

Small Group Pilot: Two Approaches Participant Experience & Next Steps

November 12, 2025 at 7 pm EST

Colesville United Methodist Church

Part of the CCCSM* Initiative

**Collaborative Church Communities for Sustainable Ministry*

Outline

- Background: Pilot Purpose & Objective
- Approach to Gathering Feedback
- Review of feedback – Key takeaways
- Alignment with objective
- Recommendations on process and topics
- Questions and Observations from Discussions
- Next Steps
- Q & A // Discussion

**BACKGROUND:
PILOT PURPOSE & OBJECTIVE**

Pilot Purpose

- **Mission of UMC:** Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- **Purpose:**
 - **Aligns** us to the mission
 - **Equips** us to implement the mission
 - **So we can Live** out the mission

How do we prepare to live out our mission as CUMC?

- Making disciples **begins with us being disciples**
 - knowing God and His Word – personally and as a community of faith
 - **Scripture, God's letter to us, teaches and reminds us of our identity and responsibility as children of God to accomplish this**
 - Changing us first (inside)
 - Channels of change around us (outside)



Spiritual Formation

Pilot Objective:

Facilitate Spiritual Formation

- **What is Spiritual Formation?**

- ongoing process of being transformed by the Holy Spirit,
- through engagement with Scripture,
- enhanced within Christian community,
- so that we are increasingly conformed to the image of Christ
- that we can live as His children and His representatives who introduce Jesus to those who do not have a relationship with Jesus, and encourage those who profess they do.
- “live” → practical, daily living directed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit to navigate life’s challenges, wise decisions, discernment

Pilot Objective:

Facilitate Spiritual Formation

- **Why Spiritual Formation?** Necessary for being a disciple (follower and learner) of Jesus.
 - **Romans 12:1–2** – “Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”
 - **Matthew 28:19–20** – “... go and make disciples of all nations... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”
 - We as believers are commissioned/called to **make disciples** — a **process** of formation through teaching and obedience.

Pilot Objective to Achieve Purpose: Spiritual Formation

Colossians 3:15-17 → "Let Christ's teaching live in your hearts, making you rich in the true wisdom. Teach and help one another along the right road and whatever you may have to do, do everything as a representative of the Lord Jesus, in His name, giving thanks to God."

- learning together, listening to each other's questions, helping each other engage in Scripture and prayer – **"one another"**



Spiritual Formation in Small Groups

Approaches to the Pilot

Two Pilot Groups

- Scripture Engagement Text: 1st John
- Structured on Wesley's Meeting Model – Small Groups (i.e., Checking in with each other on faith journey, spiritual growth, and prayer)
- Two groups conducted differently

Approaches

Youth: Living in Step with Jesus (LISJ)

- Met biweekly in-person on Sundays after church (1 via Zoom)
- May through September
- 1 hour 15 mins
- Text provided ahead of time
- Discussion led by Simone Garcia
- No questions, observations gathered after each meeting

Adult: Thriving Together (TT)

- 4 weeks in September
- Via Zoom
- 1 hour session
- Large grp session (beginning and closing)
- Participants assigned to 5 small groups led by 5 facilitators
 - 35-45 minute discussion
- Text and DQ's distributed a few days before
- Gathered emerging questions from discussion

YOUR COMBINED FEEDBACK

Key takeaways - Overall Benefits and strengths

- Overwhelming support that small groups are valuable even when two-thirds had prior small group experience
- Majority would participate in future small groups
- Enhanced spiritual and social connection; Would like connections to grow
- Enables church family to become more closely-knit

Key takeaways - Individual Benefits and Strengths

- Most expressed small group benefited their personal journey of faith and relationship with Jesus, including:
 - Being able to read Scripture for themselves – began having own devotional time
 - Became more interested in reading the bible
 - Able to see larger purpose of reading Scripture
 - Made me think how I should grow
 - Improved my understanding of who God is and who I am to be as His child

Key takeaways: Positive contributions of the group discussion

- **Clear Pattern:** Discussion-based learning (questions, dialogue, raising questions) was most impactful for spiritual growth.
- Frequently indicated:
 - Being able to discuss what we read – how Scripture teaches and challenges us how to live
 - Able to raise questions
 - Helped my understanding of Scripture – others who explained
 - Helped me see that there were varying interpretations of Scripture , which led to a need for more teaching on Scripture

Key takeaways - Improvements and Considerations

- Most common: More time needed for discussion of Scripture and application
- Need a process for addressing complex questions (e.g. when questions may be addressed; having someone knowledgeable to respond to perplexing questions etc...)
- More open-ended discussion questions would be preferable
- Need to receive materials with more lead time to read and review

Small Group Experience

- **Most frequently mentioned:**
 - Balanced and positive conversation with different insights and perspectives
 - Everyone had the opportunity to speak and share
 - Overwhelmingly, people felt safe sharing in the group
 - Facilitators managed discussions well
 - Good to get to know others
 - Largely, check-ins on journey of faith over the past week were comfortable (some felt there was not enough time to delve into this portion)
 - Overall, when check-ins occurred, it was a positive experience.

Recommendations: Process

- Need process to handle difficult questions with pastoral input
- Consider seasonal scheduling with breaks (e.g., "Mid-Sept-Mid Nov, then Mid-Jan-Mid March, mid April-mid June then off for summer")
- Make discussion questions more open-ended
- Three indicated interest in being a group facilitator. Facilitation training can be provided.

Recommendations: Topics for future Small Groups

- Most commonly mentioned:
 - Books of the bibles across Old and New Testaments (specific mention, James – faith in action; Genesis – How it all began)
 - Topics mentioned:
 - Faith in Times of Turmoil/Current Events
 - Evangelism/Sharing Gospel
 - Biblical Application to Modern Life
 - Specific Biblical Topics (e.g., understanding & practicing forgiveness; beatitudes, 10 commandments; lives of biblical figures - Paul, Peter, women)
 - Follow-up of Pastor's sermon

Youth Small Group Update

- 4th Sunday (Nov. 30) service
- Highlights of experience and learning
- Make sure to attend

Questions and Observations from Discussions

Emerging themes from participants' questions and observations

THEME	Frequency (# of times comments/questions posed)
Knowing & Interpreting Scripture	20
Intentional Living as a Child of God	13
Practicing the Love of God	7
Sin & Forgiveness in the Life of a Child of God	6
Assurances as a child of God	4
Nurturing our Faith	4

Outcome of Pilot Small Group Experience

- **Scripture engagement** ✓
 - Enabled and/or increased individual interaction with the bible
 - Improved purpose for reading Scripture
 - Learned something new not known before from scripture (e.g., truth from error, role of child of God, eternal life etc...)
- **Spiritual Formation** ✓
 - Discussion-based experience highly effective
 - Spiritual connection with others encouraged participants in their relationship to God
 - Enabled deep understanding of 1st John and God's instruction for children of God
 - Experienced thoughtful reflection about personal relationship with God and daily living

Next Steps

- Determine when next iteration of small groups will be (most likely in Jan or Feb 2026)
- Identify 1 or 2 small groups based on suggested topics (perhaps the group can take a vote based on the recommendations indicated??)
- Identify group facilitators willing to lead and provide training and reference material/resources
- Address the outstanding questions raised in the pilot discussions

Q & A // Discussion