

## Welcome to UNITED Groups!

As you step into your role as a UNITED Group Host, I want you to know how much you mean to me. I have been praying over this opportunity for you. You are helping create spaces for people to find the freedom they've been searching for and that is AWESOME. God is so proud of your "yes" to help people grow! And honestly, you'll get so much out of hosting a group too. As I look back on different groups I've had the honor of hosting over the years, I can see how God touched my life as well. I believe the same for you! Not only will others be blessed by your presence, but you'll encounter a life-giving community right in front of you!

My goal is to come alongside you in this journey. It's going to be hard at times. There will be days when you just want to cancel. Everything is going against you and the last thing you want to do is open up your home to a group of people. It's on those days, when the enemy tries to discourage what God is trying to do in the hearts of our people. I promise you, if you push through, God will move in ways like you've never seen. There's life change on the other side of that session. There's victory on the other side of that conversation. And together, we can celebrate the life change with joy!

The purpose of UNITED Groups is to create a space for people to find freedom. We aren't preaching or teaching. We are hosts. What does a good host do? A good host holds the door open and sets the table. That's what we do every time we host a group. We hold the door open for God to enter into our presence and set the table with His Word. We don't have to have all the answers, we just have to be willing to create a space for people to learn and grow in their relationship with God alongside us.

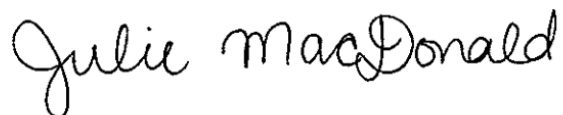
Your role as a Group Host is to point people continuously to Christ.

As a Group Host, we're empowering you to take UNITED Groups to the next level. We're praying that God will move mightily on your behalf as you assume this role as a Host. We hope that you will be able to maximize the gifts and passions that God has already instilled within you for the sake of building a community on the new and abundant life found only in Christ.

This Group Host Handbook is designed to equip you with the resources you need to activate the greater potential that God intends for you as a person and as a Host. Remember, you don't have to have all the answers. You are creating a space for others to grow in their faith journey!

The best is yet to come,

Julie MacDonald

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie MacDonald". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter of each name being capitalized and prominent.

## Groups at UNITED Church

### **At UNITED Church, people find freedom through UNITED Groups.**

We believe life change happens in the context of relationships. UNITED Groups have one simple purpose: to bring people together. God created us to live in community with others, and it is only then that we can experience the full life He intends for us. UNITED Groups have three main purposes:

#### **A place to CONNECT with others.**

We were not made to do life alone. God created us for community. UNITED Groups provide a place for you to connect with others, share life and grow in faith together.

#### **A place to PROTECT each other.**

When we do life together, our problems become smaller as God uses others to bring support and encouragement to our lives. UNITED Groups become a place where others don't just know your name but care about what is happening in your life. They want to support you in your spiritual journey.

#### **A place to GROW together.**

We believe every person is created with God-given potential to make a difference in the world. UNITED Groups are a place you can grow with others to become more like Jesus and reach the potential God has put inside you.

Four things to know about UNITED Groups:

**Our groups are "free market."** We want people to gather together based on things they enjoy and are important to them. Essentially, the things you are already doing in your life are the things that can make up your UNITED Group! From sports to lunch groups, parenting to student groups, Bible study to creative arts groups, our groups are as varied as we are.

**There are three semesters every year.** Life flows in seasons, and we want to make it easy for you to be in the right UNITED Group for you in each season. This is why we have new groups that start and stop three times a year in what we refer to as "semesters." Our Group semesters are as follows:

Spring Semester - February to May

Summer Semester - July to August

Fall Semester - September to December

**Everyone can join a group.** Our hope is for every person at UNITED Church to be connected in meaningful community through a UNITED Group. With so many groups to choose from, we are confident there is a group that is a great fit for you. You can search groups by topic, location, day and time in our online directory at [UNITEDChurchDE.com/Groups](http://UNITEDChurchDE.com/Groups). Once you find a few groups that interest you, contact the host to learn more and make plans to check them out in person.

**Hosting a group is simple.** We believe we all have something to offer others. Whether it's something you are passionate about, an experience you've had that can help others or an area in which you are looking to grow, hosting a group is a great way to bring people together in meaningful community.

## **Group Host Expectations**

As a Group Host, it is our goal that you recognize and appreciate the weight of being a Host at UNITED Church. We hold our Group Hosts to a high level of accountability and responsibility. We want to come alongside you as a Group Host and help you in your development both as a follower of Christ and as a partner with the church.

### **WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR IN A UNITED GROUP HOST**

- Someone who is a UNITED Church Partner, committed to the vision and mission of UNITED Church.
- Someone who has a mature walk with Jesus and is continuing to grow and cultivate their relationship with Him - not perfect, but in progress.
- Someone whose life and character rightly represents the name and nature of Christ.
- Someone who is sensitive to and dependent on the Holy Spirit in their own life, and sensitive and dependent to Him as they help others.
- Someone who is committed to their own ongoing health and wholeness.
- Someone who is committed to their own ongoing learning, development, and growth. Someone who is humble and teachable.
- Someone who has "a heart" for people who are going through their own pain, trails, struggles, etc.

### **TIME AND ENERGY COMMITMENT**

- Attend Training.
- Attend Showcases at respective Campus.
- Recruit Members for your UNITED Group.
- Plan and facilitate your UNITED Group Meetings.
- Communicate via Church Center Messages, GroupMe or text message to your group regularly.
- Take attendance at your UNITED Group Meetings.
- Individually text group members weekly, biweekly, or as needed to check in. (This is highly encouraged, especially for Group Members who may struggle with consistently

attending. If you are texting someone of the opposite sex, please include one of the following in a group chat to ensure living above reproach: your spouse, his or her spouse, co-host, or trusted group member).

- Attend Halftime Huddle.
- Attend End-of-Semester Check In.
- Regularly pray for and pray with your group members.

## **Preparing For Your UNITED Group**

### **DECIDE THESE THINGS**

- When and where will you meet?
- How will you set up the space?
- Will you provide food each session or for some of the sessions?
- Will you provide other materials such as pens, etc? If a book needs to be purchased, how will you communicate this?
- Will you be providing/arranging childcare for this class?

### **SETTING THE TONE**

Before your first discussion, set some ground rules for the discussion and ask everyone to agree on those ground rules:

#### **Keep it brief. Keep it biblical. Keep it beneficial.**

- We're going to listen and reflect back before offering commentary or advice.
- We're going to be supportive and edifying, building each other up and encouraging each other.
- Everything talked about in this group stays in this group. CONFIDENTIALITY and TRUST!
- We're not going to dominate conversation. We'll practice a good balance of speaking and listening.

**It may be necessary to have one-on-one conversations after the group if you have anyone in your group who does the following:**

- Someone who tries to give everyone advice.
- Someone who is regularly dominating the conversation.
- Someone who is difficult or antagonistic.

**What to do if you have some issues that arise that are above your ability to disciple and shepherd:**

- Talk to your leader! We are here to help!

# Starting, Staying, and Finishing Strong

## CREATING GOOD GROUP DYNAMICS

- **Set expectations.** A key to helping people feel comfortable in your group is to let them know what to expect. Take time to share how the group will flow from week to week. This can include things like explaining the times you will begin and end the group, how discussion or group activities will happen, and how group members can share prayer requests or best engage in the group.
- **Follow the 70-30 rule.** Give the members of your group room to speak up instead of doing all the talking yourself. About 70% of talking should come from members and 30% from the host.
- **Keep discussion positive.** If conversation takes a negative or destructive turn, guide it back to a healthy place. If someone needs to talk about a sensitive or complex issue, you can follow up with them after the group or call your leader to help you respond well. Don't let the discussion go down unnecessary and unhealthy rabbit trails. Some rabbit trails are good (if it's leading to a healing perspective shift). Others are not.
- **Embrace the awkward.** Be ok with awkward silences. Silence does not need to be filled. It means people are wrestling with the question. Don't fill the silence yourself. There are situations where you'll have to stop people and redirect the conversation. Don't be timid about this. You have to set the tone and the culture for the group.
- **Keep the conversation relevant to everyone.** Remember people in your group will be at different places in their spiritual journey. Be thoughtful when you talk about spiritual concepts or church terms that might be unfamiliar to new Christians or new church-goers.
- **Respect boundaries.** Men should minister to men and women should minister to women. A couple may minister to a single person. We want to maintain integrity and purity in our Small Groups. These boundaries will help protect the leaders and group members from entering into an uncomfortable or inappropriate situation.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Prayer is a foundation of our church, and it is important for your UNITED Group.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." - 2 CHRONICLES 7:14

## HOW TO PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP

- Pray for any requests group members share.
- Ask for the presence of the Holy Spirit in your group.
- Pray that God will open people's hearts to hear His truth.
- Pray for authentic community to develop.
- Pray for wisdom and strength to lead your group well.

## CONFIDENCE AS A GROUP HOST

If you only do what you feel comfortable doing, you don't need God. God's best is often found outside your comfort zone. When you serve God and people by hosting a UNITED Group, He will equip you and give you the strength and wisdom to lead well.

"For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." - PHILIPPIANS 4:13

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline." - 2 TIMOTHY 1:7

## FIGHT THE LIES WITH THE TRUTH

**When you feel like you don't have the time, remember God has created you for this, and His timing is perfect.**

- "If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done." - ECCLESIASTES 11:4

**When you feel unqualified, remember God has equipped you. It is not that we think we are qualified to do anything on our own.**

- "Our qualification comes from God. He has enabled us to be ministers of His new covenant." - 2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-6

**When you feel like your past disqualifies you, remember God uses imperfect people.**

- "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God." - 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

**When you feel like you don't know how to help someone in your group, remember ESPN:**

E: Encourage

S: Share Scripture

P: Pray

N: Next Steps

## **WHAT'S NEXT?**

People in your group will be at different places in their spiritual lives and each person will have different next steps to take. Here is a guide of some next steps you can help people take:

- Start attending Sunday Experiences
- Start reading the Bible regularly
- Start praying regularly
- Be water baptized
- Complete Growth Track
- Start tithing
- Start attending First Wednesdays
- Invite a friend or neighbor to church or a UNITED Group
- Attend a UNITED Group Leader Training to become a Group Host

## **Personal Growth**

If you are pouring yourself out without being spiritually fed, you will quickly burn out. Make sure to have consistent quiet time with God and incorporate resting into your weekly rhythms. If you feel like you are being spiritually depleted in hosting a UNITED Group, we encourage you to have a conversation with leadership. Your soul matters to God and we want to make sure you are cared for and are healthy!

## **Managing and Developing Your Group**

### **CHURCH CENTER APP**

- In order to effectively communicate with and account for our Groups, we use an app called Church Center. We build your Group and designate you as the Host. It's then your responsibility to manage your roster, respond to inquiries about your Group, and communicate with your Group members. The Church Center App is easy to use once you get the hang of it so any questions you have, don't hesitate to reach out to leadership and we can help you!

### **TAKING ATTENDANCE**

- We want to make sure we are stewarding people well so it's of vital importance for you to not only take attendance at each session, but monitor your roster of Group Members. If you notice someone hasn't attended in awhile, reach out! You never know the impact of a positive text message or phone call saying, "We miss you!". If there is a Group Member who is no longer responding to messages or attending, don't hesitate to reach out to

leadership on how to handle the situation. Sometimes people join a group without realizing the commitment to attending but other times there may be an issue that we can help you address.

- Every number represents a life that God has changed. We have systems in place to help us see how God is moving in our Groups. We will always celebrate the lives that God has changed at UNITED, and we want you to take part in that.

## **RESPONDING TO NEW MEMBERS**

- Unless otherwise specified, your Group will be visible to people browsing our online Groups search engine on our website. If someone requests information about your Group, an email will be sent directly to you. Please respond to them as soon as you can so that no one falls through the cracks and misses out on finding the right Group!
- If your Group has reached its capacity, reach out to leadership to close your Group so no one else can request to join. However, we advise you to do so only after you have overfilled your Group.
- As your Group continues to meet, you will get used to seeing the familiar faces of your Group members. But you should always be prepared to welcome and incorporate anyone that decides to join your Group during open registration or a new semester.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR GROUP**

- At its core, Church Center is designed to be a communication tool for you to connect with your Group members. You will be able to quickly and easily send messages and create reminders for when you are meeting.
- It's highly encouraged for you to use this feature. If your Group prefers phone calls or text messages, that's fine. Our end goal is to see you regularly communicating with your Group members.
- While you don't have to communicate everyday, it's important to post a message at least once a week. Encouraging conversation among Group Members is also highly recommended as it builds community!

## **CELEBRATE LIFE CHANGE**

- Don't be ashamed to celebrate what God is doing in your Group. No story is ever too small. Praise God and let us celebrate with you for the progress that your Group members are making.
- If you see someone in your Group making progress, focus your investments on them for a season. Take them out to lunch. Invite their family to spend time with yours. By strategically investing in their lives, their small steps of spiritual growth may turn into a lifestyle of audacious faith.

## **FOSTERING ACCOUNTABILITY**



- “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” - James 5:16
- Accountability has always been a key ingredient to a deeper walk with God. When we trust those close to us, we are more likely to share with them our greatest struggles and greatest victories. When we trust others, we are more likely to share the things that drive us closer to God or away from God.
- When you are able to guide your Group to a point of this type of sharing, you are growing your people; you are living out James 5:16.

### **CONSTANTLY REITERATE THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE GROUP**

- Constantly remind your members that this Group is a safe place to share personal feelings and reflections.
- You do not have to make an announcement out of it, but rather just mention it in passing. Your members will pick up on your guidance.

### **SET THE EXAMPLE**

- How comfortable are you sharing your personal thoughts and struggles? Keep in mind that your Group members are going to follow your lead.
- Your growth will foster the growth of the rest of your Group.

### **PEOPLE WILL COME & GO**

- Attrition is inevitable. No matter how strong you are as a Host, people will leave your Group. It’s not always going to be a reflection of your Group. Things happen—work schedules change, children have ball games on Wednesdays, among other things.
- Your responsibility is to remain faithful to the people that God has entrusted to your care. Host your Group with the same passion and energy, whether you have one member or fifteen.

## **Recruiting**

There’s no greater advocate for your UNITED Group than YOU. Upon registering, your UNITED Group will be created and posted in Church Center, an app and a website in which our church family can explore and sign up for UNITED Groups once they go live for the Groups Showcase.

### **HOW TO GET PEOPLE TO JOIN YOUR GROUP**

- Participate in the UNITED Groups Showcases at your respective Campus.
- Come up with a list of people who may benefit from joining! They can be in your sphere of influence, a co-worker, a Partner you serve with on a Sunday morning, or even a friend of a friend! With the way adding Members is set up in the Church Center App, it’s really

easy to send out texts with the link to join! We will review at the Training on how to do that.

- There's so much power in a personal invitation! And they don't have to go to our church to join!
- Post about your group on your social media! Facebook and Instagram are great ways to get the word out there! I've seen people successfully get people to join their group through a post explaining what the group is about, when and where it'll be, and how to sign up!
- Be ready for conversations! And not just at church! Just a casual, "What are you doing this weekend?" is all it takes to open up an opportunity to talk about faith. As you find yourself in conversations with family and friends, don't be afraid to share the vision of your group and how they would benefit from joining!
- Ask God to send the right people to your group!

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **HOW BIG SHOULD MY GROUP BE?**

The average Group size is 8-12 people, but every Group is different. If you lead a married couple's Group and have the space to hold 15 couples, great. But if you lead a single women's Group in your studio apartment, you may only be able to hold six people. Your Group should be the maximum number of people that you can effectively lead.

### **WHERE SHOULD MY GROUP MEET?**

Again, this is entirely dependent on what you want to accomplish with your Group. What environment will set your Group up for success? If that is at Chick-fil-A, Starbucks, or in your living room, you will need to take the necessary steps to secure the appropriate seating and create the atmosphere your Group will need. Other options include: Zoom, local coffee shops or restaurants, or parks.

### **HOW LONG SHOULD MY GROUP MEET?**

Again, there is no set formula for what every Group meeting should look like. Your own capacity to Host will dictate how long your Group meets. We consider one hour to an hour and a half to be the sweet spot! You're encouraged to host for the full Fall or Spring Semester. Some Groups end earlier, some continue after the semester is completed.

### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY GROUP MEET?**

Once a week, once a month, twice a month. Sessions should be consistent and communicated ahead of time. Scheduling events in your UNITED Group in the Church Center App will help provide clarity and set reminders to Group members. Frequency of sessions should be decided by your capacity to host.

### **WHAT IF I CAN'T ANSWER A QUESTION IN MY GROUP?**

As a Host, we expect you to represent UNITED at a very high level, but we don't expect you to know everything. In those instances, work with your Group members towards finding an answer. But if an answer doesn't come to mind, we expect you to at least respond with, "That's a great question. I'm actually not sure why that is, but I can ask a staff member and find out for you."

### **WHAT TYPE OF GROUP CAN I HOST?**

Currently, Groups are categorized by: Mens, Womens, Young Adults, Students, Personal Development, Marriage, and Freedom.

### **WHAT SHOULD MY GROUP STUDY/DO?**

Groups can do sermon series studies, bible studies, book studies, video studies, or they can meet for common interest activities such as: sports, crafting, puzzling, cooking, game night, movie night. UNITED will also provide resources to Group Hosts for hosting their group.

### **WHAT ARE MY GROUP EXPECTATIONS/REQUIREMENTS?**

In addition to your study/activity we expect Group Hosts to Pray with and for Group members as well as abide by the expectations set forth in the "Group Host Expectations" section. Clarity is kind so if there any questions or concerns about what is expected from a UNITED Group Host, don't hesitate to reach out to our leadership team.

### **CAN I HAVE A CO-HOST?**

Yes! We encourage Groups to have a Co-Host to share responsibilities. We highly encourage developing Co-Hosts for continuing Groups.

### **HOW DO I FILL MY GROUP?**

You are the primary recruiter for your Group. Invite the people on your team. Invite the people that you sit next to during the worship experience. There will still be people that find your Group online, but your personal connections will fill most of your Group. Also, believe it or not, people will leave your Group. Account for this by always aiming to overfill your Group.

### **CAN I INVITE MY FRIENDS THAT DON'T ATTEND UNITED TO JOIN MY GROUP?**

Absolutely! UNITED Church exists to Love Delaware. Use your Group as a vehicle to reach the people closest to you and get them involved with what God is doing at UNITED.

### **DOES UNITED PROVIDE RESOURCES?**

Yes. We have RightNowMedia and recommended books for specific studies. Your biggest resource will be your leader who can help you develop a plan for your group. To access

RightNowMedia, go to <https://www.unitedchurchde.com/resources> to select RightNowMedia and set up your free account.

### **SHOULD I OFFER CHILDCARE?**

This is entirely dependent on the people you are looking to fill your Group. But if you offer childcare, your Group will fill. Lack of childcare is one of the most commonly recurring reasons people fail to connect with a Group.

### **HOW SHOULD WE DO CHILDCARE?**

There are several ways to offer childcare, so work with your Group to do what works the best for you. Some Group Hosts provide and pay for a sitter each week. Other Groups have their Group members each contribute a few dollars towards hiring a sitter.

### **CAN I INVITE MY FRIENDS THAT DON'T ATTEND UNITED TO JOIN MY GROUP?**

Absolutely. UNITED Church exists to Love Delaware. So use your Group as a vehicle to reach the people closest to you and get them involved with what God is doing at UNITED.

### **CAN I BE REIMBURSED FOR THE BOOKS THAT MY GROUP BUYS FOR OUR BOOK STUDIES?**

We are only able to reimburse you for a leader guide. If you find a study you want to do with your Group, purchase the leader guide, send us the receipt, and we will reimburse you. Your Group members are responsible for buying their own materials. However, if a \$15 book is truly a burden for one of your Group members, contact us and we'll make special arrangements for them.

## **Group Host Agreement**

Thank you for serving as a Group Host at UNITED Church. Through this role, there is a higher standard to be held. As a result, we ask that you enter into agreement with the other Group Hosts by making the following commitments:

I will embody and reflect the core values and vision of UNITED Church and will support the leadership.

I will support the vision of UNITED Church and ensure that my Group reflects that vision in all areas.

I will set the standard for my Group members in areas such as character, audacity, honor, generosity and unity, while understanding my interpersonal interactions and social media presence has a tremendous bearing on how others view my role as a Group Host.

I realize that I am a reflection of Jesus Christ as well as UNITED Church and, therefore, I will act accordingly.

I will faithfully attend UNITED on Sundays.

I will make my Group a priority by faithfully attending my Group and spending time preparing for my UNITED Group beforehand each week.

I understand that I am responsible for the care of my Group but can always reach out to leadership for assistance as needed.

I will strive to create an environment of growth in my group by involving as many people as possible in group discussion, creating a safe, comfortable and welcoming environment, and beginning and ending on time.

I commit to pursuing a growing relationship with Jesus while serving my UNITED Church team well.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print