

Small Group Covenants



Table Of Contents	Page
How to Use This Resource	2–3
<i>By Sam O’Neal</i>	
Small-Group Covenants	
Basic Covenant (Fill in the Blank)	4
<i>Source: Sheila Ely</i>	
Basic Covenant #2	5
<i>Source: Mark Ingmire</i>	
Basic Covenant with Church Logo	6
<i>Source: Hope Church, Mason, OH</i>	
Basic Covenant with Border	7
<i>Source: Diana Bennett</i>	
Group Covenant as Curriculum Insert	8
<i>Source: LifeWay Resources</i>	
Specialty Group Covenant.....	9
<i>Source: Diana Bennett</i>	
House Church Covenant	10
<i>Source: Eddy Hall</i>	
Small-Group Agreement	11
<i>Source: Freedom Church, Lebanon, IN</i>	

How to Use This Resource

Take a quick peek here to maximize the content in this training download.

by Sam O'Neal

There's nothing complicated about a small-group covenant. It's just a way of spelling out what will happen during the life of a group, and what will be expected of the group's members over that period of time.

Most covenants include these basic elements:

- Information regarding when, where, and how often a group will meet.
- A purpose or mission statement explaining the reason for the group's existence. This may also include specific goals that the group will look to achieve over a period of time.
- Ground rules or expectations of behavior for the people within the group. These usually include things like confidentiality, respect, commitment, and a request for regular attendance.
- A space for group members to sign the covenant.

How to Use This Resource

This Best Church Practices resource contains eight different covenants for small groups. And while they are all somewhat similar in structure, they do have variations depending on the needs of different churches and types of groups. And because all of the material in this resource comes in Microsoft Word format, each covenant can be edited and adapted to fit your needs.

The first two covenants (pp. 4–5) are basic skeletons that a church can use for all of its small groups. They contain blanks that can be filled in by each group leader to provide specific information for their group. And the “Basic Covenant with Church Logo” (p. 6) contains an image that can be swapped out in favor of your church's logo, and any image of your choosing.

“Group Covenant as a Curriculum Insert” (p. 8) is a great resource for churches that provide groups with Bible studies. The introductory material in the covenant can be tweaked to fit the study, and then the covenant can be handed to the group leader along with the curriculum.

Finally, “Specialty Group Covenant” (p. 9) and “House Church Covenant” (p. 10) can be adapted to fit specific types of small groups—those that have a more defined structure or purpose.

My Take

Here are a couple tips that I'll pass along after using covenants in my own small groups for several years.

- **Early is better.** Many group leaders prefer to wait until the group has “settled in” before they introduce a covenant. They feel that it’s better to wait until a group is “serious” before requiring such a commitment. I disagree, mainly because this can lead to unhealthy patterns of behavior within the group that then need to be corrected once the covenant is in place.

In my mind, it’s much better to introduce a covenant as one of the first things you do in your first group meeting. This will clarify for everyone right off the bat what the group will be about and what will be expected of them. It helps the group get started on the right foot.

- **Get signatures.** I encourage group leaders to sign the group’s covenant, and to have each member do the same. This officially announces that everyone is now on the same team—that we are starting something meaningful together. It’s also very helpful to have a signature as witness if a group member begins violating the covenant and needs to be corrected.

— *Sam O’Neal; copyright 2009 by the author and Christianity Today International.*



Community Church of the Word

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www.churchid.org

The Rev. John Smith, Pastor
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Small Group Covenant

Our group exists to:

-
-
-
-

Our specific goals are:

-
-
-
-

We will meet on _____ (day of the week)

We will meet (circle one) weekly, bi-weekly, monthly.

We will meet from (start time) _____ to (end time) _____.

We will meet at _____ (place) and/or rotate where we meet.

Other standards we choose to live by:

- We agree to be on time in order to respect others.
- We agree to keep things said in group confidential.
- We agree to attend group as faithfully as possible making it a priority.
- We agree to participate in group, while being careful not to dominate.
- We agree to treat one another with respect at all times, especially in times of disagreement or conflict.
- We agree to help one another and be available to one another outside of group meetings whenever possible.

Signature

Date

— Source: Sheila Ely

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Small Group Covenant

The Purpose of Small Groups at First Community Church:

To lead people to a life-changing connection with Jesus Christ by building a healthy small-group community.

We agree to the following expectations:

This group will normally meet every _____

Actual meeting time is to begin at _____ and end at _____

We will meet at _____

Refreshments or meals will be handled in the following manner: _____

Childcare will be handled in the following manner: _____

We agree to the following values:

1. **Priority.** Because we believe in the value of community, we agree to give priority to our group meetings. If we are running late, we will call ahead.
2. **Confidentiality.** We agree that whatever is shared here stays here. This includes what is shared through phone calls, e-mails, etc. We want this group to be a safe place to grow.
3. **Participation.** We agree to encourage, support, and stand behind one another, choosing to see ourselves linked together.
4. **Accessibility.** We agree to give one another the right to call in times of need—even in the middle of the night.
5. **Openness.** We will seek to be open and honest with each other. Our small group is a place where we can take off our masks, be ourselves, and be accepted for who we are.
6. **Respect.** We agree to communicate in ways that are respectful, and to give advice only when it is requested. We will strive to be available to one another and listen, encourage, support, and tell the truth in loving ways.

Open Chair. We agree to keep an empty chair for others and seek to reach out to people like us who need this place of caring and growth. Eventually we plan to reproduce our group.

Signature(s)

Date

— Source: Mark Ingmire

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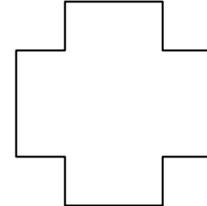
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Group Covenant

1. The purpose of our small group:

-
-
-
-



Church Logo

2. The goals for our small group:

-
-
-
-

3. We will meet _____ times a month from ____/____/____ to ____/____/____.
After this time period we will evaluate our group before continuing.

4. We will meet on _____ (day) from _____ (time) to _____, and we will strive to start on time and close on time.

5. We will meet at _____ (place), or we will rotate where we meet.

6. We will agree to the following ground rules:

Attendance: To give priority to the group meetings.

Participation: To share responsibility for the group.

Preparation: To come prepared with assignments completed.

Confidentiality: To keep anything that is said strictly confidential.

Empty Chair: To seek and welcome new members to the group.

Accountability: To give permission to group members to hold each other accountable to areas agreed upon.

I have read and agree to what is stated above:

Signature(s)

Date

— Source: Steve Lizzio, Hope Church in Mason, OH

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Our Small Group

Purposes

- To get to know God in a more personal way
- To understand what we believe as Christians
- To connect with other believers
- To belong to a small group that will support me in my growth
- To genuinely show care in tangible ways
- To have fun

Goals

- Allow time for sharing and unpacking our stories
- Spend designated time in prayer
- Spend designated time in Bible study
- Plan quarterly social times outside regular meetings, such as celebrating birthdays or holidays

Length, Times, and Location

Length:	7–8:30 p.m. (fellowship time varies)
Day:	Monday evenings
Times:	Every week, with social times over holidays and summer
Location:	Rotate among group members

Agreements

Priority:	Our small group will be a priority over other activities.
Participation:	We will prepare the lesson prior to each meeting.
Confidentiality:	What is shared in our small group stays there.
Open group:	Our group will accept new people at the end of a study.
Support:	We will always be available for offering care and support.
Accountability:	We will hold each other accountable for modeling Christ as we respond to God's Word.

— Source: *Diana Bennett*

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Group Covenant

As you begin this Bible study, it is important that your group covenant together, agreeing to live out important group values. Once the values are agreed upon, your group will be on its way to experiencing true Christian community.

It's very important that your group discuss these values together—preferably before you begin this study. The first session would be most appropriate.

- **Priority:** While we are in this group, we will give the group meetings priority over life events that are non-emergency.
- **Participation:** Everyone is encouraged to participate in our group discussions, and no one is given permission to dominate.
- **Respect:** Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinions, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- **Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in our meetings is never repeated outside the meeting without permission.
- **Life Change:** We will regularly assess our progress toward applying the “steps” to redemptive community. We will complete evaluation activities to reinforce what we are learning and better integrate those lessons in to our lives.
- **Care and Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group will provide care for every member.
- **Accountability:** We agree to let the members of our group hold us accountable to commitments we make in whatever loving ways we decide upon. At the same time, giving unsolicited advice is not permitted.
- **Empty Chair:** Our group will work together to fill the empty chair with an unchurched person or couple.
- **Mission:** We agree as a group to reach out and invite others to join us and to work toward multiplication of our group to form new groups.
- **Ministry:** We will encourage one another to volunteer to serve in a ministry and to support missions work by giving financially and/or personally serving.

I agree to all of the above: _____
Signature Date

Source: This covenant, or another like it, is included in all of the material at [LifeWay Resources](#).

Community Church of the Word
Small-Group Covenant



Purpose

Spiritual Leadership Communities are small groups designed to provide ongoing encouragement and discernment for leaders of ministries who come together for worship, sharing, prayer, and personal reflection. By coming alongside one another's spiritual journeys for one full year, it is our hope that we will develop a lifestyle of spiritual formation which will impact our personal walk with Christ and infiltrate our daily ministry context.

Commitment

We will make our designated meeting times a priority in our schedule. The following concerns will be discussed and adhered to for the vitality and authenticity of our spiritual leadership group:

- We will honor confidentiality with information and experiences during our time together
- We will commit to the assigned reading/projects during the next 12 months
- We will engage ourselves, when comfortable, in the discussions and strive to create an authentic Christian community by being vulnerable and accountable to one another
- We will pray often for one another
- We will respect theological differences and honor each person's love for God
- We will treat each other with dignity, respect, love, and be open to the mystery and surprise surrounding God's presence
- We will hold to the statements of the Apostles' Creed
- We will strive to create a safe environment where each is encouraged, strengthened, loved, challenged, and when appropriate, admonished
- We will be available to one another outside group meetings should the occasion be necessary
- Within this safe place, we will have the freedom to raise issues/questions about spiritual formation and its implication for our personal/ministerial life.

Signature

Date

Hilltop Urban-House Church
A community of grace and truth

Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
and the Wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time,
Enjoying one moment at a time,
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,
Taking, as Jesus did,
This sinful world as it is, not as I would have it,
Trusting that You will make all things right, If I surrender to Your will,
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,
And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Our Mission

To be a reproducing family, living out together by the Spirit's power the countercultural way that Jesus lived and taught—loving God, loving one another, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Our Confession

- We admit we are powerless to be like Christ in our own strength.
- We believe that God's Spirit can transform anybody—us too.
- We surrender our lives and will to Jesus Christ.
- We believe this Way of life to which Jesus calls us can only be lived out in community.
- We grow when we honestly share our struggles and victories with one another.
- We will serve our King Jesus and His Mission with the strength God provides.

Guidelines:

- We will be honest and open in sharing our struggles and journey.
- We will listen and learn from each other's sharing.
- We will support one another, not try to fix one another. Only if asked will we give advice.
- Confidentiality: What is shared in the group stays in the group, unless someone threatens to harm themselves or others.
- Conflict and correction, unless a group matter, will be handled privately, not in the group.

Living Out the Three Loves

Loving God

- Give praise and thanks to God.
- What strikes you from today's Scripture, and how can we live it out?

Loving Our Neighbors

- Who is there in your world who needs support and encouragement this week, and how could we together respond with God's love?

Loving One Another

- What do you need Jesus to do for you today?

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Small-Group Agreement

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. A written agreement will help you avoid unspoken agendas and disappointed expectations. If the idea of having a written agreement is unfamiliar to your group, we encourage you to give it a try. A clear agreement is invaluable for resolving conflict constructively and for setting your group on a path to health.

We agree to the following values:

Clear Purpose To grow healthy spiritual lives by building a healthy small-group community.
In addition, we _____

Group Attendance To give priority to the group meeting (call if absent or late)

Safe Environment To help create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (please, no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes)

Confidentiality To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group

Spiritual Health To give group members permission to help me live a healthy spiritual life that is pleasing to God

Shared Ownership To remember that every member is a minister and we will encourage each attendee to share a small-group role in order to serve one another in love.

We agree to the following expectations:

- Refreshments/Mealtimes _____
- Child Care _____
- When we will meet (day of week) _____
- Where we will meet (place) _____
- We will begin at (time) _____ and end at _____

We agree to the following commitment:

Father, to the best of my ability, in light of what I know to be true, I commit the next season of my life to CONNECTING with your family, GROWING to be more like Christ, DEVELOPING myself for ministry, SHARING my life mission every day, and SURRENDERING my life for your pleasure.

— Source: Shane Frazier, Freedom Church in Lebanon, IN.