

CF Discipleship House Manual

Why Discipleship Houses?

One great way to grow in the Lord is to live together in fellowship with other believers. In biblical times, living in community with other Christians was the norm, not the exception. This would normally occur either in one's own Christian family or in the extended family of their parents. Christ apparently lived with his disciples, as did Paul with apostolic bands with whom he traveled. Living alone in an apartment is a modern phenomenon.

In order to provide this privilege, the CF family of churches has organized Discipleship Houses. Discipleship Houses are not the only godly way to live in fellowship as a single believer, but they are a very good way for singles to enjoy the benefits of Christian community. In a ministry house, singles can develop a spiritual base that will last a lifetime, while serving the local church.

For these reasons, houses members need to understand that Discipleship Houses are not simply another rooming option, because living in one carries added expectations. A Discipleship House is more like a sports team or military barracks. If you were recruited to a sports team, it would be because of the contribution you could make to the team. If you were serving in the military, you would view your living situation quite differently than if you were a civilian selecting one of the many available options for boarding.

By moving into a house, you agree to these extra expectations and willingly try to comply, or, if you change your mind, agree to move out. Be sure to read this manual carefully, so that you understand the vision of a Discipleship House and the commitment you are making by moving in.

Values-Based Houses

While it would be easy and tempting to rattle off a list of superficial reasons why Discipleship Houses are worthwhile and helpful for those who choose to live in one, it is best to start with the most fundamental reasons, rooted in our core values, that we as a family of churches have chosen to organize these houses. We hope to run our Discipleship Houses in the same way that we build churches: only upon the things that God values, and not upon worldly ideas of success. Here is a consideration of Discipleship Houses in light of our several core values.

Knowing God, Fatherhood, Relationship, and Unity

Before the world began, there was life together. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shared a unity so deep that it transcends our ability to fully grasp it. Out of this unity and because it was so good and right, God was pleased to create mankind in his own image, with the capacity for

loving and unified relationship. It has always been his desire to walk in relationship with mankind as a father with his sons and daughters. In other words, the Father loved life with the Son so much that he wanted to fill the earth with more just like him.

The Father always intended for us to have pure fellowship with him and with each other, just as he shared with the Son in the Holy Spirit, and it was to last for all eternity. This is what Scripture calls eternal life. But as we know, sin and rebellion has fatally damaged our ability to relate to God and to each other in the way that pleases him, the way he designed. Eventually the Son himself had to leave the glory of heaven to become a man and demonstrate the life we were always meant to live.

Jesus says in John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” Through a relationship with Jesus, we can once again enter the eternal life that the Father always intended for us to live. Of course, walking with Jesus is not a solitary activity; Jesus called his disciples to walk with him *together*, and he calls us to do the same. It is in our life together, then, that we most fully experience eternal life.

The Church, Brokenness, Christ in You, and Servanthood

So what does all of this have to do with living in a house with some friends?

Well, once we repent of our rebellion and turn from our sin, and once we turn toward Jesus to follow him and learn from him how we should live, we soon discover, if we are honest with ourselves, that our sin has conditioned us to shape our lives around our own desires, and not around the will of God and his purposes. As a result, we don't know how to live in community as God intended.

In the process of being integrated into the church body, we come to terms with the incompatibility of self-interest on one hand, and a healthy community, living out the purposes of God, on the other. Through living together, we come to recognize and repent of the aspects of our lives that focus on self rather than self-sacrifice. Discipleship Houses accelerate and intensify this process as we open up not just our professed beliefs and outward religion to the community in which God places us, but the very details of our preferences and private lifestyle as well. The cross that Jesus calls each of us to take up comes into focus as we live together, and as we lay down our lives, we are progressively transformed into the image of Jesus.

The Structure and Dynamics of a Discipleship House

A Discipleship House is typically a group of single adults living together with the two-fold purpose of 1) growing in Christian maturity and 2) carrying out the great commission to go and make disciples.

House Leadership

Discipleship Houses have a **spiritual leader** (a resident who serves the house by carrying the focus and vision of the house) and a **practical leader** (a resident who serves the house by coordinating the administrative responsibilities). These roles of service are themselves overseen by an ordained leader (pastor, elder, deacon) of a local congregation, or a designated member of the core leadership team. For girls houses, a designated primary woman or two will oversee the house as the young ladies embrace the roles unique to women (see leaders manual).

Relationship to Church Vision and Leadership

It is important to note that a Discipleship House does not replace or supercede the relational and governmental structures common to all members of the local church (see Foundations manual, Part III), nor is it typically a remedial or interventional option for a believer who is immature or unwilling to grow. It merely gives disciples of Jesus the opportunity to live under the same roof as those who are giving themselves to the local church in the same way. In other words, all of the members of a house should themselves be disciples of Jesus who have been integrated into a local church family, and who actively walk out the church vision in the context of a Home Fellowship. This would include having an established discipling relationship with an older believer, and a healthy relationship with the pastor of their church.

House Meeting

Be that as it may, it is still vital for the relationships within the house to develop and deepen. To this end, members of each Discipleship House gather weekly for a meeting, with a typical agenda of: 1) intentionally share how God is working in each person's life and pray for each other's walk with God, 2) shore up any shortcomings of members in fulfilling their practical duties within the house, 3) address particular areas of accountability in each other's lives, and 4) strategize on using the house for hospitality and outreach.

House meetings are led by the spiritual and practical leaders, and often include the Home Fellowship Leader or Pastor overseer, depending on the maturity and experience of the house leaders. Home Fellowship Leaders and primary disciplers of any house member are welcome to join, provided they remain respectful of the confidentiality of these meetings. This may mean stepping out of the meeting if a particular member has something to share that is privacy-sensitive in nature.

Specific Expectations

We expect all Discipleship House members to:

- Participate in the house meeting once a week.
- Regularly attend the appropriate church and Home Fellowship as a regular diet of Body Life (Heb. 10:24, 25 and Acts 2:42).
- Live responsibly in terms of performing your house jobs according to the schedule (Eph. 4:3ff; I Jn. 3:18). Members should also have a job or go to school regularly (2 Thess. 3:11, 12). Laying around watching movies and playing video games is not an adequately healthy life for Discipleship Houses.
- Pay your agreed upon rent, utilities and additional expenses on time (I Thess. 3:11,12).
- Accept and initiate loving involvement with other roommates. Ministry houses are not for private living away from others. These houses are intended to promote interpersonal involvement. This includes timely and godly resolution of conflicts with other members or leaders. Home church leaders or college ministry leaders will help, if necessary with conflict resolution.
- Be diligent to find and practice appropriate ministry roles in the local church. (I Cor. 12). Your house leadership and Home Fellowship leadership will help you with advice and training, but you must exert initiative in finding ways to serve God.
- Practice hospitality as part of a team, when the house hosts events. This implies sharing in the work to set up and clean up, buying food, welcoming guests, etc.
- Respect the rights of others, allowing them to sleep and study, not using others' personal belongings without permission, and helping to keep shared open areas free of personal clutter, out of consideration for other roommates and visitors.
- Members should avoid offensive social practices that would negatively impact fellow members or guests. Out of control temper tantrums, drug abuse, drunkenness, and viewing pornography are examples of unacceptable behavior.
- Members of the house should strive to show respect and care for surrounding neighbors. Each member should do his or her part to make the ministry house a blessing and a help to nearby residents.
- Members must agree in advance to move out of the house if the house leadership, in consultation with church leadership, judges them to be in continued violation of house rules.
- Respect and cooperate with house leadership.

Special House Rules

Some houses have decided to add special rules not mentioned above. All special rules must be approved in advance by the pastor or delegated house overseer.

House Name _____

Address _____

Special Rules:

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Although CF leaders assist and advise house leaders, the houses are not CF church property, and house leaders and members are not under the control of the CF churches. Discipleship House leaders are not employees of the CF churches and such leadership is not an official office in the church. Therefore, the CF churches cannot accept liability for accidents or errors in judgment on the part of ministry house leaders or members. The CF churches also receive no fees or income from Discipleship Houses.

We cannot guarantee a specific level of quality in training or living conditions. Living in a Discipleship House is similar to living in any other campus boarding house—the landlord normally carries liability insurance.

If, at any time, you become aware of a problem in your house that you believe will not be addressed adequately by your house leadership, feel free to bring your complaint to the pastor of a sponsor church, and they will help you arrive at a Christ-centered resolution.

By signing this you indicate that you have read the agreement and you agree to the terms of membership described.

Name _____ Date _____