



January 2026

Welcome to the Life Group – New Leader Orientation

Whether in Manila for a season or a lifetime, people are warmly invited to join UCM's journey of growing together as we follow Jesus Christ. For those who consider saying "yes" to the invitation, Small Groups (see Appendix B) are the primary vehicle for the journey (Acts 2:42).

At UCM, Small Groups are geared toward a threefold purpose: belonging, building up, and bearing fruit, fostering Christ-centered community within the larger church. Through SGs, people at all stages of their spiritual journey are learning to live and love just as Christ did. These groups cultivate deep relationships that allow individuals to let their guard down, dialogue, share their struggles and victories, and pray with and for one another. Transformation happens because trust and camaraderie flourish, which flows into ministry outwardly.

UCM SGs include 1) Life Groups and 2) Catalytic Groups. An LG may be guided by varied emphases for an indefinite time, while a CG is guided by a CG-planting emphasis within a specified time.

Essential to both groups is the leader, who shepherds, prays for, and encourages the Group members. An SG leader is someone willing to be a servant leader, intentionally coming alongside a small, specific Group of individuals and watching how God works in and among the Group members.

The Leader is not a "perfect" person, nor do they need to be. God may work more through our weaknesses and imperfections than through our strengths.

Being an SG Leader is rewarding and challenging, which is why this orientation exists—to explore together the responsibilities of an SG Leader and see if this is the direction God is leading. This packet contains information intended to inform and encourage you.

Life Group Leader

Goal:

To faithfully shepherd and encourage LG members to grow in maturity in Christ.

Character Qualifications:

1. A member of UCM committed to UCM's mission, values, and policies.
2. Lives according to Scriptural leadership qualities - **1 Timothy 3; Titus 1**
3. **Faithful** - to Jesus Christ and his commission
4. **Available** - to give time to one's LG members
5. **Submissive** - to the SG ministry leadership
6. **Teachable** - to receive input and feedback. Exhibits skills in listening, observation, and discernment

Guidelines:

1. Accepts the authority of the UCM leadership
2. Completes both the LG New Leader Orientation and the LG Leadership Application
3. Upon approval, commits to serve for at least one year with no maximum time limit

Responsibilities:

1. **Shepherd** UCM members, attendees, and contacts. Support other local churches by referring contacts to them who are far from the UCM campus and outreaches; refrain from "shepherding another church's sheep."
2. **Encourage** and challenge your LG Members as appropriate:
 - a. *Praying* regularly for and with your LG.
 - b. *Preparing* and being ready for each LG gathering;
 - c. *Overseeing* the facilitation of the LG regular gathering and doing the following:
 - i. Lead the group in selecting an appropriate gathering consistent with the group's three-fold purpose.
 - ii. Maintain regular contact with Group members and serve as a channel of communication, motivation, and concern between individual Group members and the whole group, being aware of what God may be doing in the members' lives and the LG.
 - iii. Follow up with each gathering to let any absent Group members know you missed them. When appropriate, assist in finding a way to alleviate the reason for the absence.
 - d. *Modeling* acceptance, understanding, and sharing among Group members; prayerfully encourage potential leaders to co-facilitate LG gatherings and, when ready, encourage them toward possibly beginning an SG (by inquiring of the Discipleship Committee).
3. **Communicate** joys and concerns and remain accountable to the SG ministry's leadership. Update the Discipleship Admin Coordinator on any changes or new

information (e.g., changes to meeting time or location); advise the Coordinator on the proposed new theme or study focus before commencement. Seek support from the SG's ministry leadership when confronted with difficulties.

Support:

1. All leaders are encouraged to participate in L.E.A.D. huddles, events, and other equipping opportunities that interest them in and around UCM. Various opportunities for SG leader development will be available throughout the year. Topics may include skill areas as follows:
 - a. SG Life Cycle
 - b. Prayer Training
 - c. Facilitating Group Discussion
 - d. Handling Group Dynamics
 - e. Listening Skills
 - f. Personal Evangelism Workshop
 - g. Catalytic Discipleship Lessons
2. Discipleship Administrative Coordinator: discipleship.ac@unionchurch.ph

LG Guidelines

Commitment:

1. Establish shared agreements, in writing or verbally:
 - a. Type of Group - all men, all women, mixed, couples, etc.
 - b. Gathering Schedule - day, frequency, start and end times, location, platform if hybrid
 - c. Theme, materials, and facilitation
 - i. standard weekly discussion guide that follows the Sunday Scripture focus - provided by email each week from the UCM pastoral team; the leader may forward the discussion guide to the group ahead of the Sunday
 - ii. Groups may elect to "do something different," selecting another theme or resource for its content focus (see page 6 under "Curriculum Resources")
 - iii. Groups may coordinate benevolence service projects and other related participation through UCM's Missions & Benevolence Ministry
 - d. Values to Uphold
 - i. UCM's five core values (United in Christ, Centered on the Gospel, Rooted in Scripture, Called to Renewal, Mobilized for Mission)
 - ii. confidentiality, openness, honesty, affirmation, availability, prayerfulness, sensitivity, accountability
 - iii. "no-politics" unless the discussion is planned and facilitated appropriately - sharing national partisan opinions spontaneously in an international context usually won't lead to a constructive discussion
 - e. Members

- i. roles of members (host, facilitator, etc.)
- ii. guests and new members – protocols for new members and guests - see page 2 under “Responsibilities” and “Shepherd”
- iii. protocols for potential leaders or co-facilitators - see page 3 under “Modeling”
- iv. size of the group: usually consists of between three and up to 10 people. Once a Group reaches 10 people, it should earnestly pray about allowing/encouraging some members to venture out to start a new Group.
- f. Etiquette
 - i. cell phone expectations: e.g., off or silent mode
 - ii. discussion/prayer expectations, if any
 - iii. meal expectations, if any

***See Appendix A for a standard Life Group Agreement**

Management:

1. Comply with copyright laws of resources as a testimony of integrity, honoring the Lord.
2. Supervise self-funding / support for program needs.
 - a. SG groups should shoulder the expenses incurred for activities or events they will organize outside of UCM SG ministry activities. Costs include transportation, driver hiring, food, venue rental, etc.
3. Enforce “*No Solicitation for funds or other support*” by request of Group members for themselves or on behalf of others.
4. Seek prayer, counsel, and support from UCM care ministries: 8812 6062 (ext 242); carecoordinator@unionchurch.ph

Getting Started:

1. Initial members:
 - a. Be in prayer for whom the Lord will bring to establish your Group.
 - b. Personally invite UCMers in your area.
 - c. The Discipleship Admin Coordinator will provide you with the names and contact details of persons who may be a good fit for your Group from connection requests.
 - d. Reach out to these people within 48 hours.
 - e. The Discipleship Admin Coordinator can also share your contact details with interested parties.
2. First meeting suggestions:
 - a. Before the gathering:
 - i. Pray.
 - ii. Send personal reminders of the first meeting’s time and location.
 - iii. Send a reminder text on the day of the first gathering.
 - iv. Have name tags unless everyone knows everyone.
 - v. Prepare the agenda/activity and plan the gathering.
3. During the gathering:

- a. Begin or end with food.
 - b. Have fun, laugh, and enjoy one another.
 - c. Start or open the group time with an “ice-breaker” question or a “get-to-know-you” activity.
 - d. Lead a short devotional / study.
 - e. Discuss “guidelines” and “group commitments” together.
 - f. Note Group agreements and commitments.
 - g. Close with prayer time.
4. After the gathering:
- a. Pray and thank God for what happened.
 - b. Write Group agreements and commitments to share at the next gathering. (These can be shared with incoming new members and referred to when needed.)

Strategies for Common LG Dynamics:

1. Non-Participation:
 - a. Sit where you have eye contact with those not participating.
 - b. Invite them to respond to straightforward questions, particularly if they have a prepared answer or if the question relates to personal insight.
 - c. Observe body language when they indicate having a response.
 - d. Give genuine positive feedback when they contribute – smile, nod, thank, and emphasize a meaningful point.
 - e. Have the group write a response and then share; invite the quieter ones to share first.
 - f. Have a Group share / discuss a question with a partner.
2. Over-Participation:
 - a. Remind the group of the goal: for everyone to have an opportunity to participate and to hear the Lord through each of us as we share insights.
 - b. Sit beside the person so there is no easy, direct eye contact.
 - c. Specifically direct questions - e.g., *Can we hear from someone who hasn't shared today? What do you think, Sally or Jun?*
 - d. Acknowledge contributions when they pause and redirect to someone else.
 - e. Speak privately with the person, and invite them to help you draw out others.
3. Distracting Participation:
 - a. Ignore the misdirect – keep the endpoint in mind.
 - b. Refocus on the topic and ask a new question.
 - c. Acknowledge the point and propose an alternate time to dialogue – over food, during another Group time, or in person.
 - d. Discern if it is worthwhile to pursue an essential element that's out of the prescribed box.
 - e. Privately discuss if the problem is a recurring behavior affecting the group.

Curriculum Resources:

UCM's Library and Discipleship ministries have partnered to provide a range of easily accessible resources to help you as a Life Group Leader.

1. Digital library:

- a. All active SG Leaders may utilize [RightNow Media](#) (RNM), the digital, customizable video Bible study library for every person of UCM. RNM harnesses the power of technology to help equip and disciple the body of Christ with inspiring, biblical media. Like the Netflix of Christian Bible study, RNM gives UCMers access to over 15,000 Bible studies. RNM has resources for SGs, families, students, Christian leaders, and more. *To request RNM access, please email the Discipleship Administrative Coordinator (DAC).*

2. Physical library:

- a. All active SG Leaders may borrow materials from the UCM Library, particularly from the SG resource section. Borrowers are subject to the Library's policies and conditions. Once a Leader begins leading a Group, before borrowing from the library, s/he is expected to contact the DAC to register for a personal annual library membership; the SG ministry pays the annual fee. The DAC may also answer any questions about your official SG Leadership status.
- b. Highlighted expanded borrowing benefits for SG Leaders:
 - i. **Extended borrowing time:** Books may be borrowed for one month instead of the regular two weeks. They may also be renewed for another month without bringing them to the library. To renew materials or inquire about the library, please contact Ms. Rhon Bautista, Head Librarian, at 8812 6062, extension 219, or library@unionchurch.com.
 - ii. **Multiple copies:** Multiple copies may be borrowed beyond the regular limit of five (5) books at a time. However, there will be a limit of only five (5) different book titles at a time, regardless of the number of copies.
 - iii. **Reserve section:** These expanded privileges apply only to the books in the Reserve Section for SGs, as they have been budgeted and selected intentionally for use in SG activities. Regular rules apply to books in general circulation, even when the borrowers are Leaders.
- c. Highlighted guidelines:
 - i. **Authorization:** Other Group members cannot borrow materials for you or themselves without a signed authorization letter from you. Please help clarify this for your group if they have questions.
 - ii. **Fines/Lost Book:** All fines and penalties are subject to the library's regular policies (i.e., P2.00 per day per book).
 - iii. **First-time users:** please schedule a 15-minute in-person orientation with Rhon. You must complete minor paperwork to access your library card (a photo is helpful) and register with the online Destiny account.

Appendix A

Life Group Agreement

Leader:	Type of Life Group:
Gathering Schedule (<i>Day, Start & End Times, Location, Platform if hybrid</i>):	
Facilitation:	
Values to Uphold:	
Members:	
Etiquette:	
Benevolent Service Project:	
Evaluation (<i>Date</i>):	

Appendix B

ABOUT SMALL GROUPS

At UCM, small groups under the discipleship ministry were, for years, called Small Discipleship Groups (SDGs). In line with the revised UCM Mission Statement and the Discipleship Ministry Vision, the Discipleship Committee has introduced a new Small Group ministry paradigm to support the Mission and the Vision. Following this “new wineskin” paradigm, beginning in 2024, UCM will have 1) *Life Groups* and 2) *Catalytic Discipleship Groups*. The new name for an existing Small Discipleship Group is Life Group. Nothing changes for an SDG except the name. Longtime SDGs that wish to retain the name may do so.

There are similarities between LGs and CDGs, as well as marked differences.

Similarities:

1. Both usually consist of 3-10 people who meet weekly (in person or via a hybrid format) to share their faith and life experiences and encourage one another, fostering a sense of a Christ-centered, smaller community within the larger church.
2. Both are geared toward a threefold purpose: *belonging, building up, and bearing fruit*.
3. Regarding Group leaders, both participate in “Huddles” for support and further equipping.

Differences:

Life Groups:

- a. Guided by varied emphases, such as prayer, Bible study, or a shared outreach or activity.
- b. Led by a UCMer dedicated to gathering and cultivating a Group around one or more of these emphases for a season or a lifetime. There is no life cycle or terminal point. (Several current SDGs have been meeting for years, even for more than a decade).

Catalytic Discipleship Groups:

- a. Guided by a definite emphasis on disciple-making, bearing fruit is gauged by Spiritual growth (fruit of the Spirit) *and* by leading others to Jesus by sharing the gospel and walking alongside them (as new believers) — helping them progress in their Spiritual journey.
- b. Led by a UCMer equipped to reproduce another CDG within an 18-month life cycle, a CDG would plant and cultivate another CDG within 1.5 years.

FAQs:

Q. Could an existing SDG/Life Group transition to become a CDG?

A. Yes. How? The group has to decide. The leader then undergoes equipping by attending a CDG. Effective Small Group leadership is "*more caught than taught.*"

Q. Could an existing SDG/Life Group not transition at all?

A. Yes. Existing LGs need not transition into CDGs; they may remain as they are.