

- Are you open to welcoming members of the public who are not part of the TriCon community?
- Do you see your group helping TriCon’s fulfill its mission in a particular way?



2. **Get in touch with one of our clergy** to talk about your proposed group. If your idea is approved by the clergy and Diaconate, one of the clergy will serve as clergy sponsor.
3. **Upon approval of your small group idea**, publicize your small group idea to the wider TriCon community both through the newsletter and on the website.

Once your group is approved, please keep the following in mind:

1. **Small groups start with a six-session trial period.** Then you meet again with the sponsor to review group progress, troubleshoot any issues, and plan next steps. Group leaders continue to meet with clergy sponsors regularly.
2. **Groups are open and inclusive.** They welcome any new TriCon members unless ruled out by the charter (i.e., Men’s Group) until the upper limit is reached. Tricon small groups are always welcoming, affirming, and supportive.
3. **Groups *never* offer therapy or treatment.** Tricon small groups provide spiritual support as needed as well as other types of learning and experiences.
4. **Mutual respect and good listening skills are essential.** If confidentiality is critical to the group, consider how you will help ensure that it is observed. We recommend that groups operate with a behavioral covenant. (See TriCon Small Group Resource Packet.)
5. **Groups can occasionally develop problems.** If difficulties occur, group leaders may need to use a tested and reliable process to try to repair and/or reset the group. Talk this over with your clergy sponsor.
6. **Small groups do not last forever.** Eventually they fulfill their purpose or changes occur that indicate the group should end. Therefore, leaders should consider how to end the small group well. Consultation with sponsoring clergy is part of that process.
7. **A Small Group Resource Guide** with more information is available on the website and in the office.

Thank you for helping enrich the TriCon faith community with your TriCon small group. We look forward to supporting you!

In faith,

TriCon’s Diaconate



TriCon Small Group Resource Guide

March 26, 2019

TriCon Small Groups enhance TriCon’s identity as a nurturing community of faith that honors God through service and mission. As leaders begin the process of starting a new group, they will find this resource guide helpful in ensuring that the new group will further the church’s mission and operate in a way that is in keeping with TriCon’s values.

This guide will discuss how small groups fit into the broader identity of TriCon Church, the character of small groups at TriCon, the leader(s) responsibilities, the process of ending a small group, behavioral covenants, and administrative matters. This guide also provides templates for a small group charter and a small group behavioral covenant.

TriCon’s small groups reflect and are guided by TriCon’s mission, action priorities, and statement of faith.



Vision: God is calling us to be a nurturing community of faith that honors God through service and mission.

Top Three Priorities:

- **Create vibrant worship through a spectrum of opportunities**, including Sunday Services, small group gatherings, church school, and youth and adult programs.
- **Live out our faith through caring for one another and hands-on service and mission**, including youth, family, and adult mission opportunities.
- **Cultivate our church community** to grow and thrive through increased collaboration, communication, and harnessing our collective talents.

Mission Statement as Expressed in TriCon’s Bylaws:

We are the Body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, living in faithful covenant with God and one another. We are called to:

- Honor God through worship;
- Be a safe place of Christian fellowship to seek, learn, and grow;
- Recognize and support one another’s unique gifts;
- Reflect God’s love through commitment and service to our church, our community, and the world;
- Pursue actively Christ’s vision of peace and justice.

Statement of Faith: This church acknowledges as its head Jesus Christ. It acknowledges as sister and brother in Christ all who share this confession. It looks to God as revealed in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It claims as its own the faith of the historic church expressed in ancient Christian creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the church in each generation to make this faith its own. This church identifies with the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ.



- **Why have a TriCon small group?**
 - God calls us to be a nurturing community of faith that honors God through service and mission. Through meaningful small groups, the TriCon community is encouraged to discover and allow their gifts to flourish to the benefit of the whole body of Christ.
 - A small group aims to support and encourage the spiritual growth of its members and supports Christ's vision of peace and justice in the world. A small group's members come from the TriCon community and, occasionally, from the wider community.
- **What else is important to know about TriCon small groups?**
 - Groups are accountable to their members and to TriCon through clergy sponsors and the Diaconate.
 - Small groups may be renewed annually without limit. Groups may fulfill their purpose and decide to end. At that point the leader notifies the clergy sponsor.
- **How TriCon small groups function and the role of the group leader(s)**
 - **Leader responsibilities:** The group leader is responsible for the effective and safe functioning of the group, consistent with TriCon's values and the group's charter. The leader collaborates with the group's clergy sponsor and promptly raises any safety or other concerns that may arise. The group leader is also responsible for following TriCon administrative policies, both written and unwritten, and for collaborating with TriCon's administrative staff.
 - **The Servant Leader model:** TriCon group leaders are encouraged to adopt the servant leader role to fulfill their responsibilities. Servant leaders in a TriCon context pay attention to the well-being and growth of each individual in the group and that of the whole group while seeking to follow the example of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The servant leader's focus is on meeting the needs of others first, assuring the growth and well-being of group members, the broader TriCon community, and TriCon as an institution. Servant leaders practice the following:
 - Encourage and support diverse perspectives
 - Prioritize the needs of others
 - Encourage rather than discourage or limit
 - Maintain the integrity or the purpose of the group
 - Build trust and model trustworthiness
 - Embody humility, thus modeling Jesus in his dealings with the world
 - Look for the gifts of leadership within the group and nurture them
 - **Leadership skills:** Fostering conversations that are meaningful to others is an art. Groups depend on having successful conversations. Exchanges between members are most likely to be fruitful when both leader and members build trust, listen carefully, and think before responding.
 - **Group facilitation:** Designing and running successful meetings is often the work of the group leader or another facilitator. Facilitators work to assure that a group is functioning collaboratively. They build trust within the group so it can work smoothly and resolve any internal conflicts successfully.
 - **Professional support:** Occasionally, a group with a particularly sensitive focus may benefit from having a trained facilitator. That need should be discussed with the clergy sponsor at the time of

the development of the group charter. Considerations such as the type of professional support needed, volunteer versus paid support, and need for additional review may be examined.

- **Leaders managing conflict:** Conflict in the group can be challenging for any group leader. Careful listening and reflecting back a member's concerns are key strategies in resolving conflicts. Group leaders must try to resolve any difficulties in group dynamics. Keep your clergy sponsor informed of any difficulties within the group. Sometimes, a group member may directly approach a clergy sponsor with concerns about group dynamics. Focus on resolving the concerns with the member, while working with the clergy sponsor. The clergy sponsor is there to help.
- **Leader responsibility to flag at-risk situations:** Group leaders are responsible for *immediately* raising any concerns they may have about group members with their group's clergy sponsor including any and all concerns about a member's emotional, financial, or physical safety. If the thought has crossed your mind that a group member or situation may not be safe, you should share it with your clergy sponsor right away. It is better to over-communicate than under-communicate.
- **Leader responsibilities when a group ends:** By understanding that all groups eventually end, a leader can identify when an ending is at hand and help end it well. Here are some reasons why a group might end:
 - It was already planned for the group to end: with time-limited groups, periodically remind members of the number of meetings remaining. Formally close out the group expressing appreciation for the group members' engagement. Ask how the group might be strengthened if offered again.
 - The group needs to end, but has not considered this: if the energy or purpose of a group is dwindling, respectfully ask the group if it should still meet. Consult with the clergy sponsor. Help the group decide and develop a plan for ending.
 - The group comes to a natural end: the ending of a small group need not be considered a failure. Celebrate what has been learned and achieved as well as the relationships nurtured. It is equally important to give the group permission to express grief, including sadness and anger over the ending of a group. Ask the clergy sponsor to help. Communicate the ending to all members of the group and the wider TriCon community, including clergy, staff, and the Diaconate. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide the group through its ending. Consider an ending ritual. Be open to the ending possibly seeding a different kind of group in the future.
 - The Diaconate may end the group as a TriCon-sponsored small group if a group or group leader wants to evolve the group in a direction not consistent with the group's charter or with TriCon's status as a 501C3 nonprofit organization. For example, a group may want to advocate for a candidate for public office. The Diaconate will in that case end the TriCon sponsorship of that group. This means the group might continue but would no longer be a TriCon small group and wouldn't be permitted to access church resources.
- **Behavioral covenant:** TriCon encourages the use of behavioral covenants for groups as a way of setting ground rules for how people in groups treat one another, and in order to make groups stronger and more collaborative. A group may write its own or use the framework suggested at the end of this resource guide. If the group writes its own, it may be helpful to review Bible passages that guide our lives as Christians. Ask your clergy sponsor for help.
- **Other administrative matters:** groups and group leaders must collaborate and coordinate with church administrative staff, leaders, clergy, and committees, and follow church policies and procedures.
 - Group logistics: meeting times, location, scheduling, and cancellations must be managed effectively and in coordination with the church calendar and policies. Security and care of church property must be maintained.

- Reporting: group leaders may be asked from time to time to submit reports on activities, attendance, and similar matters.
- Communication: groups and group leaders may be asked to update or share their activities with the congregation, clergy, committees, and/or administrative staff. They need to coordinate communication with the congregation through established means and personnel.
- Maintaining charter: charters that are developed upon the launch of a group are updated at least yearly, so congregation members can be aware of group membership opportunities and to enable periodic review by the Diaconate.
- Managing open/closed group member status: some groups may be limited in size, and it is the group leaders' responsibility to make sure anyone in the church community may join a group, space permitting. Favoritism or preferential access to group membership is not permitted.
- Group and leader decision-making parameters: the leader manages the group and collaborates with the clergy sponsor. The leader may NOT make expenditures or raise money without Finance Committee approval.
- The Diaconate meeting schedule is available on the church calendar.
- Contact information (clergy, diaconate, church administration) is on the final page of this Resource Guide.



TriCon Small Group Charter Template

Date

What is the name of your proposed small group?

Who is your group for and what will be its focus?

Who will be the group's leader(s) be? TriCon advises a leadership team of two or more.

Where and when do you want to meet? What are upper and lower limits on number of members?

Will you require a consultant or other professional to present to your group at some point?

After the trial period of six sessions, how long do you envision the group running?

Are you open to welcoming members of the public who are not part of the TriCon community?

How does your group's purpose support TriCon's vision, mission, and values?

What are your behavioral and communication expectations of members?

What are your planned logistics (meeting times, frequency, location, etc.)?

_____ Date _____

Clergy Sponsor

_____ Date _____

Chair of the Diaconate



TriCon Small Group

Sample Behavioral Covenant

The following are examples of practices that may be discussed with the group and agreed to as common commitments. Please note that the specifics of your group should be substituted for the text within the brackets and adaptations made to the list as required.

Behavioral Covenant Template

In order to help the small group succeed in its charter and support the goals and mission of TriCon church, the members of our small group agree to:

- Work together towards our small group's goal to [support divorced individuals spiritually as they navigate a challenging transition]
- Treat one another in loving ways, honoring and supporting one another
- Practice direct, open communication, avoiding any temptation to gossip
- Use 'I' statements to express oneself
- Listen respectfully
- Ask questions for clarification, seeking to understand rather than judge
- Try not to "solve or fix" a problem shared by a member
- Strive to be honest
- Avoid stereotyping
- Speak the truth in love, gentleness, and patience
- Recognize that other viewpoints and opinions may be valid
- Pray for one another and forgive each other
- Focus on common interests and not positions/opinions
- Build mutual trust
- Maintain confidentiality if this is a group requirement
- Support the safety and security of the group and its members
- Treat electronic communication (phone calls, and email) the same as face-to-face conversation
- Arrive on time
- Honor this Behavioral Covenant and live as a people of faith as members of the group and as a church community in witness to the world around us



Contact List

Clergy

1. Rev. Bob Brown, Senior Minister: revbobbrown@triconchurch.org
2. Rev. Dr. Jean Vandergrift, Interim Minister: revdrjvandergrift@triconchurch.org

Diaconate

Bob Lehmann, Chair: bob_lehmann@comcast.net

Moderator

Russell Sanna: russellsanna@gmail.com

Administrative Staff that are relevant to small groups

1. Judy Walpole, Church Administrator: jwalpole@triconchurch.org
2. Amy Bruning, Administrative Assistant/Membership Coordinator: abruning@triconchurch.org
3. Marcia Macres, IT/Web Coordinator: mjmacres@triconchurch.org

Church Address, Telephone, and Website

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