

Why Have Connect Groups?

The gospel shapes everything we do at Emmanuel.

The Bible begins and ends with the same picture of what God wants: people rightly connected to him, *and* to one another. But from Genesis 3 up to the new creation, our sin messes up both relationships: we're cut off from God *and* divided from those around us.

The gospel is God's story to reconnect both relationships: Jesus died on the cross for us so we can be reunited to God *and* to one another. Now the risen and reigning Lord Jesus is gathering together a loving family who trust him, and he's sending us out with the good news that he came to save us. The church is at the centre of God's plans to impact the world.

The word 'church' can make us think of buildings and institutions, but really it just means a 'gathering'. When the New Testament speaks about churches, it's normally referring to small groups of Christians meeting in people's houses. And that's what our Connect Groups are at Emmanuel; simply a small version of church meeting in a home.

We're not so much a church *with* small groups, as a church *of* small groups. Our Connect Groups are the main place where we 'do' church. And that's why we'd normally expect Church Members to be committed members and attenders at a Connect Group.

Connect Group Aims

Like mini-churches, Connect Groups are places where we implement Emmanuel's vision *to glorify God* as we seek *to reach out, to build up* and *to send out*. Therefore we want our Connect Groups to be:

- a good place **to listen to God together**: each can help the others to study the Bible and draw out the implications.
- a good place **to talk to God together**: each can pray for the others in an informed way.
- a good place **to care for one another**: each can carry the others' burdens and encourage one another in following Jesus.
- a good place **to reach the lost together**: each can play a part in working together to spread the gospel.

That's why we've called these new groups Connect Groups. Because they are the primary place in church life where we connect with one another, and where together we connect what we're learning in the Bible to our everyday lives. They help us to connect with God and grow in that relationship as we listen and talk to Him. And they are places for connecting with non-Christians so that they connect with Jesus too. Our Connect Groups help us to live out these four aims in community together.

Putting Our Aims Into Action

Listening to God together means that the Bible is at the heart of Connect Group life. Our Connect Groups are more than Bible study groups, but they're certainly not less than Bible study groups. We delight in seeing the Word of God convict us and encourage us, teach us and train us, as it shapes our life together. Keeping the Bible central is not just a matter of talking about it, but helping each other to live by it.

Having listened to God, we want to *talk to God together* as well, responding to what he says in repentance and faith. Sometimes Connect Groups may sing together, occasionally we informally share the Lord's Supper together, and we will always support one another by being honest about our needs and praying for each other.

It's vital that we *care for one another* and Connect Groups are our primary pastoral strategy. Not that our Connect Group leaders do all the pastoral care, but rather we all share responsibility for one another. My Connect Group is the Christian family who loves me and where I start to work out my love for others, in everything from practical support (such as helping when someone's ill, listening when someone's burdened, praying for one another) to Christian discipleship. As a family we'll want to share in one's another's lives outside of official meeting times too.

We also want to *reach the lost together* as we present Jesus to our family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Connect Groups can be the best place to pray for non-Christians we know and to encourage one another to keep speaking to them about Jesus. We also seek to stay outward-looking by linking each of our Connect Groups with one of our Mission Partners. But we also see that Connect Groups with a focus on a particular neighbourhood could be a natural place to invite non-Christians to, so they get to know us and, in time, may come to know Jesus ... so we are actually doing evangelism as a group who spend time together with non-Christians.

Connect Groups & 'Big Church'

We want to create as many links as we can between Connect Groups and the larger body of Emmanuel. For example, our midweek groups will usually look at the same passage we've just heard preached on a Sunday so we can apply the Bible more deeply to our lives. We sometimes link the Connect Groups together for our First Priority meetings to pray together. Connect Groups also take it in turns to set up, clear away and 'host' our Sunday services – working together to serve the whole church.

Our Connect Group leaders work under the care and oversight of Emmanuel's Leadership Team. This means that they fully share the church's vision and priorities, and that they will be well trained, resourced and supported throughout. We've chosen our Connect Group leaders as people who will take good care of their mini-churches, and so we trust them to get on with the task and to do it in their own way.

We love our Connect Groups. And we hope you find them to be a source of joy and encouragement as we live together as a church family.

Looking at the four aims of Connect Groups and how these work out in practise, use the boxes below to write down ways that *you* could be more deeply involved in serving and making the most of Connect Groups:



to listen to God together



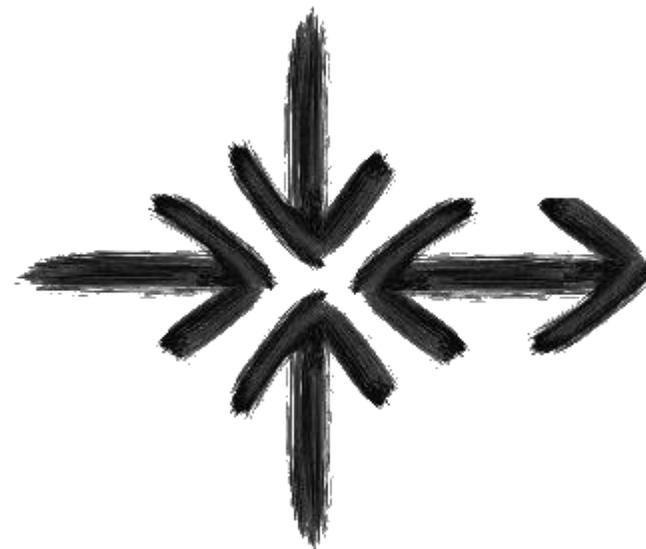
to talk to God together



to care for one another



to reach the lost together



CONNECT GROUPS

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