



Connect Group Leader's Manual

As a church, we place great value on the importance of both connect groups and connect group leaders. Here you will find the manual we use to equip connect group leaders to facilitate a healthy and successful connect group.

INTRODUCTION: THE TRAINING PROCESS

Welcome to the exciting journey of training to be a Connect Group Leader! We are committed to helping you to become an effective leader. This training process is designed to inspire you with the heartbeat and purpose of Hillsong Connect Groups as well as equip you with the skills you need to lead a life-changing group.

While it is important to complete all components of this manual, the timing is flexible according to your needs. You can start at any time and go at your own pace!

SESSION 1: THE HEART OF CONNECT GROUPS

Welcome to your first training session! This session is foundational to your preparation as a Connect Group leader. At the beginning of your training journey we want you to catch the heart and vision of our Connect Groups. This session is all about the why behind what we do!

1. IN THE EARLY CHURCH...

Read Jesus' last command in Matthew 28:18-20, then Acts 2:46, Acts 5:42 and Acts 20:20.
How did disciple-making occur in the early church?

SESSION 2: YOU THE LEADER

Jesus is sitting on a beach eating fish over a BBQ and talking with his close friends. He discusses their futures: what they hope for and the things they fear (See John 21). It is a familiar scene for the band of disciples. Together they had grown to understand the truths of the kingdom, learnt to love one another, been equipped to serve and grown closer to Jesus.

This lies at the core of Connect Group leadership. As leaders, this is what we are called to do! Have you learnt some things about God you can share with others? Can you befriend and love people and connect them together in a circle of friendship? Can you encourage someone when they are down? Are you able to believe in someone's potential? Then you can lead a Connect Group!

A ROLE DESCRIPTION...

As a Connect Group leader, you are:

1. Connecting people in biblical community, by: Creating a warm, "open door environment" where all people on any stage of the journey are welcomed. Taking responsibility to ensure new people find connection in your group or within another part of the church family. Referring serious needs to our pastors and team leaders.
2. Equipping people so that they develop Christ-likeness, by: Facilitating spiritual growth through encouragement and loving accountability. Praying for and with the people in your Connect Group. Helping people apply Bible teachings to daily living (2 Timothy 3:16).
3. Empowering people to serve, by:
Helping them serve in the life of the church.
Helping them to discover their gifting and call.
Helping them to impact and influence in every sphere of life.

For example, have you been able to:

Invite someone to church or have coffee with a new friend?
Pray with someone and share what God means to you?
Encourage someone to serve for the first time?

Identify ways that you are already leading others to connect, equip and serve:

WHAT A CONNECT GROUP LEADER LOOKS LIKE...

With the privilege of leadership comes responsibility. In his pastoral letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul lists some standards for leadership. Read them in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Leading a Connect Group is a key role within Hillsong Church.

Our Senior Pastor Brian says, “Leadership is example, it’s giving people something to follow.”

A Connect Group leader is:

1. Passionate about God and people
2. A person of character and integrity
3. Committed to personal spiritual growth and leadership development
4. Supportive of the leadership and vision of the church by prioritizing involvement in relevant church activities wherever possible.

This includes:

- o Attending a weekend service and serving in a weekend service
- o Attending combined connect groups/leadership team nights
- o Be supportive of the pattern of teaching at Hillsong Church; for example have a spirit of generosity, the Holy Spirit (see our www.hillsong.com – about us – what we believe)

Read through the list above. What are your strengths? Are there any areas you can mark for improvement?

WHAT A CONNECT GROUP LEADER DOES...

Leading a Connect Group requires our time and effort. As Paul says, to this end we labour - not alone - but with the “life and energy of the Holy Spirit who powerfully works in us” (Colossians 1:29,30)! The rewards of leading a Connect Group are fulfilling and eternal. There is nothing to compare with seeing others grow closer to God. Paul asks us, “What is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we glory in when Jesus comes? Is it not you?” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20). Above all else, people are our glory and joy!

A Connect Group leader:

1. Cares and prays for the people of their group
2. Is accountable for the progress of their group (e.g.: via regular reports to zone leaders)
3. Runs an inspiring and encouraging connect group meeting
4. Attends combined midweeks and is committed to being disciplined themselves
5. Takes responsibility for growing their connect group and raising new connect group leaders. This includes recommending people for potential connect group leader training
6. Facilitates social activities that encourages their group to connect with each other.
7. Gathers their whole Connect Group around all whole Church Events eg Sunday services, combined midweeks and leadership training nights. The group can sit together, share the experience and reflect afterwards on how this helped them grow as a Christian and a leader.
8. Inspires people to contribute to our church outreach giving.

ACTIVITY:

Discuss your answers to the questions in this session with your Input Leader. Share potential strengths and any fears or concerns you may have in seeking to lead a connect group.

SESSION 3: A MEETING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).

Think of a Connect Group-type meeting that you really enjoyed. What made it encouraging or helpful - so that you were looking forward to the next time you'd gather?

In starting Hillsong Church, Pastor Brian aimed to build a church he wanted to go to. Let's aim to lead a Connect Group meeting we want to go to!

1. THE UNSEEN ELEMENT...

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matthew 18:20). It is unseen, yet you know when it's there and when it's not. It's invisible yet it is perhaps the most powerful element of a meeting. It is atmosphere.

A positive atmosphere full of faith, hope and love inspires people to grow, facilitates healthy relationship-building and importantly allows the Holy Spirit to work. The goal is to reproduce the atmosphere and spirit of our weekend services in your own home. There should be a culture of encouragement, blessing and unity. Your meeting reflects the heart and vision of Hillsong Church! As a leader it is your role to set the tone and culture of your group. Atmosphere does not just happen!

How can you create an effective atmosphere that builds others up? Consider the location of your group, your preparation for the meeting and the example you can set as a leader:

2. THE MEETING PLAN...

A typical Connect Group meeting includes:

Start and Finish

Connect group meetings last 90 minutes. Please respect people's time by starting and finishing the meeting promptly. If some want to linger longer, make sure you officially close the meeting so that remaining members are free to leave.

Time to Connect

Allow approximately 20-30 minutes for welcoming and introductions. This time is essential. Also food always helps socially so empower people to contribute! Be a good host and try to ensure someone connects with every member of your group. You know you have a healthy Connect Group when you have to curb conversations to begin the study!

Study Together

Our Connect Groups all follow the same Bible study based upon what is being spoken from platform in our Sunday services. This means that the whole church is moving forward in one direction even if we do not all attend the same service.

Prayer and Spiritual Gifts

In each Connect Group meeting, pray for each other's needs, our church vision and leadership as well as anything coming up in the life of our church. Prayer points are included on the study as a guide. This is also an opportunity to encourage others prophetically, always ensuring that our words encourage and build up. Try different combinations in prayer to add variety and help new prayers. For example, pray in pairs or small groups as well as praying corporately.

Nation Builders: Missions Giving

We are passionate about reaching beyond the four walls of our church into the wider community and the world. In time we may incorporate mission giving to fund various outreaches and ministries. This segment is an essential time for us to focus on and catch the vision of these exciting endeavours! Our giving and prayers make a difference!

Church Events

Occasionally Connect Groups gather together around our special church events such as Combined Midweek Gatherings, and in time Sisterhood and Prayer Nights. Our Connect groups are not individual islands; they are clearly aligned around the ongoing vision of our whole Church. Your leader will let you know throughout the year when these special nights occur. When they are scheduled, aim to sit together and create opportunity for fellowship in your group in the whole church setting. Remember to report attendance as if this was your normal Connect Group meeting.

3. LEADING THE STUDY:

The study time provides opportunity to discuss what we have learnt in weekend services, ask questions and reflect on how we can apply biblical truth to our lives. The early church leader James wrote: Do not just read what the Word says; do it! (from James 1:23-25).

(You can download each week's study from www.myhillsonline.com/la)

Carefully prepare! Look up the scriptures. Answer the questions yourself first. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Be selective in your use of the discussion questions. If people are sharing from their hearts and the discussion is fruitful, do not feel locked into completing every question. Encourage people to read from their Bibles. Model good use of your Bible (even through YouVersion). Conclude the study with a challenge or an emphasis is on how we can apply what we have learnt to our lives.

4. GROUP DYNAMICS:

Your Connect Group may be made up of people of all backgrounds, nationalities, and spiritual maturity. You will be sure to meet ‘Shy Sally’ and ‘Talkative Tom’! You may have new Christians and seasoned theologians!

Ask open-ended questions to encourage full participation. Avoid doing all the talking! A good guideline is the ‘30-70’ rule. i.e. Approximately 70% of the speaking should be from members and 30% from the leader. Keep the discussion positive and discourage a critical spirit amongst your group. Carefully lead the conversation back to the topic when tangents occur.

Where sensitive issues or complex questions arise in your group, follow up one-on-one after the meeting. Remember to ask for advice from your leader if you encounter difficulty leading your group.

5. NATION BUILDERS: MISSIONS GIVING, CHURCH PLANTING & EVANGELISM...

“I will bless you... and you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2)

We are heirs to this amazing promise given to Abraham hundreds of years ago. Abundant generosity not only leads to blessing in our own lives but to the lives of people around the globe. Get excited about the opportunity to share in this promise!

In time we will incorporate Nation Builder’s giving as part of our Connect Groups.

The aim of this short segment is to present the vision of Nation Builders to your group and inspire them to give. People give to vision! When we get to this stage in Connect Groups please prepare for a few minutes familiarizing yourself with the Nation Builders focus of the month and make sure to have a few giving envelopes on hand (you can grab some at a service on the Sunday prior). Please be diligent with these practical details – many people choose to give using their credit cards even in Connect Group so it is important that you have the envelopes available.

Setting a Faith Goal:

One of the best ways to inspire Connect Group giving is to set a faith goal at the start of the year - by:

1. Sharing our vision and strategy.
2. Read a scripture to show the biblical mandate of missions and to build faith.
3. Be passionate about the vision of our Nation Builders giving – people give to vision.

Carefully prepare! Look up the scriptures. Answer the questions yourself first. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Be selective in your use of the discussion questions. If people are sharing from their hearts and the discussion is fruitful, do not feel locked into completing every question.

Encourage people to read from their Bibles. Model good use of your Bible. Conclude the study with a challenge or an emphasis is on how we can apply what we have learnt to our lives.

6. 'PEOPLE COUNTING'...

The shepherd knew when one sheep was missing from his fold of 100 (Luke 15:4). As one pastor said, "We count people because people count!" It is important that we are faithful with those who have been entrusted to us. Every person matters to God. Every number represents a person!

Our efficient web-based reporting system www.MyHillsong.com will help you manage & lead the people in your connect group. Using this tool we can monitor the health of our groups by tracking attendance, following up our members pastorally and maintaining accurate contact details and offerings.

TO USE CONNECT GROUP REPORTING:

Log onto www.myhillsong.com

Go to My Menu

Click on 'My Connect Group', then under the Attendance tab, enter attendance, mission giving and update any contact details.

ACTIVITY:

Plan the prayer and mission segment of the meeting.

Sometime after Connect Group discuss with your leader:

How did you go?

What worked and what didn't work?

Any areas of improvement?

Ask any questions of your leader regarding the meeting report.

SESSION 4: CONNECT GROUPS WHO CARE

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be (1 Peter 5:2, NIV).

In the rural communities of the first century, shepherds were a common sight. Traditionally good shepherds were those who knew their sheep by name, who protected them from danger, led them to green pastures where they could feed and grow and who were willing to even lay their life down for them. This describes the heart of Jesus for us (John 10:11-13).

Like a shepherd who cares for the sheep, a Connect Group leader takes responsibility for the health and welfare of each person in the group. It goes beyond just a quick “how are you?” to creating a sense of family where people are genuinely loved and cared for.

1. A FAMILY WITHIN THE FAMILY

God sets the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6). He knows we need a loving group of people who know our name and understand how we really are. Even though our whole church is a family, it is through Connect Groups that we can see the church family functioning in relationships of genuine love and practical care. As our church gets bigger we also need to get ‘smaller’.

In our Connect Groups we celebrate personal milestones and achievements; we support each other through tough times, we believe in each other's potential and show loyalty by keeping confidence when people trust us enough to share.

How can we care for people in our Connect Groups in practical ways?

#You can see the birthdays of the members of your connect group on MyHillsong.com

2. A BRIDGE TO SPECIALIZED CARE:

There will be situations in people's lives that require more support than you are personally able to give them. At such times the Connect Group leader acts as a bridge between members and other resources in the church.

Pastoral Care Team

Our Pastoral Care team are available to assist you with professional counseling, crisis care and emergency relief. Contact them in times of major or long term sickness, marriage difficulties, hospital stays, safety issues, loss of employment or a death in the family.

If you are unsure of what to do, do not hesitate to ask! Your Pastors and team leaders can all advise if you are unsure. Also, remember that Pastoral Care are available to you personally if you need someone to talk to in confidence.

ACTIVITY:

Organise a social gathering for your connect group or take the lead in arranging practical support, such as meals, for someone who is sick.

OUR MISSION AND STRATEGY:

Just as in the early church, regular small group gatherings in homes are central to the life of Hillsong Church. Connect Groups are one the key strategies we use to fulfill our mission statement:

To reach and influence the world by building a large Christ-centered, Bible-based Church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and influence in every sphere of life. This mission is outworked through our campuses, a citywide network of Connect Groups, contributing ministries and extension services.

It is primarily through Connect Groups that we connect and empower people to ‘lead and influence in every sphere of life’. They are central to the journey of discovery at Hillsong Church! We want to see everyone in our church connect to biblical community, be equipped to be a follower of Christ and serve others in love.

Therefore Connect Groups are a key mid-week priority just as our weekend services remain the priority within the life of our church.

THE ESSENCE OF CONNECT GROUPS:

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

Paul is writing to the church at Thessalonica. Describe the relationships within the Thessalonian church.

Take a few moments to describe an environment where healthy spiritual and personal growth can occur. What should Connect Groups be like?

In our church, healthy Connect Groups aim to fulfill the following purposes:

Connect
Equip
Serve

CONNECT:

Think back to your first few weeks in our church.
How did you connect with people on a personal level?

It is easy to feel alone in a crowd. Connect groups are an open door into the life of our church family. This is how we become as Pastor Brian says, “a small church with lots of people”. When you are in a connect group, you experience the love and strength of biblical community.

EQUIP:

Imagine someone you can call when you’re discouraged, someone to pray with when you are doubting and someone who can teach you more about what God is like! ...A loving community of people who notice when you are away, gently sharpen you when you need it and who help you share your faith with others. Connect Groups are the place you can equipped to become more like Jesus and to live a faith-filled life. We want to see you grow, flourish and become all that God has called you to be!

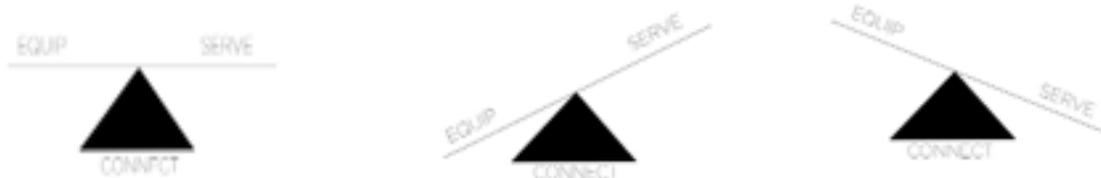
SERVE:

We believe that every person is created with God-given potential to make a difference in the world. Connect Groups help you realise your spiritual gifts and challenge you to use them in serving others. Here is a place where there are like-minded people who believe in you. This is how leaders are developed!

A Balanced Connect Group:

These three functions: connect, equip and serve are all essential in the life of a Connect Group. “Connect” is our primary goal. Our first priority is to make sure everyone in our church is connected and cared for. People don’t care what you know; they want to know that you care!

It is through a foundation of genuine connection that equipping and serving can occur. Like a seesaw these three priorities need to be kept in balance so there is opportunity to both give and receive. As a leader, you will need to be responsive to different seasons and the unique needs of the members who make up your group. For example, at times there needs to be an emphasis on inspiring people to serve (eg. at conferences), and at other times people need time to recharge and regroup. Or in another situation, a group of mature Christians who are highly involved in church life will have very different needs to a group of teenagers who recently came to Christ. All groups need to connect, but an effective leader knows when to equip people and when to inspire them to serve.



What may be the outcome of a group that becomes too focused on connection, but not on equipping? Or too focused on service, but not on connection?

CAN YOU SEE IT?

Meet Sam:

Sam has been coming regularly to church for six months. His spiritual journey has been a rollercoaster ride having been raised in a church home but wandering away from God in his early twenties. Now approaching mid-life, he is searching for some answers. He attends the 11am service, and has seen a few familiar faces here and there but has yet to really get to know anyone. Facing pressure at work about his recently renewed faith and unsure of his future, he has lots of questions about issues like prayer and guidance – especially in regard to his family. He would love to contribute more to church-life but is unsure about where he fits in. But mostly he wonders if God notices...

Sam and many others in our church are the reason for Connect Groups! We are passionate about the vision to see a strong citywide network of connect groups that reflect the heart and nature of God. It is great to have you join us in seeing this vision fulfilled. Can you see it?

*A church so compassionate
that people are drawn from impossible situations
into a loving and friendly circle of hope...
A church so committed
to raising, training and empowering a leadership generation
to reap the end-time harvest
that all its ministries are consumed with this goal...*

ACTIVITY

Discuss the heart of Connect Groups with your Zone Leader. How well have you caught the heartbeat and vision of Connect Groups?

SESSION 5: READY, SET, GO!

Starting a Connect Group is one of the most practical & effective ways to actively build the church. Now that you have come this far, are you ready to start a new group?

Readiness Checklist	Yes	In Progress	No
Are you growing in your walk with God?			
Do you carry the heart and spirit of Hillsong Church?			
Have you prioritized involvement in key church activities?			
Have you lead a study?			
Are you willing to arrange for your connect group to meet at a church service, combined Midweek, or other church gathering?			
Are you serving on a volunteer team?			
Have you signed a privacy permission form?			
Have you read and understood the Connect Group Training Manual?			
Are you ready to start leading a Connect Group?			

BEGINNINGS...

How do new groups start?

Listed below are 8 different ways that you can connect new people into your group.

Someone comes and asks if they can join your connect group
 Someone comes and asks a member of your group if they can join your group
 You meet someone and invite them to your connect group
 One of your connect group meets someone and invites them to join your group
 You are introduced to someone in the Welcome Lounge who is interested in joining a connect group
 A person fills in a card saying they want to join a connect group. The card goes to a call-team member. Once they have contacted the new person after three attempts, the call team member identifies your connect group as the best fit. The call team member calls or e-mails you so that you can then call the new person and invite them to your group. Once you have made contact with the new person they meet you and the rest of your connect group.
 Someone finds your connect group details from our online search tool and asks to join your group
 Pray and wait for people to supernaturally turn up at your connect group

By far the most effective way to find people for your group is face-to-face connection. Invite the people you meet in Church, serve in the church courtyard, on the information team, or join a connections team. These are by far the best ways to build your Connect Group!

Our Courtyard and Main Foyer are the best places at our weekend services to meet people who are interested in finding a Connect Group. Our Connect Group teams would love to have you serve in the Courtyard or Connections Tea with them – simply visit the Information Desk and offer to be part of the Connect Group Team, or contact your Zone Leader.

Our online search tool and our MyHillsong allocation systems are fantastic, but they are a back –up to the culture we are intentionally creating of meeting people face-to-face and inviting them to your group.

THE HILLSONG ALLOCATION SYSTEM:

We want to help newcomers find a Connect Group as quickly and easily as possible! Our new online search system enables interested people to search for potential connect groups at www.myhillsong.com. Any person with a MyHillsong account can search through a list of all of our connect groups and contact you directly.

There is also a Connections team that helps new people get connected into groups. A new allocation occurs when a person submits a Decision Card during weekend services. The team then allocates them to your group and informs you via email or phone. Their name will also appear on your list at www.myhillsong.com.

YOUR PERMISSION:

In order to provide easy accessibility, we need to provide people with the contact details of available connect groups. With your permission, we will make this information available through www.MyHillsong.com, a private and secure website for the people of our church.

Any new person with a MyHillsong account or our Connect Group Connections team will be able to access your details and locate your group. The search function will be linked to Google maps, so people will be able to find directions to the suburb and street where your group meets. (We have chosen not to provide the actual house number or address for privacy reasons. Any new person coming along will still need to call or e-mail you in advance before coming along to your connect group).

Privacy legislation means that we need your written permission to do this. Please fill out the form on the following pages and turn in to your zone leader once it is completed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your zone leader one of the team leaders. A full copy of our privacy policy can be viewed at www.hillsong.com/privacy.

THE FIRST CONNECTION:

Let's make potential members feel welcome by responding promptly to a new allocation or an expression of interest! If you have not yet met them face to face, it is a good idea to arrange to meet them after a weekend service and get to know them briefly. Why not take them out for coffee? They are more likely to come to your group if they have met you first. Be warm and encouraging, but also allow them the freedom to check out other Connect Groups if they do not feel comfortable in yours. Be kingdom minded and help them find their place.

A NETWORK OF SUPPORT:

We are committed to seeing you succeed as a leader and helping you to build a healthy connect group. These people are available to help you:

- Your Zone Leader
- Your Weekend Team Leader

ACTIVITY

Meet with Input Connect Group Leader to discuss your progress and readiness for leadership using the Readiness checklist.

CONNECT GROUP DETAILS PERMISSION FORM

Please complete and hand to your Zone Leader prior to starting your Connect Group.

I _____, give my permission for Hillsong Church to use the following details for the benefit of connecting potential new people into my connect group.

I am aware that these details will be disclosed on www.MyHillsong.com and will be used by team members to connect people into my group.

Please complete the following details:

- Phone Number: _____
- Email: _____
- Street Name: _____
- City: _____
- Day of week we meet: _____
- Time we meet as a connect: _____
- Four words that describe my Connect Group (E.g. male-only, young adults, creative arts, relaxed):

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

SESSION 6: CONNECT GROUPS FOR EVERYONE

The vision of our church is for every person to find a sense of home. In time we have a variety of connect groups that cater to different age groups and geographic areas; but these categories are not bound by hard and fast rules. Relationships develop organically and do not always fit in neat categories. The priority is that every person finds a place where they belong at Hillsong Church!

Generally we pastor people by service, geographic area and age-groups. We encourage people to attend connect groups that relate directly to their age-group, primary service (the service that you serve in), or the area in which they live or work. This helps to facilitate relationships, as people are more likely to cross paths naturally and regularly. However if you have strong relationships with people from another service, area or age- group, there is always freedom to move beyond this structure.

Each of our categories are uniquely designed to serve the needs of the people in them.

For Adult Connect Groups with children:

- Start and finish at a time that is attractive to families: E.g. 6.30pm – 8.00pm or 7.00pm – 8.30pm.
- Ensure the host's home is left clean and tidy and children honor the home.
- Share a 'pot-luck' dinner together where everybody brings a plate of food. This gives families the option of coming straight from work and allows for a reasonable bedtime.
- Prepare a program for the children, so they look forward to connect group. Allocate a leader to organize a roster and design activities: game, craft, children's study questions, DVD etc.
- Include the children in your connect group by getting to know their names and who they belong to.
- Plan social events with the children in mind to build relationships with the families e.g. brunch at the beach, meet at a local park

ACTIVITY

1. Meet with your Zone Leader for final approval and to plan for beginning your group.
2. Complete Contact Details Permission form and hand to Zone Leader.
3. Brainstorm ways of attracting new members to your group with your Zone Leader. Ask them to show you how to add a new person on www.myhillsong.com. Follow up someone who has been allocated to you.