

INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of ARC, we have sought to have small groups play a role in our effort to evangelize the community and make disciples who follow Jesus. The following white paper is written to answer some basic questions about small group ministry at ARC.

Specifically, this paper is designed to answer:

1. What types of small groups do we have and what are their purposes?
2. Who can lead small groups at ARC?

Types and Purposes of Small Groups

ARC's small group strategy began as a way to put into practice the evangelism and discipleship model outlined in the book, *The Trellis and the Vine*. That book envisions the following four-step process for seeing a person go from not believing in Christ to serving on mission for Christ:

- Outreach
- Follow-Up
- Growth
- Training

ARC has small groups for each stage of this process.

Outreach involves building relationships with people who are not yet Christians and sharing the gospel with them. ARC "block groups" are the small groups we use for outreach. *The purpose of block groups is to (a) provide settings where we get to know our neighbors and (b) complete evangelistic Bible studies and discussions with the hope of seeing our neighbors converted to faith in Christ.* So, block groups are all about neighboring and evangelizing. They are *not primarily* about the ongoing discipleship of Christians.

Examples of block groups include the Ridge Place Block group and the group led by Jayme, Jaleshea and Thierry.

Follow-up. What do you do with someone who confesses their sin and puts their faith in Christ for salvation? That's what the **follow-up** stage and our follow-up groups are for. Follow-up involves helping new and young Christians get off to a good start in the faith. *The purpose of ARC follow-up groups is to cover the basics of Christian belief, spiritual disciplines, and church life.* Follow-up groups tend to be shorter-term group experiences of 6-12 weeks or so.

An example of a follow-up group would be Hanna Baker’s new member group to read *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* over a 12-week period.

Growth. Every living thing grows. So, spiritual growth ought to be a regular feature of the Christian life. *Growth groups focus on the ongoing spiritual growth, discipleship and covenant-keeping of its members.* Unlike follow-up groups, growth groups tend to last for a couple of years or more. Growth groups also tend to study and discuss a wider range of topics. So, we have growth groups for young married couples, for prayer, for financial stewardship, and for overall discipleship.

Examples of growth groups include the Severn-area Small group, the young married couples group once led by the Zamchiyas, and the young men’s group led by Pastor T.

Training. As Christian disciples progress from being new believers to growing in the faith, they should be moving toward more active disciple-making and ministry in the local church. From time-to-time, preparing for more active ministry will require some form of training. The purpose of training groups is to equip Christians for increased leadership and service responsibility.

Examples of training groups include the Titus 2 older women’s group and the Timothy Group for training potential pastors and deacons.

If our small group strategy works as we hope it will, then we will have a “pipeline” for taking people from unbelief to faith, from faith to growth, and from growth to mission.

Who Can Attend the Different Groups?

Since the groups have different goals, it makes sense that the membership of the groups will vary. The table below gives a snapshot of the intended audience for each group.

Group	Audience
Block Groups	Neighbors who are not yet Christians
Follow Up	New and young Christians
Growth	Members of ARC
Training	Members of ARC

Our goal is to have enough small groups for every member of ARC to attend a group if they choose. Attendance at ARC small groups is voluntary. While some churches automatically assign members to a group and require participation as part of their shepherding strategy, we do not

believe the Bible teaches or requires that. So, while we enthusiastically encourage small group fellowship and participation, we cannot and do not require it.

Who Can Lead Small Groups at ARC?

A Christian is a disciple who makes other disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). So, in some way, all Christians have responsibility for helping other Christians to grow and helping people who are not yet Christians to understand and hopefully believe the gospel.

General Qualifications to Lead Small Groups

So, in the most general sense, every member of ARC is eligible and encouraged to consider leading a small group.

However, there are some things people should consider before leading a group. The pastors will help determine the answer to these questions (not an exhaustive list):

1. Am I leading a healthy Christian life?
 - a. Do I attend church services regularly?
 - b. Am I regularly reading the Bible and praying in faith and joy?
 - c. Is my life free of any known and habitual sins?
2. Do I have teaching abilities? Do others recognize those abilities?
3. Do I have a good understanding of the Bible and Christian theology?
4. Can I care well for people by answering their questions, managing group dynamics, helping them focus spiritually, and encouraging their growth?

Women and the Official Gatherings of the Church

From time-to-time, the pastors are asked what we think about women teaching in general and teaching small groups in particular. Usually the question presumes teaching to a group of both men and women, since everyone agrees that women should teach other women (Titus 2:3-6).

The question is raised in large part because 1 Timothy 2:11-12 forbids women to teach or exercise authority over men:

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

The Bible's teaching in 1 Timothy 2 specifically applies to the *regular gathered meetings of the entire church*. It applies to what we might call "church services" today. So, the instruction in 1 Tim. 2:11-12 does *not* forbid a woman to speak in *any* way and in *every* context where men are present. It limits the pastoral office and the authoritative teaching of God's word *in the gathered assembly* to qualified men.

From the beginning, ARC defined its official gathered meetings as the Sunday morning services and Thursday night Bible study. Eventually, we added Sunday school to the church's calendar of official services.

In Sunday school, Sunday morning services, and Thursday night Bible study, we intend to have qualified and capable men (including those who may be in training or discerning a teaching gift) teach God's word to the church family.

The Church Gathered and the Church Scattered

How does the Bible's teaching apply to women leading small groups?

The Bible's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 does *not* forbid women to teach in *any* and *every* setting that includes men. The text does not address, for example, more informal discussions that take place in members' homes. Consider that both Priscilla and Aquilla taught Apollos in a more private setting in Acts 18:26.

We do *not* regard small groups as official gatherings of the *entire* church family. Nor do we regard them as house churches. Small groups are not "mini-churches." Consequently, we do not believe the apostle Paul had small groups in mind when he penned the words of 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

In addition, there's clear evidence in Paul's letters that he regarded women as fellow workers in spreading the gospel. For example, Philippians 4:3 refers to Euodia and Syntyche as women "who have labored *side by side with me in the gospel* together with Clement and the rest of my *fellow workers*, whose names are in the book of life." Paul stresses their equality ("side by side with me") in church-planting missions and makes it clear they worked "in the gospel" with him. This means they were sharing and spreading the gospel as evangelists. They were "fellow workers" with the apostle, which seems to be one of Paul's favorite titles for men *and women* who help him spread the gospel. He uses that title of Prisca (Priscilla) and Aquilla in Romans 16:3 and a range of other gospel partners in 1 Cor. 3:9; Col. 4:11; and Philemon 24.

Based on this, it seems the apostles made a distinction between church *scattered* outreach, evangelistic, gospel-spreading activities and church *gathered* authority-centered leadership and teaching activities. In *church scattered* activities, women participated as full team members with the apostle. In *church gathered* activities, the early church reserved the office of pastor and the regular teaching of God's word to some qualified men.

Small groups at ARC are church *scattered* activities.

Women and Small Group Leadership

We are happy and would encourage women to lead **block groups** if they desired. Block groups are *not* an extension of the *teaching* ministry of the church but of the *reaching* ministry (evangelism) of the church. Responsibility for evangelism falls to *all* Christians—men and women alike (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). While we think it is generally prudent for a sister leading a block group to have male fellow workers in the group for safety and for any gender-specific issues that may arise, we believe sisters can, should, and must be evangelists. Leading a block group—whether limited to women or co-ed—is one way of doing that.

We are also thrilled to see women lead **follow-up groups**. These groups are often transitional groups between outreach (block groups) to longer-term growth groups. Being short-term and episodic in nature, follow-up groups do not represent any “authority over” new and young Christians (1 Tim. 2:11-12).

Going forward, we encourage women to lead **growth groups** as well. We already benefit from the ministry women have to other women. Praise God. But we want to grow the usefulness of our sisters by beginning to have teams teach our co-ed community and growth groups. We envision pairing a brother with a sister as fellow workers who co-lead some of our growth groups. This will allow more gender-based discipleship (Titus 2:1-6) beyond the actual group setting and help prevent unwise cross-gender mentorship. Alongside these co-ed groups, we hope to maintain a sufficient number of men’s and women’s groups. This will allow small group fellowship for anyone whose conscience may be disturbed by women or men teaching in co-ed settings.

Leadership of **training groups** depends largely on the area of training covered. In principle, we hope to have people with expertise in an area provide training to participants. For example, Jhonna Turner, our children’s ministry director, has responsibility for providing childcare training to volunteers. Were we to have a class in learning Hebrew, sister Stacey Swanson might lead such a group given her advanced degrees in Hebrew. In training groups, we want to leverage the best knowledge, skills and abilities for the training topic at hand.

The table below lists the groups, audiences, and leaders by gender.

Group	Audience	Leaders
Block Groups	Neighbors who are not yet Christians	Men and Women
Follow Up	New and young Christians	Men and Women

Growth	Members of ARC	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men’s Groups 	Men
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s Groups 	Women
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ed Groups 	Men and Women
Training	Members of ARC	By expertise

Conclusion

This short paper is *not* designed to answer all the questions one might have about the Bible’s teaching on the roles of men and women in the family and the church. We have sought to answer two specific questions:

1. What types of small groups do we have and what are their purposes?
2. Who can lead small groups at ARC?

While other churches may reach other applications, ARC small groups meet outside the official gatherings of the church and have a range of purposes from outreach to training. Since all Christians have responsibilities for outreach (evangelism, etc.) and both men and women participated in outreach in the NT, leadership of “block groups” and follow up groups is open to men and women, often in co-ed teams. In men-only groups men lead and in women-only groups women lead. In co-ed growth groups—for example, marriage groups and community groups—we want to have male and female co-leaders. And in training groups, we hope to have the best qualified teachers for a given topic lead the training.

Our hope is that this approach (a) gets more of the church family fully involved in the ministry of the church and (b) leads to the fuller flourishing of each member, especially women with gifts and interest to evangelize and teach in appropriate settings.