

2021-2022 HOUSE CHURCH HANDBOOK

THE PURPOSE OF HOUSE CHURCH:

The purpose of the House Church program is to "build up the body"- to build a sense of community and belonging among our adult members. This program is not under the "Education Commission" but the "Fellowship Commission." Thus, House Church is not primarily a "learning time" or a Bible Study time. Yet we want there to be some meaningful content to House Church. We want what we do at House Church to help people interact and begin to know one another. The warmth and joy of being together are to be promoted at all times.

THE STRUCTURE OF HOUSE CHURCH:

On the appointed night of each month, the House Churches meet at a previously determined home of a member of the respective House Churches, or restaurant, or meeting space in the church. For those house churches that do a potluck, each person in the House Church brings a food dish (previously assigned) and these dishes form the meal that takes place followed by the program fashioned from the materials provided (or of their choosing). The meetings should open and close with prayer.

THE FOOD ASSIGNMENTS FOR HOUSE CHURCH:

Food assignments vary with each House Church. Do that which suits your House Church best. (Your group may wish to select a "secretary" for the group who will send out e-mails or reminder cards a week before the upcoming meeting - reminding the members of the group of the date, time, and what food they planned to bring). Typically the monthly hosts are to provide plates, napkins, cups, eating utensils, and beverages.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADING GROUP DISCUSSIONS:

Keep the discussions moving along – but do not be afraid of short silences. Some people react immediately, thinking out loud. Others need time to think things through before speaking. You do not have to follow the material provided if it does not suit your group. If your group bogs down, move on until you find something that generates interest. You are under no obligation to ask every question or use every program. By all means, have fun, get to know one another, and do whatever suits your group the best.

SERVE TOGETHER:

Your House Church group may wish to take on a service project outside of the usual evening gatherings. We encourage you to do so. If you need help with a project idea, contact Maren Sonstegard-Spray or a member of the Outreach Commission. House churches can also serve together in other ways to facilitate fellowship opportunities in the church. **House churches are encouraged to volunteer together to help with the Fellowship Café for a month or provide desserts for Fellowship meals. Please contact the chair of the Fellowship Commission to learn more about these ways to serve.**

WHITE ELEPHANT OPTION:

You may choose to hold a *White Elephant* gift exchange at your December or January gathering. Each person brings a wrapped gift. Set all the gifts in the middle of the room. Create numbered cards for the exact number of people who have brought gifts. As the leader, go around and let people draw one of the numbered cards from a hat. The person with #1 gets to go first. After that person selects one of the gifts and opens it, then #2 has a choice. He/she may select another gift from the pile of unopened gifts or take the gift person #1 selected. If he/she takes the gift from #1, then #1 can go and select another from the

pile. Then person #3 can take one from the pile or either of the first two. If #3 takes person #2's gift, #2 can then go to the pile or take the gift from #1... the swapping can go on and on - and always produces lots of laughter.

PROGRAM MATERIALS:

Since each house church is different, here are a couple of different options for the program portion of each month's gathering:

Track 1: No program at all

Enjoy each other's company. Have a relaxed time of conversation. House church is one of those increasingly rare times to sit with friends old and new, to learn about one another and develop spiritual friendships, and to connect more deeply to the body of Christ.

Track 2: Spiritual Conversations

How is your spiritual life?

Where have you seen God at work in your life?

How have you felt God's presence in your life?

Where are you seeking guidance from the Lord?

What did you receive from God this week?

What of God have you passed on to others?

Can also include group Lectio Divina on a Gospel reading – contact Maren for more information.

Track 3: Story Telling

Use the prompts below to get to know one another on a deeper level. These are adapted from a house church guide from many years ago but it was a popular one so we are bringing it back!

Track 4: Choose Your Adventure!

- Members of the house church can take turns providing a short devotional of their choosing.
- A house church could pick a book or curriculum with topics they find interesting.

October

Getting to Know You

- Share with the group something unique or interesting about your name.
- Have you ever had a nickname? What is it and how did you get it?
- If you had to change your first name, what would you change it to?

Going Deeper- WORSHIP

Meaning: To show respect and love for God, especially listening for God in hopes of something catching hold or being transformed

Bible Verse: Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. (Psalm 100:2 NRSV)

Discussion:

- Describe your favorite kind of worship service.
- What was your most significant worship experience?
- Is there a "right" way to worship God?
- What is one element of a worship service that holds great meaning for you (i.e. prayer,

confession, song, scripture, sermon, offering, benediction), and why?

November

Getting to Know You

- What was your favorite subject in school and why?
- What teacher inspired you the most? How did they?
- What is most memorable about your high school years?

Going Deeper- COMMANDMENTS

Meaning: A divine rule, especially one of the Ten Commandments

Bible Verse: Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Mark 12:28-31, NRSV)

Discussion:

- Jesus said that the two most important commandments are to “love the Lord your God with all of your soul” and to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Do you agree?
- If you could create the 11th commandment, what would it be?

December

Getting to Know You

- How did you find out the truth about Santa?
- What is your favorite family holiday recipe?
- What is your favorite family tradition?

Going Deeper- ADVENT

Meaning: Four weeks before Christmas, observed in preparation and anticipation of the coming of Christ into the world; beginning, e.g., the advent of spring

Bible Verse: Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. (James 5:7 NRSV)

Discussion:

- Advent is a period of waiting for Christ to come again. Are you good at waiting?
- What was the hardest thing you had to wait for? Was it worth the wait?

January

Getting to Know You

- During a day if you had 30 minutes of unexpected free time, how would you spend it?
- What is something you always love doing, even when you are tired or rushed? Why?
- Name something on your bucket list.

Going Deeper- EPIPHANY

Meaning: A Christian festival traditionally observed by the Church on January 6 to celebrate the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus; a sudden insight into something

Bible Verse: On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts. (Matthew 2:11 NRSV)

Discussion:

- Tell me what you know about the Magi.
- The Magi were the first to witness the epiphany of God, but they were not the last. When have

you seen an epiphany of God in the world?

February

Getting to Know You

- What characteristics do you most admire in others?
- If you were to tell one person "thank you for helping me become the person I am today," who would it be and what did they do?

Going Deeper- FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

Meaning: a biblical term that sums up the nine visible attributes of a true Christian life

Bible Verse: By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5: 22-23 NRSV)

Discussion:

- Which fruit of the Spirit do you most want to grow in your own life?

March

Getting to Know You

- Who is your favorite author?
- What book has influenced you the most?
- Would you rather read from an actual book or an iPad, Kindle, etc?

Going Deeper- BIBLE

Meaning: a book of holy writings or sacred scripture of Christianity, consisting of the Old and New Testament

Bible Verse: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105 NRSV)

Discussion:

- The Bible is like a library of different genres and stories. What is your favorite genre or story?
- Which part or genre within the Bible are you most likely to read?
- What are some ways that the Bible guides you in your life?

April

Getting to Know You

- When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- How did you choose your profession?
- If you could master one skill right now that you don't have, what would it be?

Going Deeper- PATIENCE

Meaning: the willingness to wait calmly when faced with a delay

Bible Verse: "...when the way is rough, your patience has a chance to grow. So let it grow, and don't try to squirm out of your problems. For when your patience is finally in full bloom, then you will be ready for anything, strong in character, complete. (James 1:2-4 LB)

Discussion:

- Some say that "patience is a virtue." It is also an of the Fruit of the Spirit. How has patience been rewarded in your life?
- Why is it important to learn patience... to allow your patience to grow?

May

Getting to Know You

- What do you miss the most about being a kid?
- In what ways are you the same as your childhood self?
- What words of wisdom would you pass on to your childhood self?

Going Deeper- PROVIDENCE

Meaning: divine guidance, care, or direction; a continuing involvement with creation in anticipation of future events

Bible Verse: Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! (Luke 12:24 NRSV)

Discussion:

- How have you experienced God's providence or care in your life?
- How is God's providence different from chance or fate?