Flanders Baptist and Community Church

Small Group Proposal Form

Use this form to propose a new small group. Fill out the sections below and submit to the pastor. (Leaders will be notified when the proposal is approved. Do not start the group before approval.)

- **Date:**___ **/**_____ /____
- **Group Leader Name:** _____
- **Contact Info: Phone**_____ **Email** _____

  Address_____
- **Group Co-Leader Name:** _____
- **Contact Info: Phone**_____ **Email** _____

  Address_____
- **Church Member?** Yes / No / *Working on it*
- **Group Name/Topic:** _____
- **Group Description:** (Purpose, Bible book or theme, etc.)

_____

- **Target Audience:** (e.g. women, young adults, families, etc.)

- **Meeting Day/Time:** _____
- **Frequency:** (weekly, biweekly, monthly, etc.) _____
- **Start Date:**_____ **/**_____ /____
- **Duration:** (e.g. 6 weeks, ongoing, etc.) _____
- **Location:** (address, meeting room, online, etc.) _____

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- **Planned Curriculum or Activities:**
  (Bible study materials, video series, service project, etc.)

- **Will children/youth be in attendance?** Yes / No
  - If yes: *Please follow child-safety rules: two unrelated adults present at all times, background checks for caretakers, and signature of our child protection form, etc.*
- **Resources Needed:** (e.g. study guides, A/V equipment, snacks, etc.)

- **Group Leaders' Agreement:**
  I have received and read the Small Group Ministry Policies. I agree to abide by these guidelines (including child protection rules, meeting etiquette, etc.) as a condition of running this group.

Leader Signature: _____ Date:____/_____ /____

Co-Leader Signature: _____ Date:_____/_____ /____

- **Church Approval (to be filled by Pastor:**
  [ ] Approved [ ] Needs Revision [ ] Denied

Pastor Signature: _____ Date:____/_____/____

(After approval, group details will be shared with the congregation.)

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Small Group Ministry – Policies & Procedures

A **small group** is a Christ-centered gathering of several believers (typically 6–12) who meet regularly in homes or church spaces for Bible study, prayer, and mutual support. As one writer notes, a small group is "a gathering of believers committed to becoming more like Jesus by studying the Bible, obeying it, and loving one another". This is not an alternate worship service, but a supplement to Sunday and Saturday worship services (Sunday morning and Saturday afternoon services remain the primary corporate gatherings). The Bible gives examples of small-group discipleship: Jesus chose 12 disciples to train and send out (Matt. 4:18–22; Luke 6:12–16). Even in the Old Testament, communities of prophets apprenticed together (e.g. the "sons of the prophets" under Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha). In each case, the goal was mutual edification and learning God's Word. In other words, small groups exist to **build up believers and spread the Gospel** (Eph. 4:11–16, Matt. 28:19–20).

Small groups foster genuine **community** and discipleship. They provide a place for open discussion, personal sharing, and focused Bible study that may not occur in a large setting. In a small group people "meet each other where they're at," asking questions, praying, and applying Scripture to life. Over time, group members become closer: they pray for each other's needs, encourage one another in faith, and hold each other accountable. This matches one church's description of small groups as building *"deeper connections"* and *"accountability"* within the body of Christ. The intimate setting also creates natural opportunities for outreach: groups can invite non-Christians to explore faith, provide a friendly environment to ask questions, and serve together in the community.

Our Small-Group Model: Flanders Baptist will adopt a **hybrid small-group model** (sometimes called a *"cell" or "meta-church"* model). In this approach, small groups are the core building blocks of church life. Each group carries out the ministry of the church in miniature: worshiping, studying, praying, serving, and reaching out. From time to time the whole church gathers (e.g. Sunday worship or special events) mainly to encourage all the groups and carry out joint activities. This combined model keeps the strengths of both a "large church" and "network of home churches." In practice, it means **all members are invited to join or form a group**.

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We encourage groups that **edify existing members** (through Bible study, fellowship or support) and also **witness to neighbors** (through community service or outreach study). Every group should ultimately aim for spiritual growth (Eph. 4:15–16) and evangelism (Matt. 28:19–20) in its context.

Types of Small Groups

Our church welcomes many kinds of groups. Leaders may start groups tailored by age, interest, or need. For example:

- **Bible/Discipleship Groups.** These meet to study Scripture or a Christian book. They deepen faith and equip members for ministry.
- **Support/Care Groups.** These focus on life issues (e.g. grief recovery, medical diagnosis, parenting, addiction, marriage enrichment). One member's example was a "Grief During the Holidays" series of 8 meetings; another was an Advent study on the Christmas story for 6 weeks.
- **Ministry/Service Teams.** Groups may form around a service (e.g. a worship team, hospitality team, men's breakfast cooks, etc.) – doing ministry together builds friendships.
- **Interest or Community Groups.** These could be a running club that starts/ends with prayer, a parent's playgroup, a workplace lunch group, or any group whose members share an interest or setting.
- **Age/Stage Groups.** (Teenagers, young adults, seniors, families, empty-nesters, women, men, etc.)
- **Outreach/Alpha Groups.** These meet specifically to explore faith or to reach non-church people (for example, an "alpha" course, neighborhood cookout group, or casual dinner discussion group).

As a church notes, *"sharing the shepherding duties"* through various group types helps the church reach more people and meet more needs. **All groups should include both fellowship and mission elements**. Even a support or interest group is encouraged to pray for non-believers and serve the community together as part of their agenda.

Examples of Groups: A women's Bible study on James, a co-ed marathon training group with weekly devotion, a "Young Families" picnic and prayer meet-up, a "Senior Saints" monthly luncheon and chat, an empty-nester support series, or a foreign-language Bible group. Be creative. If you see a community or need around you, you can respond by starting a group (with church support). Groups can be **ongoing (permanent)** or **seasonal (short-term)**. For instance, you might pilot a 6–8 week group on a topic (such as financial stewardship or grief) to test interest; if it thrives, it can continue meeting.

How a Small Group Meeting Works

A typical meeting lasts 1–2 hours and follows a relaxed, informal format. For example: start with a greeting or snack time; then open with a short devotion or Bible passage. The leader might prepare 2–3 discussion questions. Members take turns sharing insights or prayer needs. The group prays together to close. Often someone volunteers to lead or host each week on a rotating basis. In all meetings, the focus is on Scripture and on one another, not on the leader "doing all the talking."

One guide describes small-group gatherings as generally including *"devotional study, personal check-in, and intentional prayer"*. You might pass a notebook for group prayer requests, or use a whiteboard with key Bible verses. Sometimes groups plan a service project (like serving lunch at a shelter or visiting neighbors) or a social outing together. Whatever the format, leaders should keep the conversation on track (using the Bible as the authority) and ensure everyone has a chance to speak and pray if desired. The church will provide training resources for leaders (see below) and can suggest study materials (e.g. curriculum books, video series, or online resources).

Church Support

The church will help by providing **materials and training**. For example, we may loan Bible-study books, video lessons (RightNow Media, etc.), or church space if needed. We will also offer several leader meetings for encouragement. If your group has

specific needs (childcare, transportation for a member, etc.), talk with the pastor about it. Our goal is to equip you, not to burden you. So ask!

Safety and Child Protection

All church-affiliated groups must follow our **Safe Church** guidelines to protect everyone. In particular:

- **Background Checks & Training:** Anyone leading or hosting a group that includes minors (children or teens) must have a cleared background check and complete the church's child-protection training. Leaders of any group are encouraged to attend our safety training (and must do so if children attend).
- **Two-Adult Rule:** If children are present (childcare or mixed-age activities), at least two unrelated adults must be in the room at all times. Do not meet alone one-on-one with a minor.
- **Public Space:** Groups should meet in reasonably public areas of a home, park, restaurant, or church (e.g. living room or kitchen, not a private bedroom). Keep doors open or use a well-lit area; avoid enclosed back rooms.
- **Policy Acknowledgement:** All group hosts and childcare providers must sign and follow the church's Child Protection Policy (available from the church office).
- **State Offender registry:** groups are encouraged to check the sex offender registry regarding everyone expected work with children

These measures help create a safe environment and clarify the church's responsibility. If an approved group is found not following policy, the pastor will work with the leader to correct issues, or may withdraw approval if necessary. Also, all small groups must reflect the values of the church.

Starting a Small Group (Invitation and Approval)

Anyone in our congregation who feels called can propose a new small group. Pray and talk with friends about your idea. Before you begin, fill out the **Small Group Proposal Form** (see attached). This form (to be submitted to the pastor) asks for

basic info: group leader name, contact, group name and description, meeting time and place, intended audience, and whether children will attend. The pastor will review the proposal and discuss it with you. Once approved, the pastor (or a delegated person) will announce the new group to the Church Council and to the congregation. Approved groups will be added to the church directory of small groups. An application will be denied only with a majority vote from Council members.

Starting a group is simple. But help us do it thoughtfully: it's wise to begin with a trial run (say 4–8 weeks on a clear topic) to see if interest is there. Short-term, seasonal groups are welcome (they often grow into ongoing groups). For example, a person might launch an 8-week "Holiday Grief Support" group in November, or a 6-week "Christmas Bible Study" in December. After the initial term, the group can decide whether to continue meeting.

Meeting Approval

Don't start officially meeting or advertising your group until the pastor has reviewed and approved your plan. This ensures you have church support and are following policy. The pastor will then inform the Church Council. You may begin inviting people as soon as approval comes.

Meeting Example

- **Icebreaker/Welcome:** Begin with casual conversation or a simple game/snack (10–15 min).
- **Opening Prayer or Song:** Ask God to guide your time.
- **Bible Study/Discussion:** Read a Bible passage or study chapter together. Ask prepared questions and allow group members to share insights (30–45 min).
- **Personal Sharing:** Each person may share a personal high/low or prayer request if comfortable (15–20 min).
- **Prayer Time:** Pray for one another's needs and any concerns for your community.

- **Closing:** Affirm one another and maybe plan a group activity (like a community meal or service project).

At every meeting, there should be **one clear leader or discussion facilitator** (at least at first). Leaders can enlist a co-leader or rotate hosting duties. We encourage groups to end meetings on time and to keep the focus on faith-building.

Group Resources & Communication

The church will post approved groups on the bulletin board, the newsletter, the website, and other appropriate venues. We may create a simple group directory (phone/email) for group members. Leaders should communicate regularly with the pastor to report attendance and any special needs. If you want church funding for any study materials, see the Treasurer.

Safeguarding Reminder

Leaders, please review our Safe Church guidelines every year. If at any time you suspect abuse or misconduct, report it immediately to church and/or other authorities.

Acknowledgement of Policy

By leading a church's small group, you agree to follow these policies. The **Small Group Proposal Form** includes a statement to that effect for you to sign. Our hope is that these guidelines help you start groups quickly, but also wisely. We trust you to minister in love and discernment. If you have questions, the pastor or elders are happy to advise.

May our Lord bless every small group as it grows His Kingdom at Flanders Baptist!