

Associated Canadian Theological Schools of Trinity Western University

Graduate Course Syllabus

Course Number: PTH 508 OL

Course Name: Small Group Ministry

Semester and Year: Fall 2022

Instructor: Kevin O'Coin, DMin, Associate Director of Enrolment

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Pre-requisites: None

Semester Hours: 3

Course Dates: August 29 – October 22, 2022

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10 am to 12pm; at other times by appointment.

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Course Description

This course will look at issues related to leading a small group ministry. The issues to be considered will be: biblical perspective of small groups, definition of small groups, process of building relationships related to small group dynamics, roles and personalities of members of a small group, small group ministry development, leadership, group dynamics, organization of a small group ministry, and leadership development.

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Objectives

This course will help students:

- formulate a personal theology of community with special attention given to small groups,

- evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of various approaches to small group ministry for their church context,
- strengthen skills for leading small groups and small group ministries,
- assess the effectiveness of their church's small group ministry and propose recommendations for making it stronger, and
- design a training plan for small group leaders

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Course Learning Outcomes

Knowledge and its Application

- Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of small group ministry.
- Apply knowledge about small group ministry to solve group problems.
- Identify and interpret new ideas and research related to small group ministry.

Cognitive Complexity

- Engage in academic research, writing, and communication as skilled practitioners who think critically and deeply about issues related to group dynamics.
- Undertake inquiry and analysis to solve problems with a high degree of innovation, divergent thinking and risk taking.
- Engage in thinking that bridges multiple disciplines.
- Integrate ideas and experiences in a way that generates novel insights related to small group ministry.

Inter- and Intra-personal Wellness

- Appreciate the role of small group communities in wellness.
- Employ skills that address abuses of power and unhealthy conflict in small group settings.
- Demonstrate increased professional capacity and autonomy as small group leaders who effectively manage group dynamics in ways that strengthen individuals and the small groups of which they are a part.
- Exhibit superior organizational and time management skills.
- Demonstrate academic and personal integrity.

Aesthetic Expression and Interpretation

- Consider and practice creative engagement and interdisciplinary thinking.
- Demonstrate the ability to engage in a dynamic educational environment within which intellectual and imaginative products are brought into relation with the most pressing human issues of our time.

Social Responsibility and Global Engagement

- Analyze, appraise, and evaluate insights about small group ministry in a social context.
- Develop the ability to become socially responsive agents with a commitment to understanding global issues and helping their small group members do the same.

Spiritual Formation

- Cultivate a growing relationship with God that increasingly manifests itself in godly character, loving relationships, and missional living.
- Demonstrate greater understanding of and active participation in God’s work in the world.
- Utilize spiritual practices to deepen love for God and increase ministry effectiveness.
- Exemplify a Christian ethic in pursuit of truth, reconciliation, compassion, and hope.

Leadership

- Demonstrate a growing capacity in the four growth factors that facilitate small group growth: prayer, reaching out people of other faiths/no faith, caring for one another, and empowering group members to use their gifts in living out their God-given calling.
- Appreciate that small groups exist in a larger small group system that influences the overall health and growth potential of the small group ministry.
- Prepare well for leading a small group meeting by growing in key leadership practices and engaging in pre-work that sets the stage for a dynamic small group meeting.
- Employ group facilitation skills that promote open and focused discussion that helps group members grow in their understanding and application of biblical truths and in their relationships with one another.
- Utilize shepherding skills that help group members grow personally and in their relationships with others.
- Foster missional thinking and actions that move individuals and the small group itself into loving engagement with people of other faiths/no faith.

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Course Textbooks

Atkinson, Harley T. *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2018. 356 pgs. (Omit chapters 6 and 8)

Boren, Scott M. *Missional Small Groups: Becoming a Community that Makes a Difference in the World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2010. 186 pages.

Hartwig, Ryan T., Courtney W. Davis and Jason A. Sniff. *Leading Small Groups that Thrive: Five Shifts to Take Your Group to the Next Level*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020. 272 pgs.

Hook, Jan Paul, Joshua N. Hook and Don E. Davis. *Helping Groups Heal: Leading Groups in the Process of Transformation*. West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2019. 296 pgs.

Total pages of reading = 969

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Course Instructional Content

You are required to watch, listen to, and/or read the course instructional content and interact about the content in the online forums. The full instructional script along with links to the videos and audio podcasts will be posted in the Moodle online classroom.

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Course Assignments

The assignments for this course are [pre-reading](#), [participating in the online forums](#), [formulating a theology of community](#), [participating in a small group](#), [small group ministry assessment](#), and completing the [course evaluation](#).

Assignments are due by midnight (Pacific Standard Time) on the day they are due. Submit your assignments in the appropriate digital folders in Moodle. Once I have marked your assignment, I will post it in Moodle where you can check your grade and review the comments I made on the assignment (you will receive an automatic notification whenever I put a graded assignment in Moodle). Please note that I will deduct 5% of an assignment's total possible value for each day that it is late. Having said that, if you find that you are unable to complete an assignment on time, I will grant one extension of up to one week for one assignment during the course (without penalty) when you inform me of your need for an extension before the due date for that particular assignment. I will also consider extensions in exceptional circumstances such as a medical emergency (when a doctor's note accompanies the request). For the times when I allow a student to rewrite an assignment, I will generally take off 20% of the assignment's value before assigning a grade to the rewritten assignment.

Here is an overview of all the assignments followed by a detailed description of each one (you can click on the assignment links to go right to the description):

Overview of Assignments (click on link to go to description)

Week	Dates	Assignments	Percentage of Final Grade	Cumulative Percentage
Week 1	Aug 29	Pre-reading		
Week 1	Aug 29 – Sep 3	Online Forum #1 and Required Reading (<i>Leading Small Groups that Thrive</i>)	5%	5%
Week 3	Sep 12 – 17	Online Forum #2 and Required Reading (<i>The Power of Small Groups in Christian Spiritual Formation</i>)	5%	10%
Week 4	Sep 19 – 24	Online Forum #3 and Required Reading (<i>Helping Groups Heal</i>)	5%	15%

Week 5	Sep 26 – Oct 1	Theology of Community	35%	50%
Week 6	Oct 3 – 8	Online Forum #4 and Required Reading (<i>Missional Small Groups</i>)	5%	55%
Week 7	Oct 10 – 15	Small Group Participation	10%	65%
Week 8	Oct 17 – 22	Small Group Ministry Assessment	35%	100%
Week 8	Oct 17 – 22	Course Evaluation	0%	100%

Pre-reading

Due to the condensed nature of the online portion of the class, please read *Leading Small Groups That Thrive* by Aug 29. We will discuss this text in the week one forum.

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Online Forum Participation (20% of the final grade)

This course has four online forum weeks where you will have an opportunity to interact with others in the class around key questions, assignments, course readings, and/or additional lecture material. You should plan to invest approximately four hours into each forum week. Each forum week is worth 5% of your final grade. Please make sure that you do the prescribed reading and watch the instructional videos (or access the instructional content in other ways) for each forum week, so that you can participate fully in the forum discussions.

In the event that we have less than three students in the course, there will be no online forums and students will do a three-page reflection paper on the forum questions for each forum week. Each reflection paper is worth 5%.

Here is a schedule of the forum weeks that shows the required readings for each week (please note that the forum weeks start on a Monday and end on a Saturday):

- Form #1 - Week 1 – *Leading Small Groups that Thrive*
- Forum #2 - Week 3 – *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation*
- Forum #3 - Week 4 – *Helping Groups Heal*
- Forum #4 - Week 6 – *Missional Small Groups*

Students are expected to contribute to the forum discussions by posting a minimum of four conversational (worth up to 10 points each) and three substantive contributions (worth up to 20 points each) per forum week. Each forum week has three forums that correspond to the readings and instructional content. The first substantive post for the first forum is due on the Tuesday, the second substantive post for the second forum is due on the Wednesday, and the third substantive post for the third forum is due on the Thursday.

By conversational contributions, I mean simply joining the flow of discussion with shorter responses (e.g. questions, affirmations, quick thoughts about what someone has said). I'd encourage you to ask good coaching questions that invite others in the class to think more deeply or in different ways.

By substantive responses, I mean responses that show a deep processing of relevant ideas (200 or more words). We have a tremendous opportunity to build on one another's knowledge, insights, and experience. Our goal is to collaborate in the forum. At times, we will respectfully challenge each other. I anticipate that this will be a rich time of dialogue. To create a safe environment for this to take place, we must build a supportive subculture that encourages one another. Disagreeing and challenging can be stimulating if done in an edifying manner.

Substantive participation may include (among other things):

- ❖ Providing and developing a new thought, idea, or perspective.
- ❖ Citing an experience or example of what we are learning and showing how it applies.
- ❖ Adding a new twist on a perspective.
- ❖ Critically reflecting on an idea/concept.
- ❖ Questioning or challenging a principle/perspective and giving reasons for your questioning.
- ❖ Integrating Scripture and other sources in a meaningful way

What Substantive Participation is NOT:

- ❖ Very basic comments such as "I agree" or "I disagree."
- ❖ Restating what someone has said (*unless there is a direct purpose in doing so*).
- ❖ Disrespectfully disagreeing.
- ❖ Pat answers that are not thought-provoking.

Below are examples of how to stimulate your own and others' thinking:

- ❖ What would happen if...
- ❖ Other times it may be helpful to...
- ❖ It is my understanding...what is your experience with this?
- ❖ You might approach this from...
- ❖ Is it possible that...
- ❖ Would you consider...
- ❖ Maybe...
- ❖ Possibly...
- ❖ Sometimes...
- ❖ I'm wondering if...
- ❖ Do you think...

Note: You can use any of your forum posts in other papers for this course. I would also encourage you to view the posts of others as important resources that you can cite in your papers. Everyone brings a wealth of insights into the class!

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Theology of Community (35% of the final grade)

Note: A key part of this assignment is to read all the course textbooks.

For this assignment, develop a biblically-based theology of Christian community based on Scripture, all of the course texts and at least five other sources. What is Christian community? Why is it important? What does it look like in the life of a local church? How does community fit with other key dimensions of church life such as discipleship, worship and outreach? Your theology of community forms an important framework for understanding how small groups can contribute to the building of community within a church. In your paper, devote special attention to the role of small groups in helping to build biblical community.

Maximum Length: 3,000 words

Due Date: October 1

Before you submit your paper, make sure that you have included all of the following:

- A biblically-based definition of Christian community
- A defense for why biblical community is important
- A description of biblical community within the context of a local church
- The place of biblical community within the larger ministry of the church (i.e. how does biblical community relate to other aspects of church life?)
- The role of small groups in building biblical community
- A rigorous integration of Scripture (minimum of 20 meaningful and explicit interactions with Scripture)
- Integration of ideas from all the textbooks
- Integration of ideas from at least five additional sources on biblical community

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Small Group Participation (10% of the final grade)

What would a course on small group ministry be without participation in a small group? For this assignment, you will participate in at least three small group meetings (with at least three people in attendance at each meeting). These can either be in-person or virtual meetings. For at least one of the meetings, you should be the one who leads/facilitates the discussion. These could be Bible studies, accountability group sessions, Alpha table group discussions, Freedom Session meetings, etc. After each session, take up to one page to journal your thoughts about the meeting. Using Scripture and the course texts as lenses for viewing the experience, answer the following questions (and others that you think would be helpful):

1. How well did the group provide a sense of community during this session?

2. What worked well during this session?
3. What would you suggest to improve the functioning of this small group based on what you observed during this meeting?

Maximum Length: 900 words

Due Date: October 15

Submission Checklist

- Three one-page (300 words) journal entries that answer the questions posed above
- Meaningful integration of ideas from the course resources and other sources
- Reflective integration of relevant Scriptures

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Small Group Ministry Assessment (35% of the final grade)

Now, that you are an expert on small group ministry ☺, this assignment will capitalize on your wisdom by giving you an opportunity to assess your church's small group ministry. This assignment has three parts:

Part 1 – Identifying Small Group Ministry Health Indicators (900 words)

From the course instructional content, course readings, your theology of community paper, and other sources, come up with approximately 10 important indicators of the health of a small group ministry (e.g. a clear and compelling vision, leadership training). Provide a short rationale for and description of each health indicator (make sure these descriptions are grounded in the sources mentioned at the start of this paragraph).

Part 2 – Assessing the Health of the Small Group Ministry in Your Church (1,500 words)

For this part, design and implement a process for evaluating the small group ministry in your church in the 10 areas you identified in part one. I would suggest using surveys, interviews, or a small group discussion for your assessment. Please include three elements in this section:

- A description of the assessment process (including the final version of your survey or list of interview/discussion questions as an appendix) – 300 words plus survey or interview questions
- A summary of the assessment results – 600 words
- An analysis of how your church's small group ministry measures up to the health indicators you identified in part one. Which areas are commendable? Which areas need further attention? – 600 words

Note: If your church does not have a small group ministry, part two would involve gathering information about whether people in your church believe that small groups are important and what they would want to see in a small group ministry.

Part 3 – Small Group Ministry Strategic Plan (600 words)

Based on your assessment in part two, design a strategic plan in collaboration with key stakeholders in the small group ministry (e.g. small group leaders) for strengthening your church’s small group ministry. The plan should have at least three major objectives and three SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-bound) action steps for each objective. Include a short description about how you collaborated with the key stakeholders to design the plan.

Note: If your church does not have a small group ministry, you would develop a strategic plan for developing a small group ministry based on the input you received in Part 2 and in collaboration with key stakeholders in the church.

Maximum Length: 3,000 words

Due Date: October 22

Submission Checklist:

- List of approximately 10 important health indicators for small group ministries along with a rationale for and description of each one that is well-grounded in Scripture, the course resources and other sources (900 words)
- Small group ministry assessment, which includes a description of the assessment process (300 words), survey or list of interview questions (as an appendix), a summary of the assessment results (600 words), and a discussion of how your small group ministry measures up to the 10 health indicators (600 words) OR the alternative assignment mentioned above if your church does not have a small group ministry
- A plan for strengthening your small group ministry that includes three objectives and three SMART action steps for each objective (600 words) OR the alternative assignment mentioned above if your church does not have a small group ministry

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Course Evaluation

Because your feedback is very important to me (I will often change future offerings of a course based on the feedback I receive from students), I have made the course evaluation a required part of the course. You will find the course evaluation under the Week 8 tab in Moodle. Once you have completed it, you will be able to submit your final assignment.

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Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage	Description	Grade Point	Meaning in Graduate Work
A+	97-100	Superior	4.30	Exceptionally well-reasoned, compelling development of position. Outstanding incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Strikingly appropriate examples. Extraordinary insight,

				critical analytical and evaluative ability, and creativity. Superlative style and language usage. Makes an original contribution and is potentially publishable.
A	93-96.99	Excellent	4.00	Well-argued and convincing development of position. Insightful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Notably appropriate examples. Excellent insight, critical analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Impressive style and language use.
A-	90-92.99	Very Good	3.70	Thorough and plausible development of position. Skilful incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Very good examples. Very good insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Commendable and fluent style and language usage.
B+	87-89.99	Proficient	3.30	Proficient development of position. Appropriate incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Relevant examples. Good quality insight, analytic and evaluative ability, and creativity. Clear and correct style and language usage.
B	83-86.99	Good	3.00	Competent development of position, but possibly with some gaps and/or limitations. Good incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Good examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally good style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
B-	80-82.99	Average	2.70	Average development of position, but with obvious gaps and/or limitations. Satisfactory incorporation of personal vision as well as of references and resources. Satisfactory examples. Reasonable insight, analytic and evaluative ability. Little creativity. Generally satisfactory style and language usage, but possibly with some minor flaws.
C+	77-79.99	Adequate	2.30	Adequate development of position with significant gaps and/or limitations. Some incorporation of personal vision as well as references and resources. Adequate use of examples. Very little creativity. Considerable number of issues related to coherence and style.
C	73-76.99	Acceptable	2.00	Limited development of position with a noticeable lack of consistency with personal vision or references. Limited integration with external sources. Acceptable analytic and evaluative ability. Numerous weaknesses in terms of clarity, coherence, and grammar.
C-	70-72.99	Needs Work	1.70	Passable but unimpressive development of position. Position not completely consistent with personal vision or references and resources not taken fully into account or examples are basic or not completely convincing or barely acceptable insight and analytic and evaluative ability. Adequate style and language usage, but with weaknesses in some respects (e.g., clarity, coherence, grammar). Overall quality shows noticeable deficiencies.
F	Below 70	Below Standard	0.00	Unacceptable work at graduate level. Shows lack of understanding and/or competence in several of the criteria described above. This grade is a failing grade at the graduate level.

Note: This grading rubric is an adaptation of the one used in the MA in Leadership and MA in Educational Leadership programs at TWU.

Assignment Assessment

When I assess written assignments and presentations, I tend to look for the following:

- **Substantiveness (40%)** – The content reveals deep thinking. This may take the form of critiquing existing ideas and proposing new ones. It may involve applying ideas from the readings and class discussions in deeply personal ways. It could also include a novel integration of ideas from various sources. As you think about substantiveness, I would also ask you to go beyond “left

brain” thinking that focuses on systematic and logical thinking. Add “right brain” analysis that views concepts in intuitive and more holistic ways. This may involve viewing assignment topics from creative vantage points by using word pictures, analogies, metaphors, pictures, diagrams, drama, poetry, music, and other creative devices that can often enrich conceptual meaning and make it more personal. In order to get an A on an assignment, **you really need to present your ideas in an integrative and creative way.** Go beyond the stated expectations of an assignment (not in terms of length ☺). Surprise me with a novel combination and/or expression of ideas.

- Appropriateness (30%) – The content matches the requirements of the assignments.
- Coherence (20%) – The content flows in a consistent and meaningful way.
- Engaging (10%) – The writing style does not distract from the content (e.g. grammatical mistakes), but rather engages the reader’s attention.

Assignment Grade Appeals

Students can appeal their grade to me by stating in writing their reasons for contesting the grade. Deadline for such appeals is one week after the student has receipt of grade. Formal course grade appeals can be made with the ACTS Academic Director’s Office.

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Important Academic Notes from ACTS

Add/Drop Policy

All OL courses are open for registration until the first day of class. Once the class has begun, students wishing to drop or withdraw from the class must contact the Registrar’s Office by submitting a request through the TWU Service Hub (twu.ca/help). Tuition (excluding fees) refund rates are as follows:

Weeks 1-2 - 100%

Week 3 - 60%

Week 4 - 50%

Week 5 - 40%

Weeks 6-8 - 0%

Academic Integrity and Avoiding Plagiarism at TWU

One of the core values of Trinity Western University is the integration of academic excellence with high standards of personal, moral, and spiritual integrity. The University considers it a serious offence when an individual attempts to gain unearned academic credit. It is the student’s responsibility to be informed about what constitutes academic misconduct. For details on this, and on identifying and avoiding plagiarism go to the:

[University Homepage > Academics > Academic Calendar](#) (p. 47).

<https://prezi.com/od62fxnkbmxh/plagiarism-how-to-get-it-out-of-your-life/> (Prezi presentation)

<http://bit.ly/1p00KX3> (Google Slide presentation offering more comprehensive information)

Students with a Disability

Students with a disability who need assistance are encouraged to contact the Equity of Access Office upon admission to TWU to discuss their specific needs. All disabilities must be recently documented by an appropriately certified professional and include the educational impact of the disability along with recommended accommodations. Within the first two weeks of the semester, students must meet with their professors to agree on accommodations appropriate to each class. Students should follow the steps detailed by the Centre for Accessible Learning on their website at: <https://www.twu.ca/learning-commons/centre-accessible-learning/equitable-access-policy-students-disabilities>.

Hospitality in the Classroom

TWU is committed to an ethic of inclusion, centered on the principles of Christian hospitality, reciprocity and reconciliation. We seek to cultivate generous learning spaces that are based on respect for differences and are open to diverse views, opinions, and identities that are thoughtfully expressed in a collegial manner. We welcome and value all voices, including those from under-represented groups or those who have been marginalized.

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Campus Closure and Class Cancellation Policy

In the event of extreme weather conditions or other emergency site:

<https://www.twu.ca/campus-notification>

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