



Connect Groups

What, Why & How

Welcome to the Connect Group Leadership Team of The Grainery Church

You've agreed to a very exciting ministry of our church and you will discover that you will grow immensely in your relationship with God as you lead others to do the same.

To effectively lead a connect group, you will need to understand and embrace the vision of the church. Each connect group works towards the vision enabling the whole church to work towards the vision.

THE VISION OF THE GRAINERY CHURCH

Bringing Heaven to Earth

“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Matthew 6:10

The mission statement of the Grainery Church is to partner with God and build the Kingdom of God in three ways:

1. In us personally [WITHIN]
2. In us as a community [AMONG]
3. In the world [BEYOND]

What is The Church?

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

1 Peter 2:9

We often talk about the church as if it were a building, a worship service on a Sunday, or an organisation that we join. The church is “people”. Our purpose is to live in fellowship with God and each other, making Jesus known in the world, making disciples for Him and bringing blessing and hope to the world.

Scripture gives many images of the Church to help us understand the nature and character of this group of people:

The People of God	The Family of God
The Body of Christ	The Flock of God
The Bride of Christ	The Vineyard of God
The Building of God	The instrument of Kingdom of God

Question: What stands out to you most as you read these descriptions?

Relationship and community are part of God's DNA. He Himself is a community of 3 - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Grainery Church believes in the importance of relational Community. Our Connect Groups express this and disciple one another to live abundantly in all relationships - with God, with others and with ourselves.

What does a healthy church aim to achieve?

1. To glorify and worship God

Worship means attributing worth to the one who is worthy. Only God can be the focus of true worship.

- The church exists for the sake of the glory of God (Psalm 19:1).
- The church brings God sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15, 1 Peter 2:5 Ps 147:1)
- We are examples of God's grace (Ephesians 2:6-7).
- We are to worship the Father in spirit and in truth – John 4:23.
- We worship God with our whole being, our whole life: an offering of all we have and who we are in gratitude for all He has done in Christ.

2. To model God through community

Our common allegiance to Jesus forms a bond between us that is greater than all other human bonds. We are all co-heirs with Christ. (Rom 8:17)

- God never intended the Christian life to be lived in isolation.
- Do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.... (Heb 10:25)
- True community requires those in it to relate to each other with sacrificial love
- This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends (John 15:13 [MSG])

3. To co-operate with God's work on earth

- The Holy Spirit empowers every believer with gifts. As part of one body, each member has a specific, God ordained purpose in relation to everyone else.
- The gifts are distributed freely by the Holy Spirit, glorify God and are for the benefit of all.
- We are responsible for identifying our gift and for exercising it for the benefit of the church, and as evidence of the power of God at work.

4. To make disciples

- But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth – Acts 1:8
- Both how we live and what we say should bring the light, flavour and fragrance of God to our world.
- Discipleship moves both believers and seekers closer on a journey to Jesus.
- A true community of faith will set its sight outwards – beyond themselves, longing to see the whole human family reconciled to God, one another and creation. We are tasked by Jesus to go into the world and make disciples.

5. Proclaim and obey the Word of God

- God's main tool for transforming his people is his Word. (Romans 12:2)
- Preaching
Preaching, by God's grace and inspired by the Holy Spirit, can be a vehicle for an authentic encounter with God's living and active word. (Hebrews 4:12)
- Study of Scripture
The whole Bible is God's living word to us.
- We each need to spend time in the Word daily and expect God to speak to us through it.
- Meeting in groups to study the Bible has been a key factor in the church's growth from the first days after Jesus' resurrection.

6. Observe the Sacraments

- A sacrament is an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible grace. It provides a reminder of God's grace given us in Christ.
- Jesus commanded we observe baptism and communion because they are beneficial to us.
- By participating in them, we declare and affirm we have received God's grace (through Baptism) and reaffirm (through Communion) our commitment to God.
- The Lord's Supper
Communion is an act that we are to practice repeatedly. It reminds us and reaffirms what is declared in baptism.
- Communion celebrates God's salvation in Christ.
We re-enact the Last Supper and follow Jesus' command to "do this in remembrance of me". We remember his sacrificial death, on our behalf, received through repentance. Communion rekindles our devotion to the Lord.

7. Pray

- Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)
- Look to the Lord and his strength: seek his face always (1 Chronicles 16:11)
- Pray in the Spirit on all occasions...(Ephesians 6:18)
- Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. (James 5:13)
- Jesus instructed his disciples to be prayerful and taught them how to do it (Luke 11). God alone is our source of strength.
- Prayer must be rooted in worship and thanksgiving to God.
- Corporate prayer in accordance with God's will, is particularly powerful (Matthew 18:19).

8. Suffer with hope

- Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12).
- God works in and through the struggles and sufferings of his people, for their good and for His glory.

9. Edify each other

- Jesus mandated we follow his example of mutual edification when he washed the feet of the Twelve in the Upper Room (John 13:12-17).
- We are called to build each other up, so that we might all become spiritually mature. We are to encourage and pull-up others in love. We are to share each others' burdens and nurture those new or weak in their faith (Ephesians 4:11-13, Heb 10:24-25, Rom 14:1,19, Gal 6:1-2).

What is the purpose of connect groups?

At The Grainery Church, Connect Groups are the primary way we disciple people into a transforming relationship with Jesus. In a large and growing church, Connect Groups provide a smaller environment for people to find and experience loving community.

Connect groups help us to live intentionally, live in community and accountability, identify and cultivate our unique gifts, care and be cared for and grow as disciples.

The connect leader becomes the ‘shepherd’ of this small group on their discipleship journey.

“Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.”

Jeremiah 3:15

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

1 Peter 5:2-3

The Connect Leader must:

- Be in a transformational relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Be submitted to the Bible as an authority for their life
- Be committed to personal spiritual growth
- Be committed to the mission, vision and values of The Grainery Church
- Be willing to be mentored, trained and attend connect leader gatherings

Features of a thriving connect group

They spent their time learning from the apostles, and they were like family to each other. They also broke bread and prayed together. Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked. All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. They would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47 (CEV)

Three healthy facts of the connect group

1. The connect group is a care group

- Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds. (Proverbs 27:23)
- The leader seeks to develop positive relationships with people in the group and encourage others to do the same.
- Encourage sensitivity and kindness.
- Encourage an awareness of what is happening in one another's lives.
- Encourage members to help, visit and pray for one another during times of need.

2. The connect group is a disciple-making group

- Welcome people who are potential disciples and develop quality relationships with them.
- Motivate people to see their God-given potential.
- Be an example of a fervent disciple being honest about your own struggles and victories.
- Give people a passionate vision for the church of Jesus Christ and an understanding of how they can contribute to it.

- Help them through encouragement, affirmation, counsel and challenge.
- Training - help people read and apply the Word of God to their lives.
- Mobilize - Challenge people to act on what they have learned and share this with others.

3. The connect group is a ministry group

A connect group leader helps members become ministers in three areas:

1. Within the group

- Pray with and for each other. Seek God on behalf of each other.
- Encourage and lead by example with honest, transparent sharing and discussion. There is no condemnation for those in Christ.

2. Among the church community

- Help members recognise their gifts and where to use their gifts in service of the wider church.

3. Beyond the church

- Encourage each person to contribute to their 'sphere of influence', in a way that brings the 'fragrance of Christ' to the world.
- Encourage members to invite new people and non-believers into community.

Elements of a great meeting

- Shared ownership in the group helps people view the group as positive and transformational.
- Encourage everyone to participate and contribute by delegating tasks involved in the administration and running of the group.
- Everyone should be encouraged to share, and this should occur in a judgement free atmosphere.
- Study of the Word, prayer and ministry should be a mainstay each time the group meets.

Expectations of Connect Leaders

1. Responsible for facilitating meaningful, biblical discussion, encourage, lead and pray with your groups.
2. Follow-up those who are missing.
3. Encourage the group to support each other when in need, and refer members to the pastoral care team in times of greater difficulty/need (prayer ministry/counselling etc).
4. Fill in the online attendance after each meeting.
5. Communicate regularly with your Connect Support Person.
6. Collect and hand in cash collected in Love Change Mission jars.
7. Be actively involved and assist your group to be actively involved in the wider church.

Facilitating discussions

The following facilitation skills serve to improve understanding among group members, build open communication channels, and encourage the development of trust and vulnerability so that all members are willing to participate.

1. Involve All Members

- Involving all members is essential for building group cohesiveness, developing a sense of mutual support and encouraging leadership in others.
- Invite participation, but do not demand it. Allowing everyone to be in control of their own story creates safety as people can choose how to tell their story or how much of their story to tell.
- Skilfully limit or block a group member's excessive communication by encouraging another member to speak, or link one group member's communication to those of another.

2. Ask Good Questions

- Ask questions about thoughts and feelings vs. facts, to help members effectively engage with each other.
- Help members express their thoughts and feelings about important problems, tasks, or issues - reiterate and summarise them when necessary.

3. Active Listening

- Non-verbal behaviours - eye contact, body position and facial expression can help convey empathy, respect, warmth, trust, genuineness, and honesty.
- Don't interrupt when someone is sharing.

4. Focusing, Clarifying and Reframing

- Ask a member to clarify or elaborate, repeat a particular communication or suggest that members limit their discussion to a particular topic. This will help you more effectively focus the discussion.
- Check with other members that they understand what someone is saying.
- Reframe someone's statement to help group members examine something from a new perspective.

5. Rely on the Holy Spirit

- Start the meeting with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to interact with each of you during your meeting, and invite Him to work as He chooses.
- As people in your group share, silently pray that they might be guided toward whatever God wants them to notice.
- Offering your focused attention and a silent prayer for God to meet a person in an emotional or difficult moment can be incredibly helpful.

6. Lead with wisdom and grace

- Only give advice, suggestions and instructions when people give you permission.
- Attempts to correct a person or a situation in public can push someone into hiding and leave them feeling less capable of handling life than the others in the group. Some things are best handled one-on-one.
- When a person feels sadness, pain or frustration, don't negate a person's feelings. Find the right time to encourage them with prayer and hope from the Word.

7. Value the time commitment

- Avoid canceling if numbers are low. Often God wants to do something special when the group is small.

Your group exists to grow and multiply

Your goal as a leader should be multiplication not maintenance. The group should never think of itself as a closed unit.

1. Look out for new people at a Sunday celebration. Invite them to your group.
2. Ask each member of your group to think of someone who isn't in a group, and invite them along.
3. Pray for unsaved friends and relatives.
4. Have a discussion on how you could reach people who don't know the Lord.
5. Plan a social activity and invite others.
6. Cultivate an "empty chair" atmosphere, where you are always thinking about who will next join your group.

Expanding the Ministry - Identify an apprentice leader

As the Lord grows the group, it will become necessary to plant a new group.

To do this, connect leaders should:

1. Identify potential apprentice leaders and discuss this with your Connect Support Person.
2. Invite the potential leader to pray and seek God's leading.
3. Develop your apprentice by providing leadership opportunities within the group.

A connect leader is part of the key leadership team of the Grainery Church. To become a connect leader, you will need to become a member of the church, agree to the leadership code of conduct and complete the Safe Church training.

