <http://glenmarumc.org/church-life/small-group-resource-center/>. Materials are also available to review at the resource center located in room 143. We would also really appreciate you preparing a [review](#) of each study you do, and submit it to the small group resource center. These reviews will help others in choosing study materials and will also assist in determining which resources to maintain in the library.

Delegate Responsibilities - It can be intimidating and hard work to facilitate a small group. Please keep in mind that you are not alone. Share the work load with your group members. Develop a prayer/devotion schedule and let people sign up to be responsible for a specific meeting to develop and lead the prayer/devotion. With encouragement, people will agree to lead a prayer if they have time to prepare. Although they may initially be intimidated, they will find that it helps them grow in their faith. You can also have someone assigned to administrative items, such as email reminders to the group, or room scheduling.

### **Where Can I Go for Help?**

Don't feel like you are on your own. Please feel free to contact the Pastor for Community Life, Pastor Anna Foster ([anna.foster@glenmarumc.org](mailto:anna.foster@glenmarumc.org)), the Small Group Resource Library ([smallgroupresources@glenmarumc.org](mailto:smallgroupresources@glenmarumc.org)), or other [Small Group Facilitators](#) for help.