

Cluster Ministry Fact Sheet

LIFT Renewal Ministries

Just what is a Cluster Group ?

Basically, a Cluster Group is 5 to 12 persons who meet once a week for no more than 75 minutes in order to sharpen and hone each other's discipleship. Clusters are not "sharing groups" per se. Nor are they meant to be group therapy, Bible studies, prayer groups, or work teams. Cluster participants simply help one another discover the answer to two basic questions: "What does my next level of faithfulness with God look like?" and "What must I do next to go there?" Clusters are meant to be relaxed, confidential, and honest (there's no one to impress but ourselves!) Of course, deep friendships—what the Bible calls *koinonia*—do grow out of Cluster Groups . That's how it is with God's love.

Who is "in charge" of cluster groups ?

Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, hence we naturally hope that the Holy Spirit is the one in charge. Having said that, this exciting new ministry at Victorville UMC will be hosted by church members and facilitated by a trained leader. Our vision is that over time a new generation of gifted leaders will be trained and equipped to give their full attention to facilitating and leading Cluster Groups. As the Cluster ministry grows, we envision twice yearly training events where new Cluster Leaders can be prepared and consecrated.

Is this a Bible Study—Should I bring a Bible ?

The short answer is "no, Cluster Groups are not Bible Studies." Nor are they "sharing groups, therapy groups, prayers groups, or work teams." Cluster participants simply help one another discover the answer to two basic questions: "What does my next level of faithfulness with God look like?" and "What must I do next to go there?" It should be remembered, however, that we are a Biblical people, and it is always beneficial to have a Bible with us when gather together. A scripture passage will be read at each Cluster gathering. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

What if I don't have anything to share, or I'm not comfortable sharing ?

No one should ever be expected to share something they're not comfortable sharing. Clusters are meant to reflect the love of Christ our Lord, who patiently abides with each of us and calls us by name to serve in our own unique ways. Persons attending Clusters will benefit from the sharing and insights of others in the group whether they share insights of their own or not. In addition, our prayers, regular attendance, and dedication—even in silence—are a tremendous encouragement to others. Clusters are a tool for individual growth, and should never be used to intimidate or pressure anyone.

Everyone else seems so "deep" in their faith, what if I'm not there yet ?

"Faith" is not an object, but a way of being in the world. Christian faith in the Biblical sense is actually a verb—we are a "faithing" people. Since everyone who undertakes the Christian life is a faithing person, no one's life in faith is intrinsically more or less valuable than anyone else's. It is true that some persons have had more life experiences as Christians than others, but this does not make them more valuable to God. When

Jesus said “let the Children come to me, and do not hinder them” (Matthew 19:14) he demonstrated that faith is not a matter of depth or sophistication—even children can be faithful! In fact, Jesus also said that we ourselves must enter the Kingdom of God “like a child.” (Matthew 18:2) So each person at a Cluster is encouraged to focus not on what they don’t have, but to celebrate and experiment with what they do have!

I’m not comfortable praying out loud—will I be expected to do anything like that ?

Prayer is one of the most deeply personal experiences in the Christian life. In Matthew 6 Jesus warned against praying “aloud on the street corners, in order to be seen by others.” Praying aloud in a group is a servant ministry which comes easier to some than others, and should never be forced on anyone. Jesus looks at the heart which prays, not the words that are said aloud. Should we pray in groups together? YES! But not necessarily aloud. The silent, heartfelt prayers of an upright person may be the most effective prayers in the Kingdom of God. There is no pressure to pray aloud at a Cluster Group meeting.

I was just nominated for the Finance Committee, and I’m going to be taking a Bible Study, and I already volunteer with a homeless ministry in town—will I still have to go to a cluster group ?

The further a person goes toward leadership in the body of Christ, the more essential it is to be rooted and grounded in a solid life of discipleship. That person who has taken on extra duties in the local church or elsewhere in the body of Christ needs the accountability of a Cluster Group more than ever. If we try to go it alone we can make it for awhile, but sooner or later pride, temptation, discouragement, party spirit, or an unhealthy appetite for power will derail us, we’ll come off the tracks. Leaders need to be first and best at honing their discipleship.

We’re already doing too many things; why do we have to do this too ?

A wise person once said that the key to success was not to work harder, but to work smarter. Cluster Groups are a way of “focusing in” on our life in discipleship to Christ. We may find after a time that some of the “too many things” we do are not so beneficial to our life in Christ. We may find that . In fact, most persons who are “too busy” for Clusters soon find that a little time for organizing their faith life yields ten-fold increase in time for other important ministries. No one is sure how it works, but getting organized for discipleship through weekly Cluster Meetings tends to increase, not decrease, our “available” time.

These Clusters seem like “Baby-stuff” to me—I’m ready to have a deeper, more committed Bible study or prayer group.

Clusters are a starting point at Victorville UMC, but by no means exhaust our expression of faithfulness to Christ. Once we have established a pattern of faithful attendance at Cluster Groups, the Lord will lead us quite naturally into Bible studies, prayer, work teams, retreats, etc. Furthermore, Clusters are a great place to meet people with similar interests and unite our efforts. As to the matter of Christian maturity, Paul clearly said that the strongest among us should bear with those who are weaker (Romans 15:1-2) and Jesus said that the greatest of all must be servant of all. (Matthew 20:26) Cluster Groups are designed so that new Christians and mature Christians can sit down for dialogue together. The format has been set so that the least among us can participate fully from the very first. Remember—it’s the heart we bring that is most important.

Cluster Groups are an ideal port of entry into the Victorville UMC community. In years to come more people will come to Victorville UMC through participation in Cluster Groups than through “trying out” the Sunday worship service.

It seems like this Cluster Groups are being pushed at us . . .what if I'm not comfortable with others telling me how to be a Christian ?

Cluster Groups are important for individual spiritual growth, and they are one half of the “priority commitment” which each person in the Victorville UMC community is called to make. Everyone, from the Pastor to the Staff to the Church Leadership to the newest worshipper is encouraged to undertake this commitment. Of course we will ask our leadership to “set the standard through exemplary behavior,” but no one among the worshipping congregation will ever be shown the door or refused communion because they did not attend Cluster meetings.