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Last Letter

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Host Guide

The Last Letter series is a Church-wide immersive experience for the entire church.
Here are the steps:

1. **Large Group:** Pastor John will lead the charge on Sunday mornings, preaching on the book of 1 John.
2. **Small Groups** will form to discuss and go deeper into the text.
3. **Bible Reading Plan** will accompany the series for personal study

Big idea

Bring our entire church together around God's Word and inspire them to be more like Jesus.

Our prayer is for God to work in the following ways:

- Greater participation in the life of the church
- Build new relationships within our church family
- Deepening understanding of God's Word
- Inspired action that results in becoming like Jesus

Weekly Themes

Week 1 – Testify

Week 2 – Light

Week 3 – Advocate

Week 4 – Belong

Week 5 – Remain

Week 6 – Hope

Small Group Steps

Step 1 - Define the Group

- Date
- Time
- Location
- Child-care
- Desserts & Snacks
- Other

Step 2 - Communication

- Let the Pastor of Adult Formation know your plan
- Church-wide Promotion
- Recruiting group members
- Communicate with your group members

Step 3 - Small Group Management

- The small group covenant/group expectations
- Meeting environment
- Playing the Video
- Facilitating the discussion
- Prayer and challenge



Step 1 Define the Group

This is the first step in creating the group. When these details are clearly laid out, you will have a group to invite people to. Here are a few pointers:

- **Pick the best time for you.** Do not get hung up on when others can come, make it work for your schedule.
- **Choosing a location.** During COVID, it is especially important to be a good neighbor by making sure your meeting place is cleaned and prepared for others to come.
- **Child-care is up to you.** Decide ahead of time how you will handle it so there are no surprises for the group. It is ok not to offer it at your home.
- **Food is important.** Arrange to either provide it or ask your group members who is willing to bring food.

Step 2 Communication

This is the second step in creating the group. Consider communication the fuel for your group. When done well, you will build momentum! Here are a few pointers:

- **Communicate with the church staff.** You will receive from us help with promotion, mentoring, troubleshooting, etc.. We are your support network.
- **Communicate with your group.** Texting and email are most reliable and take the least time. Do what works for you! Plan on 2-3 “touches a week.”
 1. A follow-up each week with a recap and thank you.
 2. Remind people mid-week of your upcoming email
 3. The day of, send out a quick note to tell them you’re excited to meet that evening etc.
- **Church-Wide promotion.** We will promote your group! A sign-up will be setup for you and group members will automatically get placed in your CCB group.
- **Church Community Builder.** If you’re not familiar with CCB, we can help. This tool will provide an easy way to administrate your group. Here you’ll be able to send messages and see group member contact information. Log into CCB on our church homepage, at the bottom of the page under “media.”

Step 3 Small Group Management

This is the third step in creating the group. Think of this like directing a symphony. You provide the direction; the group is the talent. In concert, it really sounds great! Here are a few pointers:

- **The “Small Group Covenant.”** Cover this at your first meeting. 90% of group issues arise because of unclear expectations.
- **The meeting environment.** Clean, remove distractions, and consider how others will feel in your space.
- **Set-up a means to play video.** Smart TV’s are ideal, because you can easily stream the video from our church YouTube channel. Don’t let this intimidate you. We will help you get set up if needed!
- **Facilitating the conversation is all about asking questions.** The leader guide will provide you more depth for the questions and give you tips on how to direct the conversation.

Small Group Covenant

ALEXANDRIA COVENANT CHURCH

Date _____

Leaders _____ Ph.# _____

Hosts _____ Ph.# _____

Small groups thrive on participation! The purpose of this covenant is to help you to discuss and clarify your group's goals, expectations, and commitments.

SMALL GROUPS: THEIR PURPOSE

Small Groups exist to promote spiritual maturity and personal growth through meaningful Christian relationships and study of God's Word (Romans 8:29 & Hebrews 10:24, 25). We'll do this by focusing on four primary activities:

SHARE

Each week we'll take time to share what is happening in our lives. At first this sharing will include planned "sharing questions". But after the first few weeks, it will become more informal and personal as we feel more comfortable.

STUDY

Each week we'll study a section from God's Word that relates to the previous weekend's sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life.

SUPPORT

Each week we'll learn how to take care of one another as Christ commanded (John 15:9-13). This care can take many forms such as prayer, encouragement, listening, challenging one another, and meeting real needs.

SEND

Spiritual Growth is fostered not only by what we gain through the support and input of others, but also through service to others. The role each of us fills is important to the health of the church and for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to our community (Ephesians 4:11-16). This means applying God's Word each week.

FIVE MARKS OF A HEALTHY GROUP

For our group to be healthy, we need to...

1. Make becoming like Jesus our number one priority (Ephesians 5:1-2).
2. Accept one another (Romans 15:7).
3. Take care of one another (John 13:34).
4. Treat each other with respect (Ephesians 4:25-5:2).
5. Keep our commitments to the group (Proverbs 20:10).

GUIDELINES & COVENANT

1. **Dates** - We'll meet on _____ nights for _____ weeks. Our final meeting will be on _____.
2. **Time** - We'll arrive between _____ & _____ and begin the meeting at _____. We'll spend approximately _____ minutes socializing, _____ minutes in study/discussion, and _____ minutes in prayer/sharing.
3. **Children** - Group members are responsible to arrange child care for their children.
4. **Study** - Our studies will focus on the same topic covered in the previous Sunday's sermon or an appropriate personal growth topic. Our goal is to learn how to live out our Christianity in everyday life.



- 5. **Prayer** - Commit to praying for one another.
- 6. **Homework & Attendance** - Joining a Small Group requires a commitment to attend each week. Obviously, allowances are made for sickness, vacation, work conflicts, and other special events—but not much more! If we cannot come to a meeting, we will call _____.
- 7. **Desserts/Snacks**
Details:

- 8. **Other**
Details:

We agree together in Christ to honor this covenant.

Names of Group Members:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of support will I receive?

You will not be left on your own. The entire leading/hosting experience does have a learning curve, but it is also carefully planned out and supported by the church. The Pastor of Adult Formation is your contact for any needs you may have.

How much Bible knowledge do I need?

This is the number one question that prevents people from jumping into a leadership role. Simple answer: just be one step ahead of the group. There will always be people who are more and less knowledgeable. Your role doesn't require you to be the expert, just the guide. As a host, you provide the environment for growing by setting up the conversation and directing the time. If you don't have an answer, just say you don't know but would love to find out!

How much training do I need?

The logistics of starting a group, facilitating a discussion, and our church's goals regarding the groups will need to be understood prior to launching. All of these items are included in this training document. Much will be learned while on "on the job" and the Pastor of Adult Formation will be available and eager to answer any questions while you're leading.

How do I facilitate a good discussion?

The goal of a small group host is not to teach a lesson, but to walk the group members through a facilitated discussion of the Bible study. Here are a few rules of thumb when it comes to facilitating a good discussion.

- Only talk 30% of the time. That will help assure that everyone has an opportunity to enter the conversation.
- Know the finish line of the discussion. A good Bible study will end on application. Know where to close the conversation when that time comes.
- Always land on what the Bible says. Be careful of personal opinions or group think when it comes to major issues. Always bring the group back to what the scriptures say about the topic.
- Be okay with saying "I don't know." The group will not expect you to have all of the answers, and it's healthier for the group and the discussion if some lines of conversation are closed until more information can be gathered between meetings.

What should I do about childcare?

There are a few options here to consider. The church will provide childcare Monday-Thursday evenings for onsite meetings. This must be prearranged. Another option is to encourage the group to find their own solution. While babysitters have a cost, there is great value in being in the Word with other couples. You could also bring in a sitter. This is more cost effective for the group.

How do I set up a great group environment?

Ask yourself these questions as you prepare to host: • Is my house clean and picked up by meeting time? • Do I have enough comfortable chairs? • Do I have enough lighting? • Is my house free of pet odors? • Are my children interrupting the group? Keep in mind that it is the responsibility of the host to either provide or line up snacks/refreshments for the evening. Great environments have food.

What should I do if someone comes to me with a problem?

As a host, you will be seen as a safe person to confide in. Keep these four questions in mind if/when someone approaches you with a personal problem: 1) How long has this been going on (when did it first occur)? 2) Who else knows? Have you talked to someone else about it? How long ago? What was their response? 3) Have you received any advice or counsel on how to deal with this? What have those you've talked to said to do? Have you sought any

other help or resources? 4) What do you want to do from here? What might be your next step? Would you like me to find other resources (don't call for them, give them names/numbers to call. Connecting them with a pastor at Alexandria Covenant is completely appropriate and encouraged.)

How do I approach different personalities within the group?

Fact: wherever there are people, there will be tensions to manage and problems to solve. Don't let this scare you and know it is normal. Directing group involvement is more of an art than a science. There will be personality quirks that create some tension and require the host to manage. Problems that need solving are: people who constantly dominate the conversation, those who cut people off while talking, those that disrespect others with their comments, and people who bring up the same unsolvable problem each week. You will have pastor support, just ask!

What should I do to address problems?

First, pray. Pray for your heart, the heart of the person causing a problem, and for wisdom to address it. Second, avoid calling the person out in front of the group. Third, be positive. If they're in your group, they came because they want to grow too. Get on their side about that and help them to see how their behavior may be hindering them and others from growth. Refer to the group covenant. Fourth, ALWAYS reach out to the Pastor of Adult Formation regarding an issue. Support is freely given. Know you're not on an island.

How do I increase group participation?

Keep in mind you are not responsible for the spiritual growth of others. You are responsible to create environments for growth to happen. Some people will just choose not to participate. Don't be anxious about this. You can encourage participation with a few small group tactics. 1) When asking question, silence is your friend. Be OK with letting the question hang out there. Some people need more time to process it before responding. 2) Say something like, "Can someone who has not spoken yet answer this question _____?" 3) Share vulnerably. When you share personal examples from your life, it will encourage others in the group to do so as well. 4) Rely on 1-2 others you know in the group. Ahead of time, ask them to appropriately speak up if the conversation stalls.

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