

Book discussion groups are a great way to connect with other readers, foster thoughtful conversations, educate yourself on important topics or simply enjoy books and/or community!

This guide includes various considerations and options for the many ways to hold book groups. If you're starting with your PW group, follow the steps as listed. If you're starting from the ground up, you may want to start with recruiting readers/possible members.

Step 1: Define the Focus of the Group

- Will your group focus on a specific genre, author or theme (novels, women's fiction, classics, biographies, justice and peace issues, antiracism, spirituality or religion)?
- Will you read the book together in person or prior to the meeting?
- Do you have to read or finish the book to attend meetings?
- How will the group choose books?
- How will you facilitate discussions? One leader? Alternate leaders?
- Will discussions be organic or focus on predetermined themes like character development, storytelling style or philosophical insights?
- What expectations or ground rules will guide the group, in terms of respecting others' opinions, allowing everyone to speak and keeping discussions on topic?
- How often will you meet and when?

Step 2: Select a Meeting Location (In-person, Online or Hybrid)

- Church or community center
- Local library or bookstore
- Coffee shop or restaurant
- Member homes
- ZOOM or other video meeting platforms
- Private Facebook group—discuss books in posts or live chats

Step 3: Invite (Additional) Members

- Reach out to friends, family and your congregation.
- Advertise on church and community bulletin boards or through your local bookstore.
- Publicize via local online groups, like Meetup or Facebook's local groups.
- Post on Instagram, Facebook or online book platforms—like goodreads.com or bookgroups.com—where you can set up groups and find members who want to join online discussions.

Step 4: Prepare for the Discussions

- Choose the book. (See presbyterianwomen.org/bookgroups for books recommended by Presbyterian Women's Board of Directors.)
- Create a member roster with contact information, birthdays or other information pertinent to your group.
- Communicate the selection to members—including the author's name and a brief summary—and the date and time of the book discussion.
- Create a schedule for reading the book and/or discussion questions and share in advance of the meeting.
- Organize refreshments or meals (for in-person meetings) or invite everyone to enjoy a snack or drink while meeting (for online meetings).
- For online meetings test technology, including speakers, microphones and software features.

Step 5: Hold the Meetings

- For the first meeting or when new people attend, give everyone a chance to introduce themselves. If the group size is significant or online, brief introductions can be provided in smaller groups.
- Remind members of the group's purpose and encourage an open, respectful dialogue.
- The leader should provide an overview of how the discussion will flow, noting if the conversation will flow naturally or if certain questions or themes will be discussed at particular times.
- Confirm the date and location of the next meeting, and the next book (or when it will be chosen).

Step 6: Keep the Group Engaged

- Use texts, Facebook Messenger or email to keep everyone connected between meetings.
- Send out interesting articles, author interviews or related books that can deepen members' understanding.
- Ask for feedback on meetings, discussions and book selections, and whether members would like to adjust anything.
- Celebrate milestones, such as anniversaries, birthdays or group achievements like finishing a long book.
- Keep a journal or list of meeting dates, books read, insights or other information members may want to revisit.