

Galileo Church
from the Big Red Barn
June 21, 2017

Dearly beloved,

We hope that this letter finds you strong in the strength that God supplies, purposeful in your discipleship of Jesus, and enjoying the comfort and communion of the Holy Spirit.

This letter is long, we know. If you don't have time to read it all, please skip to page 3, "**G-Groups: a new plan**"; and also read page 6, "**What to do now.**"

Background re: Infrastructure

It's been about ten days since the servant-leaders of Galileo Church (that's the Missional Logistics Team, the Care and Feeding Team, and the pastoral staff, plus a few of our littlest kids) gathered for twelve hours (twelve hours! in a row!) to consider how our church might best accomplish all that God has entrusted us to do and be.

It remains our deep commitment to let God show us new things about how God is working in us. We are (mostly) unafraid of disruptive change as long as it serves our reason for being: *to seek and shelter spiritual refugees, rally spiritual health for all who come, and strengthen every tender soul with strength to follow Jesus into a life of world-changing service.*

You are probably aware that earlier this year we got some strong clues that our infrastructure (which is how we connect people to each other) was not as strong as we thought. That is to say, our ways of connection for the sake of Christian friendship were not (always) promoting strong relationships. Strong relationships would give us a common sense of purpose, could withstand the healthy expression of incommensurable points of view, would promote deepening discipleship of Jesus for every individual, and would build up trust in and among the whole church.

Some parts of our infrastructure were doing that, but not all the parts, all the time. So the servant-leaders convened to talk about infrastructure – in other words, where the metaphorical "house" of Galileo is strong, and where it's not strong enough. This is especially important because we believe that we will, someday, absolutely go through situations that are as hard as the one we faced together in the winter/spring of 2017. We have a chance now to make some changes that could be vital to our continued survival for the sake of the gospel we exist to share and the refugees who are not here yet, and we're grateful for that chance.

G-Groups: form follows function

As you likely know, Galileo has one large gathering each week for worship (Sundays at 5 p.m.), and many small gatherings that happen throughout the week at taco bars and coffee shops, in the Big Red Barn, and in people's homes. These small gatherings were the particular focus of our working retreat, during which we discerned two main purposes for G-Groups.

- 1. G-Groups are Communities of Care** in which we honor each other's stories. By practicing habits of listening, narrating, and truth-telling, we learn to trust each other. We share mutual vulnerability. We take turns. We tell our stories. We pray for each other. We allow each person to be exactly who they are, without judgment, without expectation. There is little time for noisy chitchat; G-Groups are more likely to clear the clutter that fills our heads so much of the time. Like Jesus, we take risks in listening and speaking (and being quiet together) so that we can meet people where they are. We each expect that we, in turn, will be met and seen and appreciated and loved.
- 2. G-Groups are Communities of Learning** in which we deepen our discipleship of Jesus. Together we learn (or relearn) the One Big Story that God has been telling for a long time. We read the Bible. We join in conversation with scripture, with each other, with authors we respect, with our servant-leaders, with our Lead Evangelist. We come with soft hearts and open minds. We want to know what God wants, so we can *want* what God wants. We look to Jesus as the fullest expression of God's logic (*logos*, "Word", see John 1:14) among us. We do not expect to ever finish this work, but we hope to keep moving closer to the Center all the time. This is rehabilitative work for many of us who originally learned this One Big Story in a way that diminishes and hurts us or our neighbors. This rehabilitative theological exploration takes time, and we're lucky to be doing it together.

G-Groups: shared expectations

The servant-leaders recognize, however, that G-Groups have been operating without a shared set of expectations about how G-Groups should function to best accomplish the dual purposes of Care and Learning. It is time to be explicit about what we believe G-Groups need to successfully achieve those purposes.

- G-Groups need leadership support.* Those who lead G-Groups need training, curriculum choices, and ongoing connection with other servant-leaders for counsel and relief. Leaders should usually not also be group hosts; it's too hard to be in two roles at the same time.
- G-Groups need shared hosting.* Those who host G-Groups (in their home, or at a public location) need support in this work, and occasional rest from it. G-groupers (people who come to G-Groups, obv!) can share the responsibilities of set-up, clean-

up, meal preparation, and attendance reporting. Each G-Group needs a system for taking turns, in part to prevent host burnout; and the church should provide teaching about how to participate as a helpful partner in a G-Group.

3. *G-Groups need consistent attendance in a right-sized group.* G-Groups work best when G-groupers are consistent, and when the groups are right-sized. About a dozen adults is the maximum number for most groups. We know that every person can't come every time, but prioritizing attendance is important for the group's sense of safety-in-belonging. And that safety-in-belonging is essential for the Care and Learning that are the groups' dual purposes.
4. *G-Groups need to prioritize Care and Learning in the way they spend their time.* Without setting a rigorous, uniform schedule for all G-Groups, we want to communicate the expectation that eating and drinking, checking in, praying, and engaging biblical-theological learning are essential components of each week's G-Group meeting.
5. *G-Groups need to connect G-groupers to and within Galileo Church.* It is our high hope that G-Groups will be conduits of close connection with the whole body of Galileo Church. Galileo is forming (and reforming) a theology, ethos, ethic, and whole-church relational web, and it feels important that everyone who enters Galileo at any point, including G-Groups, be able to participate in our life together. That is not to say that every person in every G-Group should always be present for Sunday worship and other expressions of our life together. But it is an express desire that G-Groups intentionally draw near to the heart of the larger church, rather than drifting toward an isolated existence apart from the larger church.

G-Groups: a new plan

Here is a plan that we hope will form G-Groups that are strong Communities of Care and Learning, while addressing the shared expectations for leaders, hosts, G-groupers, schedules, and whole-church connection.

1. **We're scheduling quarterly turnover.** G-Groups will follow a standardized, quarterly schedule together. New quarters start each December, March, June, and September. G-Groups will meet for 10 weeks, and we'll take a church-wide Sabbath rest from G-Groups for 3 weeks.
2. **Leaders and hosts will vary from quarter to quarter.** Indeed, we hope to recruit enough new leaders and hosts that no one will host or lead a G-Group more than three quarters of the year – two would be even better. Leaders will receive training and support, and shared hosting responsibilities will be communicated to all G-groupers.

- 3. G-groupers will sign up for G-Groups every quarter.** G-groupers promise to prioritize attendance for 10 weeks. G-Groups that currently hold more than a dozen adults will divide in ways that we hope are natural and freeing. If you are currently in a G-Group that you love, you can (mostly) stay with that group, understanding that it may divide into smaller groups, change its weekly schedule, meet at someone else's home, and have a different leader.

(This means that we will no longer publish a long list of all the G-Groups and invite people to go to whichever one they like; that system has contributed to overcrowding and inconsistency of attendance, hurting the possibility of those groups engaging in Care and Learning. The G-Group leaders and hosts, the Care and Feeding Team, and the Lead Evangelist (*moi!*) will work to make sure G-Groups are balanced and beautiful. If we mess that up, let us know, and we'll work together to fix it.)

- 4. Newcomers to Galileo will be offered a G-Group just for them: Galileo 101.** We hope that new G-Groups will grow from this shared experience, with leaders and hosts drawn from among those who have been around a little longer.
- 5. The Lead Evangelist (*moi!*) will travel to each G-Group on a rotation.** I'll be available to answer questions about the church, or to talk about the biblical-theological foundations for our life together, or just to get to know each of you better. We imagine that G-Groups might send me a question that they'd like to explore, so that I can prepare a discussion around your questions.
- 6. Curriculum and scheduling will be... well, not standardized, but deliberate.** We ask that each G-Group choose from Bible study, book study, G-grouper autobiographies, or other curriculum that supports Galileo's mission and missional priorities; and that each G-Group report to the servant-leaders their ten-week plan each quarter.
- 7. Some G-Groups will remain open** – i.e. come when you can, any time, no sign-up required – **and constant** – i.e. no quarterly rotation or Sabbath breaks. Open G-Groups include:
 - *G-Sunday*, Sundays at 3 p.m. at the Big Red Barn. (Formerly called Sunday School for Grown-Ups.)
 - *G-Kids and G-Youth*, Sundays at 3 p.m. at the Big Red Barn.
 - *G-Coffee*, Sundays at 3 p.m. at McDonalds next to the Big Red Barn.
 - *Bible & Beer*, Tuesdays at 8 p.m. at Fuzzy's in Mansfield.
 - *G-Study*, whenever its leaders select a new book and set up a schedule for reading and conversation, at AB Coffee in Mansfield.

Working groups of servant-leaders

The servant-leaders still have work to do to implement the plan we've outlined. We're forming five working groups that will meet during July and August, bringing back their ideas and plans to joint meetings of the Missional Logistics Team and Care and Feeding Team.

- 1. Working Group for G-Group Leadership Development and Curriculum Support.** How do we train leaders for G-Groups (separate from hosts) who can lead check-ins, Bible studies, book studies, and prayers; and help make connections for pastoral care? Members include Ryan Danny Felber (staff), Allison Justus-Smith (MLT), Nathan Berry (MLT), Melina Madolora Wikoff (CFT), Laura Jean Allen (ordination candidate).
- 2. Working Group to Develop Shared Hosting Handbook.** Can we (a) recruit and train hosts that are not already hosting, and (b) collect and produce resources for the sharing of host responsibilities in G-groups? I.e. recipes, food purchase ideas, meal service recommendations, clean-up ideas, reimbursement instructions, timing guidelines. Missy Holtman (MLT), Susan Chiasson (MLT), Francine Speer (CFT), Kaytee Bates (CFT), Aisling Jones (MLT), Eleanor Garrett (ordination candidate).
- 3. Working Group to Schedule Leaders/Hosts/Locations.** Our new quarterly schedule will start September 2017. We'll recruit leaders and hosts, map locations, and give instruction to the whole church about what's about to happen. Harmony Weber (CFT), Katie Jane Owens (MLT), Mark Wikoff (MLT), Missy Holtman (MLT), Francine Speer (CFT), Tyler Araki (ordination candidate).
- 4. Working Group to Reimagine Care & Feeding Team.** What is the role of the CFT in the overall Galileo infrastructure? What is the relationship of CFT members to G-Groups, including and especially G-Groups that are not the primary group for any CFT member? Melina Madolora Wikoff, Kaytee Bates, Harmony Weber, Travis Weber, Francine Speer (all CFT), Jenny Jacobson (ordination candidate).
- 5. Working Group to Plan Integration of Newcomers.** What is the best structure, within a quarterly G-group structure, for getting newcomers connected in G-Groups? How do we teach Galileo 101 without insisting, "this is the way we've always done it"? How do we form new groups so that we're not packing existing groups with more people? Kimberly Grogan (MLT), Astreia Yates (MLT), Corina Sosa (MLT), Ashley Dargai (ordination candidate).

What to do now

Galileo's servant-leaders hope for three things – nope, four:

1. *That we will be engaged together in prayer for our church's infrastructure*, as it is the framework for all that we are called to do and be together, and we need God's help and each other's cooperation to make it work. Pray your thanksgiving for the G-Group leaders and hosts who have opened their hearts and their homes to so many for so long. Pray God's help for our working groups, for future hosts and leaders, for G-groupers across our whole church who depend on this infrastructure for companionship on their journey.
2. *That all G-Groups (except the Open G-Groups as described above) will take a Sabbath rest in July and August of this year.* In other words, don't meet as a group. Invite each other to dinner, go bowling together, get ice cream with church friends, whatever... but let your group leaders and hosts, and all of our best intentions, relax and breathe for a while.
3. *That each Galileo person (G-person?) will prayerfully consider whether you might be a good leader or host for a G-Group* – not forever, but for one quarter at a time, with plenty of training and support. If you're wondering whether this might be a good fit for you, please let me know and I'll talk and pray through it with you.
4. *That our church will be ready for a September G-Group Restart* with new configurations, new hosts and leaders, and new expectations for how we can be Communities of Care and Learning for each other.

We continually give thanks that God has called us into community with each of you, and that the Spirit of the living Christ is helping us live into the future of God's imagining. Please let us know what this letter means to you. May God lead us more and more deeply into Communities of Care and Learning, for God's own sake, and for the sake of the world God loves, and for the sake of the people who are not here yet.

grace and peace,

Katie, with the Missional Logistics Team, the Care and Feeding Team, and the pastoral staff of Galileo Church