

A large, stylized graphic of a leafy branch, rendered in shades of gray, occupies the left and bottom portions of the page. The leaves are layered and have a soft, painterly texture.

hunter**bible**church

Growth Groups

Handbook

2009

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Introduction:

Thank you for being involved with Maturity at HBC and most particularly with Growth Groups for 2009.

This handbook aims to provide concisely important information to help you in your role as Growth Group Leader. Any feedback will be helpful as I plan to improve this handbook in the months and years to come.

Richard Sweatman
HBC Pastor for Maturity and Ministry

Contact Details:

Greg Lee
Senior Pastor

Richard Sweatman
Maturity and Ministry

Dave Allen
Membership

Sam Hilton
Mission

Dave Moore
Magnification

Purpose of Growth Groups:

The purpose of Growth Groups at HBC is to promote all five aspects of the christian life and church life through the advantages of a smaller group setting.

The most prominent of these is Maturity which is why Growth Groups come under the responsibility of the pastor for Maturity. Smaller groups are great for promoting discussion of the Bible, encouragement in Christian growth and accountability. This is one reason why we are calling our small groups *Growth* Groups this year.

Another aspect of church life and Christian life is Mission. Our hope is that our groups can be praying for our non-Christian friends, encouraging each other in evangelism, supporting missionaries and perhaps even doing evangelism together. This is another reason why we're using the term Growth Groups- numerical growth through small group evangelism would be great to see.

Membership is also important for Growth Groups. Our groups will be one of the key places where people feel connected and supported at church. We'd love for our groups to feel like family. Groups will have a chance to welcome new people (including new Christians) into our church. Part of this will involve helping out at one or two Life Steps events.

The fourth aspect of church and Christian life is Ministry. Groups are great for practically loving and serving each other. In time perhaps our groups could take up service together for people outside the group or even outside the church.

Finally, Magnification will happen in our groups as we praise God and pray to him. Who knows, you might like to even start singing in groups this year!

In these ways, and in many more, we'd love to see all five aspects of Church and Christian life encouraged at HBC through Growth Groups.

Expectations of Leaders:

Leaders, just like all members of HBC are expected to be growing in their own maturity as the Bible explains. Their commitment to leading is on a year by year basis. For this reason, although groups may have continuity in membership for longer periods, each year is a fresh start for HBC groups.

Beyond their own Christian maturity, there are four basic **expectations** of Growth Group Leaders

1. Study Preparation

- Leaders are expected to spend 2 hours per week on study preparation. This should be possible in terms 1,2 and 4 when HBC study guides will be provided. (See more under Guidance on leading a growth group / promoting maturity / using a study guide). More time might be required in term 3 when leaders are encouraged to write their own studies.

2. Loving the group

- Leaders are expected to help the group love and care for each other. In practice this would mean at the very least:
 - regular prayer for each group member
 - being aware of generally how they are going in their Christian maturity
 - being aware of any particular crises they might be experiencing
 - spending time with each member / couple outside of group time.
 - this might be a visit or dinner or coffee once or twice a semester depending on group size and leader availability.
 - also the occasional phone call
 - working with the HBC staff in caring for people (see below under Guidance on Leading a Growth Group / Promoting Membership / Caring for people)

3. Helping train another group member

- Leaders and Co-leaders would be expected to help train another group member who might be able to lead in 2010 or 2011. This would involve:
 - finding a suitable person to train (for information on who would be suitable see below under Expectations for Trainees)
 - spending a little more time with them
 - giving them opportunities to lead and supporting them in this process.

4. Working with the pastor for Maturity

- This would involve attending four Growth Group Prep Nights during the year. These prep nights will involve:
 - receiving the study guides for the term and explanations of these
 - general information, support and training
 - fellowship among Growth Group Leaders
- The dates for these Prep Nights for am/pm are:
 - Wed Jan 21
 - Wed April 22
 - Wed July 1
 - Wed Sept 30
- The dates for these Prep Nights for Unichurch are:
 - Feb 11
 - April 8?
 - June 3?
 - Sept 30?

- Working with the Maturity Pastor would also involve phonecalls or face to face conversations during the year with Richard or another experienced Growth Groups Leader who is helping Richard. The purpose of these conversations is to:
 - encourage you as you lead
 - find out about any particular difficulties or challenges
 - ask how people in your group are going in their Christian Maturity
 - lead to prayer together

Expectations of Trainees:

Growth Group Leaders ideally should invite people to become trainees into their group. The following describes who might be a suitable trainee and what their expectations during the year would be.

A trainee should:

- have faithfully attended an HBC Growth Group in 2008
- be themselves growing in Christian maturity
- have reasonable relational or social skills.

Their expectations for 2009 would be:

- to undergo Growth Groups Training during the year
 - this will most likely be using *Growth Groups: a training course in how to lead small groups* by Colin Marshall published by Matthias Media.
 - there will be a variety of ways to do this course, dates are TBA.
 - a series of Wednesday nights
 - a couple of Saturday mornings
 - One to one training from Richard or your Growth Group Leader
- to lead a few studies during the year under the supervision of the Growth Group Leader.

Our aim in 2010 will be to have approximately double the number of Growth Group Leaders at HBC.

Program for 2009:

AM/PM Growth Groups:

- These congregations will generally follow the school term with breaks for school holiday.
- The first group meeting should be during the week starting Monday 2nd February.
- For terms 1,2, and 4 Richard will provide study guides for about 8 out of 10 weeks of the term. The remaining weeks can be used for socials, prayer nights, one off studies or something else. The material will be:

Term 1:

- the 5 Ms from Philippians
- conversational evangelism training
- a free week during the SMBC mission for an evangelistic focus (week starting Monday 30th March)

Term 2:

- New Testament. Most likely studies from the discipleship narrative of Luke (9:51-19:48)

Term 4:

- Old Testament
- topical studies on men / women / marriage

In **Term 3**, leaders will be expected to write their own studies. This is so they can keep up their skills in Bible Study writing and also have a break from the limitations of study guides. Richard will make some suggestions and guidance for NT or OT study but what leaders do is up to them.

Unichurch Growth Groups:

- Unichurch Growth Groups will follow the University term and not be expected to meet during exams or holidays.
- The first group meeting will be during the week starting Monday 2nd March (Week 1 of Uni)
- The remaining weeks can be used for socials, prayer nights, one off studies or something else. The material will be:

Term 1:

- the 5 Ms from Philippians
- a free week during the SMBC mission for an evangelistic focus (week starting Monday 30th March)

Term 2:

- New Testament. Most likely studies from the discipleship narrative of Luke (9:51- 19:48)

Term 4:

- Old Testament
- topical studies on men / women / marriage

In **Term 3**, leaders will be expected to write their own studies. This is so they can keep up their skills in Bible Study writing and also have a break from the limitations of study guides. Richard will make some suggestions and guidance for NT or OT study but what leaders do is up to them.

Guidance on Leading a Growth Group:

General:

Recruiting members

- Hopefully 90-100% of HBC members will join a group.
- Recruiting will happen
 - through people speaking with leaders and helpers at Growth Group information desks at church before term starts.
 - through phone calls by Richard, Group Leaders and helpers to some people on the database
 - through contact forms in church outlines
 - through casual contacts
- It would be wise for leaders to begin themselves by finding trainees, two core members (reliable people they'd like in their group) and a venue.

Beginning a group

There are a few things to get right during the first week or two of your group. This includes:

- Help people to learn names and get to know each other
- Build a contact list
- Outline general expectations of the group including:
 - confidentiality
 - regular attendance (phonecall if not coming)
 - group helping to love and care for each other over the year.

Men and Women in ministry

Both men and women have crucial roles in Growth Group ministry at HBC.

- It has usually been the case at HBC that the leading of mixed gender groups is done only by men. The reason for this is that the role of Growth Group Leader is an authoritative teaching role and involves, along with the HBC staff, taking responsibility for the group. The Bible instructs us that generally at church women should not formally teach or have a teaching authority over men (1 Timothy 2:11-12). This will continue to be the expectation at HBC groups. For a more detailed explanation of the rationale for this practice please speak with Richard or Greg.
- In practice, there are many opportunities for women to teach other women in Growth Groups. Some of these might be:
 - Women's Bible Study
 - Women's evening groups
 - Mixed groups splitting into men and women for some nights out of a term

Working with your co-leader

Part of a successful group is working as a team with your co-leader.

- Clear **Communication** with your co-leader such an important part of a successful growth group both in inquiring as to how each of you are going as well to discuss and reflect on the group.
- It is easy for a leader to assume that everything is going well, the studies are awesome, the group members are all happy and everyone is participating and feeling part of your group, while in reality the opposite is happening. Talking to and reflecting on the group with your co-leader can be helpful to get another perspective on the group. It can be very hard to see all the reactions of others while you are trying to run a study. Spending time talking with your co-leader should be done on a regular basis both formally and informally.

- It is also important for both leaders to know and agree on the direction in which the group is headed and to communicate these clearly to the group.

Communication between Growth Group Leaders and HBC staff

- During the year there will be a regular (probably monthly) email from Richard to the Growth Group Leaders. This will give you an update on what the staff are thinking and planning generally for the church, as well as any specific news or events coming up. It may also include suggestions for leading or other resources. If other staff want to contact leaders about anything they will do so via this monthly email.
- Richard can be contacted about any questions, comments, feedback etc about Growth Groups. Generally email is the best way to start.

Promoting Membership:

Growth Groups will be important for promoting Membership (that sense of belonging and partnership in the gospel) at HBC.

Involvement with Life Steps

- Life Steps is the HBC newcomers course designed to orientate new people to church
- There will be opportunities for Growth Groups to help Dave Allen in welcoming Newcomers.
- At this stage, AM and PM groups can help by coming along to one of the Life Steps Sunday events (Feb 8, 15, 22). The expectation is simply to bring some food and get to know some new people at church.
- For Unichurch, there will be several Life Steps events during March and April. The Membership team would love for 2 or 3 groups to come along at each event. They just need to bring some food and say hello to people.

Weekends away

- a great way to build relationships in your group
- more info to come

Caring for people

- Sometimes leaders will need extra help caring for people. Some examples of difficult situations among group members might be:
 - marriage crisis
 - mental health issues
 - financial hardship or physical needs
 - persistent serious sin
- In these cases, leaders should contact the pastor for Membership Dave Allen. He would support, encourage and work with you to help the people in these situations.

Promoting Mission:

- Growth Groups ideally will encourage each other in evangelism, pray for missionaries, pray for non-Christian friends, try running evangelistic or pre-evangelistic events, and invite non-Christians to the group.
- Hopefully, some guidance on this will be provided in the future.

Promoting maturity:

Using a study guide

- Study guides are just that: a guide, not the final product.
- Use your preparation time to
 - read and try to understand the meaning and application of the passage
 - read and understand the leaders notes and study guide
 - add, subtract and modify questions to make the study better for you and your group
 - practice running the study.
- It is generally assumed that leaders are familiar with *Growth Groups* by Colin Marshall (see resource list).

Prayer

Prayer is a vital part of any growth group.

- There are 3 main types of prayer needed in a growth group.
 - Praying for your group.
 - Praying with your group
 - The group praying for each other.
1. As a leader you have a responsibility to be praying **regularly** for your group. This should be done both for individual members and for the group as a whole.
 2. Prayer should be a **major** part of your time together as a group each week. This includes things such as;
 - praying before and after studying Gods word, asking the Holy Spirit to help us to understand, renew and change us.
 - prayer partners or prayer groups. (Singly sex groups are best as it allows people to be more honest about sin and struggles within their life.)
 - praying for any prayer points that arise from within the group, the church and the community.
 3. As a group, members should be **encouraged** to be praying regularly for other members of the group. As Christians, prayer should be an active part of our relationship with our Father. As leaders we should model this to our groups.

PTC (Primary Theological Certificate)

- This year Neil Foster will be co-ordinating the running of the Moore College PTC course.
- This is the main formal way leaders and members can go further in their knowledge of the Bible.
- It would be a great idea to speak to Neil about what times might work for you to study PTC

Promoting Magnification:

- As we study God's word, it should deeply affect not just our thoughts about God, but also our wonder, appreciation, fear and joy of God. How any study affects each group and individual will be particular to them. A lot of Magnification in your groups may happen after the studies in smaller conversations and during prayer time. Here are some tips.
 - Aim for the heart. "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever". Keep asking yourself and your co-leader if you think people have ONLY understood the concepts, but not devoured them into their lives. Do they realise the difference this information makes?

- Check Motivations. Don't assume that people's obedience and service is pure. Are they doing because they love Jesus? Or are they doing it because they love [HBC/you/acknowledgment/doing that thing]?
- Never stop giving thanks. Keep impressing thankfulness on them in new and creative ways. Encourage them to be thankful for things they've been taking for granted. Encourage their thankfulness to be deep and meaningful and from the heart.
- Keep an eye on emotions. Rather than being wary of too much emotion, we do need to be wary of too little emotion. Do people actually love God? Does their heart ever burn with pain because of their sin, or with joy because of God's grace? It need not be constant – that would be odd too – but it should be far from constantly absent.

Promoting Ministry:

- People from the HBC Ministry team may contact you about helping your members take on one or ministries at church. Please be as helpful as you can!

Useful Resources:

- *Growth Groups: A training course in how to lead small groups.* Colin Marshall. Kingsford: Matthias Media, 1995.
- *Leading Better Bible Studies: essential skills for effective small groups.* Karen Morris and Rod Morris. Sydney South: Aquila, 1997.
- *Simple Small Groups: a user-friendly guide for small group leaders.* Bill Search. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.

This handbook has been written by Richard Sweatman with the help of HBC staff and maturity team leaders. Please email me with feedback about improvements for 2010.
