

RECOMMENDED,

To approve Guidelines for House Groups, to read as follows:

GUIDELINES FOR HOUSE GROUPS

In New Testament times, Christians often gathered in homes for worship and fellowship (Rom 16:3-5; Col 4:15; Phil 1, 2; 1 Cor 16:19). Today, a similar small-group, relational approach can effectively build strong disciples who reach out to their communities. This model is indispensable in the advancement of mission, especially in closed countries where open worship is forbidden or difficult. It has also been effective in certain secular and post-Christian contexts and when reaching out to adherents of other world religions. The primary purpose of establishing house groups is to advance the mission by expanding the gospel's outreach.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual provides a helpful overview of this practice:

“Where a number of isolated believers reside near one another or where they belong to a small group, house church, or church planting core group, they should consider forming a company of believers for fellowship, worship, and mission with the objective of growing into an organized church or multiplying house churches in that geographical area.

Company status is approved by vote of the conference executive committee, which, should it become necessary, may subsequently dissolve the company. The division and/or conference should have written guidelines for organizing companies within its territory.

Church members who are part of small groups or house groups may form the nucleus of a new company. Membership of all those who want to be part of a company should be held in either the conference church or a local church (mother church). If membership for those who want to be part of a company is to be held in the conference church, the conference executive committee will vote their membership transfers to the conference church and indicate that they are part of the new company” (Church Manual, p 34,38).

The above statement from the Church Manual acknowledges the following levels:

1. Small groups house groups/churches or church-planting core groups
2. Companies
3. Churches

The Church Manual also describes two legitimate objectives for small groups or house groups. They can either aspire to grow into a company and eventually an organized church or to remain similar in size while multiplying other house groups in the same area.

The following are recommended for house groups to function most effectively:

1. **Membership**—Church membership resides only in a local church or conference church. A number of house groups can be organized as a single church or as a company and remain under the umbrella of the conference church or a mother/sponsoring church. Representation at local conference/mission constituency meetings is only possible through the organized local church.
2. **Leadership**—House groups should be led by dedicated and well-trained leaders who are essential in preserving the church's theological identity and mission focus. These leaders should receive supervision and support from a senior district pastor or network leader and, whenever possible, a designated coordinator at the conference level.
3. **Regular Meetings**—While flexibility is essential to accommodate specific geographical and cultural contexts, house groups must intentionally stay connected with the mother/sponsoring church or conference for prayer, worship, and coordinated mission activities.
4. **Oversight and Support**—Consistent oversight is crucial to maintain unity and alignment with the mission and identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Pastors or conference leaders must provide regular support and guidance to ensure house groups function effectively and remain theologically sound and mission focused. Pastoral care and oversight will ensure that house groups will reflect the theological position of the Church.
5. **Adventist Identity**—House groups must be approved and accountable to their local mission or conference. They should actively promote the study of the Bible, Spirit of Prophecy, and Sabbath School Study Guides for all ages. They should be encouraged to use the world

mission reports and other resources produced by the Church. They should also promote a faithful return of tithe and giving of offerings through the local conference or mission system.

Notes:

Usually, the main difference between small groups and house churches/groups is that small groups meet during the week separately but come together for worship in a local church on Sabbath, while house churches/groups have their own worship on Sabbath.

The Church Manual uses the phrases “house churches” and “house groups” interchangeably, referring to the same group of people. Although a fully organized church can meet in a private home for worship, here, the phrase is used for house groups that are not organized as a church or company. The Church Manual provides no space or legitimacy for a loose-knit aggregation of independent house churches.

Divisions and unions choosing to implement house groups within their territories should develop or adopt specific guidelines to ensure consistency and effectiveness in their operations.

This will ensure that these groups remain aligned with the broader mission and teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church while also addressing the unique needs and opportunities of their local contexts.

End.