



Vision and Purpose

The Gathering's vision is to create a Christian community that is compelling for new generations of people in St. Louis. Beginning in September 2011, we are establishing CoreGroups, which are small groups that meet weekly to learn together and share life with each other. The goal of the CoreGroup ministry is to create safe and supportive environments to help people grow in authentic relationships with God and others. We will begin with approximately 15-20 groups that will vary in geography and/or affinity (women, men, young adults, etc.). Groups will meet from September 2011 – May 2012.

CoreGroups will be Structured with Flexibility

The year will be broken into small periods of time (4-8 weeks) and ask each group will be encouraged to spend at least one period on each of the following:

- Sermon discussion – We will encourage each group to start by discussing the sermon series on the book of James that will be taking place in September. Additionally, groups may decide to discuss other sermon series throughout the year.
- Book study – We will provide ideas of possible books about faith, life, relationships, spiritual practice, etc. for CoreGroup participants to discuss and study.
- Bible study – We will provide resources for Bible studies to help CoreGroup members learn more about the Bible and its application to our lives.
- Foundations curriculum - We will provide a four-week study guide on Bible, God, Jesus and Church. The study guide will pull together different resources and include discussion questions.
- Five practices curriculum – We will provide a five-week study guide on the five shared practices of The Gathering UMC: Worship, learning, prayer, service, and giving. The study guide will pull together different resources and include discussion questions.
- Church-wide class – Groups will have the option to participate in an already scheduled Gathering class (such as Living Your Strengths, Pray Like a Grown-up, etc.).

We believe breaking the year up like this provides many benefits:

- 1) It gives structure to a nine-month commitment.
- 2) It provides the leader with direction in organizing the year.
- 3) It gives flexibility for the group to determine what works best for them.
- 4) It meets a variety of learning needs.
- 5) It teaches participants different ways of digging deeper in their faith.

Additionally, each group will be strongly encouraged to complete at least one service project together each semester and participate in periodic fellowship activities as a group.

CoreGroups will have Leadership with Support

- Each group will have one main CoreGroup leader who will be responsible for identifying the area of study/discussion, facilitating discussion, and providing leadership for the support leaders.
- In addition to the main CoreGroup leader, each group can identify support leaders, such as a:
 - Host – Provides a location for the group to meet that promotes a safe and supportive environment for discussion.
 - Coordinator – Ensures communication is open and frequent among group members by distributing a contact list and/or reminding the members of meeting times and places.
 - Connector – Helps new group members feel comfortable and welcome by connecting with others in the group and at the church. This may include helping to plan service projects or fellowship events for the groups.
 - Prayer “person” – Be in prayer for the group and individual group members and encourage group members to be in prayer for each other throughout the week by asking for prayer requests and encouraging prayer follow-up.

** Each group may not have each of these support roles filled and there will likely be some overlap.

We believe identifying these support leadership roles will serve multiple purposes:

- 1) It helps develop the next round of CoreGroup and church leaders.
- 2) It identifies a key group of people committed to each group.
- 3) It spreads the leadership responsibilities to reduce burn-out among the main leaders.

CoreGroups are Open with Commitment

- Throughout the year, individuals will be able to sign up at www.gatheringnow.org (via The City, the CoreGroup database) where all of the groups will be listed. We will encourage people to try out one or two groups before committing to one.
- Individuals will be able to join a group at any time, but once they have found the right group and/or attended a group 3+ times, we will ask them to commit to that particular group.
- Once an individual decides to commit to a group, they will be invited to join the group in The City and will then have access to group contact info, prayer requests, etc.
- Leaders are responsible for making sure current participants are prepared for new people to join, welcoming new people to the group, and ensuring that confidentiality is still maintained.
- Once a group has 12 regularly attending members, it will be closed (taken off the website, not available for others to join) for the duration of the semester or until some members choose to leave the group.
- Groups will be formally assessed in December/January to determine if new people are needed or if the group is at a place where dividing into two separate groups might be appropriate.