Welcome to week 1 of the Spring semester of Growth Groups! Your main objective for this meeting is not to cover a lot of content or sermon discussion, but to simply get to know one another or reacquainted with your group. **Please refer to the Leader Resource called “The First Night of Groups” which can be accessed here**: <https://www.churchatbergen.org/group-leader-resources>. That will explain the importance of the first group meeting. This guide you are reading now is meant to give you a detailed plan to follow.

**GETTING TO KNOW YOU** (I encourage you to come up with other ways to get to know each other)

*This portion of the guide is intended to “break the ice” and gently walk into discussion. This is how you will begin each meeting.*

**Give a “2-minute warning” before having them sit down. After they take their seats SAY,** “Hello everyone, welcome to our Growth Group. I would like to personally express that we are so grateful to God for each and every one of you being here. We hope and pray this group will be a place where you can grow in your relationship with Jesus, as well as build friendships here that will last. That is why these groups are called “*Growth* Groups.” These groups are the place where friends help friends follow Jesus. Before we discuss anything else, we are going to spend the majority of our time getting to know each other. So, why don’t we each go around and say the following things:

1. Your first and last name
2. Where you live
3. How long you have been coming to Church at Bergen
4. What you do for work
5. Answer one of the following questions: **1)** If you moved to Sesame Street, who would you want your neighbor to be? Why? **2)** What kind of animal best represents you? Explain.

**SETTING EXPECTATIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS**

**After everyone finishes answering the questions SAY,** “We just finished our icebreaker. We will always begin our meetings like that in order to ease into our discussions, especially to help those of you who are new get more comfortable. After the icebreaker, we will usually dive right into discussing the sermon for that week. This semester we will be going through the book of 2 Peter in order to build on what we learned from 1 Peter. The following weeks we will spend much more time discussing the sermons, since this week is more about getting to know each other. Before we talk briefly about the sermon, let’s just go over a couple of expectations about our discussions:

1. What’s said in the group, stays in the group. Although it will take time for us to grow in trust and comfortability, we should all expect each other to keep this group a confidential and safe group for you to share your thoughts and heart.
2. Seek to understand before you seek to be understood. Before you respond to something someone says, make sure that you totally understand them before you seek to make yourself understood.
3. Be more interested in what other people have to say, than what you have to say. This does not mean that what you say is unimportant. It only means that when someone is talking, our main focus should be listening carefully to what they say, rather than thinking about what we want to say. This encourages thoughtful dialogue, rather than a smattering of thoughts.

**DISCUSSING THE SERMON** *(only if there is time!)*

**After people have heard the discussion expectations SAY,** “Let’s briefly discuss some of the things from the sermon. The main passage of the sermon was from **Romans 6:1-4**. Let’s turn in our Bibles there. Would someone be willing to read it for us?”

**After a volunteer reads the passage SAY,** “Pastor Mike preached on the topic of baptism because we are preparing for our annual baptism service in June. The first question about this topic is…

1. For those of you who have seen a baptism church service, what was that experience like?
2. If you have been baptized before, what did it personally mean to you?
3. Look at Paul’s question in verse one. How would you put that question in your own words?
4. Paul links our baptism with a life that resists sin. What seems to be the connection? In other words, how does our baptism serve as a deterrent from a life that disregards living for Christ? Or, what is symbolized in baptism that would lead to holy living?

**SETTING GROUP EXPECTATIONS** (go over them yourself or play the video)

**Before you conclude the night with praying together you will need to talk about broader expectations. You have the option to either go over the expectations yourself or simply play the video of me going over them. SAY,** “Before we end the night praying together it is important that we take some time to go over expectations for this semester.”

* Expectation #1: *“Show up on time, every time.”* If you end up deciding to commit to this group, one of the ways in which we can all get the best experience out of it is for each of us to be here as much as possible, except for emergencies. Also, for flow and smoothness of the meetings, being on time is always helpful. **The last Wednesday of each month we gather at Worship and Prayer instead of the normal time and location.** If you can’t make a meeting or you are going to be late just give me or one of the other leaders a heads up.
* Expectation #2: *“Participate with humility and authenticity.”* The best groups are those where the leader doesn’t have to say much because everyone is engaging with each other. Humility is basically more concerned about others than yourself. Authenticity is basically interacting with everyone in the group without a mask. While it will take time for us to grow in this, eventually it is expected that we all participate in this way.
* Expectation #3: *“Be patient with the process of friendship.”* Growth Groups are the place where friends help friends follow Jesus. Friendship takes time, so we all need to be patient with each other. The first couple of weeks may be uncomfortable for some of us but have patience and faith that we will grow in this together.

(Be sure to let people ask any questions about anything at all that was covered)

**PRAYER**

**Always end your meetings with prayer and be sure to plan this into your time. SAY,** “The most important thing we can do together as a group is pray. Let’s just all admit that we can grow in this area, but we are going to grow together. You do not need to pray fancy, eloquent prayers, just pray with authenticity. We are going to pray for a few things. Please don’t feel pressured to pray, but we are all encouraged to pray. (You may want to take a few minutes to pray for each one of these for 2-3 minutes then move to the next one)

1. Pray for God to help us grow in our love for Jesus and for each other.
2. Pray for God to help us grow in courage in our love for those outside this group.
3. Pray for each of us to experience spiritual growth in our walk with Jesus.