



LEADER HANDBOOK

EVERYTHING RISES AND FALLS ON *relationship.*



RELATIONAL CONNECTION

At Wooster Nazarene, everything rises and falls on relationship. Relationships are the foundation of NazGroups because they are the foundation of the Gospel. Jesus didn't just preach to the crowds—He walked with 12 friends. He shared meals, entered homes, wept, celebrated, and invited people into real-life discipleship. Jesus is our example, so that's our model!

CULTIVATING A RELATIONAL ATMOSPHERE

Great groups aren't built on content—they're built on connection. Your job isn't to manage a meeting—it's to create an environment where people feel safe to be real. That happens through your tone, your warmth, and your attentiveness. People won't remember all your insights—but they will remember how you made them feel.

FUN AND RELAXED

Laughter disarms. A casual atmosphere opens hearts. When you cultivate joy and lightness in your group—even around deep spiritual truth—it becomes a space people want to return to. Don't underestimate the power of game nights, inside jokes, or a great snack table.

BE PRESENT, NOT PERFECT

You don't need to know all the answers. You just need to be available and spiritually present. Leadership in this context is about emotional availability, vulnerability, and being willing to go first. Show up with love, and God will take care of the rest.





PASTORAL HEART

*You are a shepherd
of souls—not just a
discussion guide.*

NazGroup leaders are not just hosts or organizers. You are trusted to carry part of the pastoral heart of this church.

MORE THAN A PLACEHOLDER

You are not filling a slot. You are fulfilling a calling. You've been entrusted to care for real people on real journeys—and your impact might be more eternal than you realize.

TRULY CARING FOR PEOPLE

Follow up during the week. Pray by name. Know birthdays, notice absences, celebrate milestones. In a culture of superficial connection, you're modeling what real care looks like. People may forget what was said in a moment, but they will never forget being seen.

CONNECTOR BETWEEN PASTORS & PEOPLE

You are a bridge. When needs arise—spiritual, emotional, or physical—you're the one who can link people to the larger church body. Keep your eyes open and don't carry burdens alone. We're here to support you as you support others.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

Every leader is also a disciple-maker. Your group isn't just a gathering—it's a spiritual greenhouse. Your faithfulness to pour into people—week by week, seed by seed—has ripple effects that may outlast your lifetime.

WOMEN IN MINISTRY & ORDINATION OF WOMEN

The Church of the Nazarene fully affirms the calling, gifting, and ordination of women for ministry at every level of leadership—from local pastors to global superintendents. We don't just "allow" women to minister, we *encourage* it and have since our founding! This conviction is not cultural or pragmatic; it's theological. We believe Scripture consistently reveals God calling and empowering women to lead, teach, prophesy, shepherd, and proclaim the Gospel.

We also acknowledge that not everyone comes from church backgrounds that support women in ministry. That's okay. Questions are welcome. But as a leader at Wooster Nazarene, you are expected to **honor and uphold** our church's position—and to support and respect the women God has called to lead among us.

FIRST RESPONDERS

The Front Line

You are often the first to know, the first to care, and the first to pray.

Your group members will likely tell you what they won't tell anyone else. That's a sacred trust.

SPIRITUAL FIRST RESPONDERS

When life hits—job loss, illness, marriage tension, a prodigal child—you're already in the room. You're not expected to solve every problem, but you can always respond with prayer, compassion, and wisdom.

FRONTLINE DISCERNMENT

You often see things before others do: drifting hearts, burnout, relational fractures. Ask the Holy Spirit for eyes to see and boldness to respond in love.

SUPPORT + RELAY

When it's bigger than you, relay it. You're never alone. The pastoral team is here to equip and support you in every situation. Your prompt care plus our church-wide resources are a powerful combo.

EARLY ACCESS - VISION & EVENT AMBASSADORS

You help carry the vision of the house. We want our leaders to be the most informed, inspired, and equipped people in the church.

VISION CARRIERS

You don't just attend Wooster Nazarene—you represent it! Whether it's a teaching focus, an outreach event, or a discipleship initiative—you are a cultural ambassador. Your tone and buy-in matters. Others will follow your lead.

EARLY ACCESS = EARLY INFLUENCE

You'll often get access to new content, updates, and leadership opportunities before they go public. We want you informed, invested, and ready to help shape momentum in your group and beyond.

RELENTLESS INVITATION

Don't be shy about casting vision, extending invites, and rallying your group around church events. You are often the bridge between someone's comfort zone and their next spiritual breakthrough.

**ONE OF THE MOST SACRED
ROLES YOU HOLD AS A
NAZGROUP LEADER IS BEING**
a listening ear.



COMPLAINING UP

No Gossip

People will come to you with their hurts, questions, irritations, and doubts—about life, faith, and sometimes even the church. You don't need to fix it. But you do need to know what to do with it.

YOU ARE A SAFE PLACE TO BE HEARD

Your group members may need to vent, process, or voice concerns—and that's okay. Be available. Be kind. Let them speak freely without feeling judged or shut down. Most people just need someone to listen.

DON'T AGREE OR ARGUE—JUST LISTEN

You don't have to fix it or take sides. It's not your job to defend the church, nor is it your job to take up offenses. Listen with compassion, not commentary. Ask thoughtful questions. Then move the conversation in a healthy direction.

PASS ON CONCERNS TO THE STAFF

As a leader, your role isn't to resolve every issue—it's to relay it to someone who can. Our staff is committed to handling concerns with humility and care. When you bring something to us, you're not tattling—you're stewarding trust.

ALL COMPLAINING GOES UP, NOT OUT

In healthy families, frustrations go up the chain, not sideways.

Here's the culture we want to build:

- You talk to us, your NazGroups Leadership Team. We process together.
- Anything outside that flow becomes gossip, which erodes trust and unity.

"Complaining to someone who can't do anything about it is gossip." - Dave Ramsey

This is a good gut-check. If someone is venting about a situation to people who have no power to address it, they're spreading division—not seeking resolution. As a leader, you set the tone by modeling and teaching this principle.

WHEN IN DOUBT, LOOP US IN

If something's bothering a group member—or you!—we, your NazGroups Leadership Team, want to know. Don't carry it alone or let it fester in the group. We're here to shepherd you, just like you shepherd them.

Healthy leaders create healthy groups. Healthy groups build healthy churches. Protecting the atmosphere of trust starts with how we handle tension.



DOCTRINE

Who We Are

Our theology shapes our tone. We are a people of hope, grace, and truth—and that should come through in how we lead.

WESLEYAN-ARMINIAN HERITAGE

We believe in the transforming love of a Holy God—and in people who can freely respond to that love. That means we always lead with invitation, not pressure. We disciple with both urgency and patience, knowing God is already at work in people's lives.

THE WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL

As a church, we hold **Scripture** as our foundation, while also listening to Church **Tradition**, using **Reason**, and honoring **Personal Experience**. You don't have to resolve every question in your group—but you do get to help people explore truth through these four lenses, trusting the Holy Spirit to lead.

FREE WILL

We believe people have the God-given capacity to say yes to Him—or not. That means we honor the process, knowing transformation isn't instant. As a leader, you're not here to control behavior but to create an atmosphere of invitation and growth.

PREVENIENT GRACE

God is already at work in every heart, even before we show up. As a leader, you never start from zero. Every person who enters your group has already been pursued by God. Your job is to notice where He's moving and join Him in the work.

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT GOD'S CALL TO SALVATION

At Wooster Nazarene, we believe God desires for ALL people to be saved and come to know the truth (1 Timothy 2:4). In alignment with our Wesleyan-Arminian roots, we do not believe God predestines certain individuals for heaven and others for hell. Rather, we believe:

God's grace is universal and available to all. No one is excluded from His invitation to come to salvation.

Prevenient grace means the Spirit draws every heart—before salvation, before understanding, before even knowing His name.

Salvation is not forced—it's freely offered and must be freely received.

SECURITY IN CHRIST

We do not teach Security in Christ as “once saved, always saved.” Instead, the Nazarene Church holds that continued relationship with God requires continued faithfulness to Him.

We believe salvation is a dynamic relationship, not a one-time transaction.

A person can genuinely experience salvation, and later choose to walk away from that grace.

God doesn't revoke salvation—but He also doesn't force anyone to remain. You can choose to walk away.

Eternal security is conditional, not automatic. We are secure in Christ as long as we faithfully abide in Him (John 15:6; Hebrews 6:4-6).

We know some group members may come from Calvinist or Reformed traditions that teach a more deterministic view of predestination and eternal security. That's okay—this isn't a fight. We listen respectfully, but we also confidently lead from our theological home: God's love is not exclusive, and His invitation is for everyone. We believe in a God who gives real choices and honors real faith.

As a leader, you don't have to argue this point. But we want you rooted in our conviction: God does not predetermine some to be saved and others to be lost. His love is too big, His grace too generous, and His heart too just for that.

HOLINESS - OUR CALL

The heartbeat of the Church of the Nazarene is holiness. Salvation is more than forgiveness—it's transformation. God not only rescues us from sin's penalty, He empowers us to live free from sin's power.

Holiness is about love. Entire sanctification is surrendering to the Spirit's work that purifies our hearts and enables us to love God fully and love people well (Matthew 22:37-39; 1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Holiness is both a moment and a journey—God fills us with His Spirit when we surrender, and He keeps growing us in Christ-likeness as we continue to surrender every day (Acts 15:8-9; Philippians 1:6).

This isn't for “super-Christians.” Holiness is God's will for every believer (1 Peter 1:15-16; Hebrews 12:14).

As a NazGroup Leader, you don't need to explain every theological detail—but you do get to model it. Holiness looks like a life surrendered to the Spirit, marked by love, and reflecting Jesus. When in doubt, connect with pastoral staff! They are here to help!





THINGS WE DON'T MAKE A BIG DEAL ABOUT

*"In essentials, unity.
In non-essentials,
liberty. In all
things, love."*

Our church has core theological convictions that shape our teaching, our culture, and our mission. But we also recognize that not every theological topic needs to be a dividing line. As a NazGroup leader, you help create a culture of grace over agreement—where people feel safe to explore faith without being pressured to conform on every minor issue. Here are a few theological topics we don't divide over. They matter—but they're not the main thing:

ESCHATOLOGY (END TIMES)

Jesus is coming back—on that we agree. But exactly how or when? We can hold differing views with humility. Whether someone's pre-trib, post-trib, amillennial, or unsure—we keep the focus on readiness, not charts and timelines.

MODE OF CREATION

Some believe in a literal six-day creation. Others lean toward an old-earth or theistic evolution view. What matters most is Who created it, not how long it took. We major on the miracle of God as Creator, not the mechanism.

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

We believe the Holy Spirit is active today—and that the gifts are given for the building up of the church. But we don't divide over how those gifts are expressed or prioritized. Whether someone prays in tongues or doesn't, prophecies or doesn't is not the point—We focus on the Fruit of the Spirit as the evidence of His indwelling rather than the gifts.

ATONEMENT MODELS

The cross is central to our faith. Christians have long used different models to describe what Christ accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection.

Rather than treating these as competing ideas, we see them as complementary perspectives that together help us better understand the fullness of Christ's saving work.

BIBLE VERSIONS

We love the Word. And while we generally preach from translations like the NIV, ESV, or NLT, we don't enforce a "one version only" culture. If someone loves the KJV, great. If someone's using The Message, also great. The point is engagement with Scripture—not uniformity in format.

We lead with grace. We teach with clarity. And we trust the Holy Spirit to do the heavy lifting in people's understanding.

As a leader, your job isn't to "correct" people who differ in these areas—but to cultivate conversations that are honoring, humble, and grounded in the essentials of the Gospel.

We lead with grace. We teach with clarity. And we trust the Holy Spirit to do the heavy lifting in people's understanding.



PLANNING CENTER GROUPS & CHURCH CENTER APP

Planning Center Groups is the hub for managing your NazGroup and accessing digital resources. Once your group is initially created in Planning Center Groups, you can manage your NazGroup's profile, meeting times, take attendance, invite new people to join your group via QR code, and access resources within the Church Center App.

We require all NazGroups to be added to Planning Center Groups and all NazGroups must take attendance at each meeting. We report attendance as a church for accountability, but we also report our attendance numbers to the North Central Ohio District for additional accountability. Planning Center Groups makes taking attendance a breeze! If you have any issues with this, let us know. Below are some links and tools to help you get started.

LINKS & TOOLS - TAP TO ACCESS!

ONLINE FORM TO CREATE YOUR GROUP IN PLANNING CENTER GROUPS

DOWNLOAD THE CHURCH CENTER APP

HOW TO ADD YOUR MEETING TIME TO PLANNING CENTER GROUPS (VIDEO)

**HOW TO TAKE ATTENDANCE FOR EACH MEETING
IN PLANNING CENTER GROUPS (VIDEO)**

HOW TO ACCESS RESOURCES WITHIN PLANNING CENTER GROUPS (VIDEO)

Resources from Wooster Naz include: NazGroup Leader Handbook, [RightNow Media](#) (Wooster Naz special link.), [Nazarene Articles of Faith](#), [21 Jump Start Resources](#) (Annually updated in January.), [Wooster Naz Staff Contact Info](#).

ADDITIONAL VIDEO RESOURCES

Be sure to scroll to the "GROUP LEADERS" section. These explain how to use Planning Center Groups.

RIGHTNOW MEDIA

RightNow Media is a resource filled with video-driven Bible studies, which often come with discussion questions. You can also create a group within RightNow Media, which allows you to form a group chat (RightNow Media calls it a “group thread”) or watch a study online simultaneously as a group if you need to meet virtually. Wooster Nazarene has a **special link so that anyone can join for free**, as well as a curated content page where you can see recommended studies. Below are some links and tools to help you get started!

TAP HERE TO CREATE A RIGHTNOW MEDIA ACCOUNT using Wooster Naz’s unique link.

To view the Wooster Naz content page, click “Wooster Church of the Nazarene” in the menu ribbon at the top right side of the RightNow Media home page.

RIGHTNOW MEDIA ARTICLES - TAP TO READ!

LEARN HOW TO REQUEST TO CREATE A GROUP

LEARN HOW TO MANAGE A GROUP

LEARN HOW TO CREATE A GROUP THREAD

LEARN HOW TO WATCH A STUDY ONLINE SIMULTANEOUSLY AS A GROUP

If you would like to use a study that requires payment for materials, please contact Taylor for assistance at taylor@woosternaz.org.



HOSTING TIPS

Deciding How To Start

We know it can feel overwhelming to start a NazGroup, but once you get started and meaningful relationships begin to form, you'll be so glad you did! Here are 12 tips for hosting a small group (adapted from [this article](#)).

PRAY ABOUT IT.

Ask if this is something God wants you to do.

TALK, PRAY, & READ SCRIPTURE.

Some combo of these is a great foundation.

INCLUDE FOOD.

Not essential, but snacks tend to make everything better.

PICK A START DATE. Obvious, but key. A great way to begin is by inviting folks over for dinner. Eat, hang out, and talk about what kind of group you want to be. Just let them know ahead of time that it is a NazGroup kickoff—not a bait-and-switch!

MEET REGULARLY. Weekly or every other week. Just pick a consistent day and time.

PICK AN END DATE. People can commit to 6 weeks way easier than “forever.” Try a season. If it's great, commit to another 6 weeks together.

INVITE EXTRA. If you want 5 people, invite 7 or 8. Some won't be available—and that's okay. Don't hesitate to invite people you don't know well!

CONSIDER A TYPE. What kind of NazGroup do you want to be? Do you want to focus on Bible study, or do you want to connect over board game nights? Strong spiritual friendships can grow in a variety of ways.

PRIORITIZE RELATIONSHIPS.

Don't stress about finishing the study guide or going over time. Listening and caring for each other is what matters most.

MAKE IT A DISCUSSION, NOT A SERMON. Everyone should get a chance to share—not just one person doing all the talking.

NEED HELP?

Emails of the NazGroups Leadership Team are listed at the end of the handbook. Please contact us with any questions or concerns.



SEASONS/SCHEDULE

As a church, Wooster Nazarene has 5 seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, and the Blessing Season. NazGroups meet for all seasons, except the Blessing Season (the week of Thanksgiving through the end of December), and we follow a 6-weeks-on, 2-weeks-off schedule. This means a NazGroup will meet for 6 weeks before taking a 2 week break. Our desire is that NazGroups would have specific start dates and end dates, thus providing clear on ramps and off ramps for group members to join or leave a group and for leaders to start another group or take some time off. We encourage taking rest as it is needed so you can recharge and get back to the ministry the Lord has called you to.

PREPARE YOUR SPACE

We strongly encourage meeting in homes. It feels more personable and creates a deeper sense of belonging.

Ensure the meeting room is tidy, well lit, clear of distractions, and a comfortable temperature.

To help avoid distractions:

Provide childcare in a separate room.

Keep pets in a separate room.

Sparingly use scented products like candles or perfume to prevent potential allergic reactions.

Silence or turn off phones.

If you have light music playing, turn it off during the meeting.

Have everything ready before the group starts so you can welcome members as they come in

Prepare your heart to pour into your group members. Pray for your meeting and for those attending. You can even do some of this as you are preparing your physical space!



CHILDCARE

Our greatest desire for childcare within NazGroups is that children are kept in a safe, enjoyable environment and parents are able to enjoy their time in a NazGroup without feeling overly concerned about their children's care.

IN-HOME CHILDCARE GUIDELINES

- We require having at least 2 caregivers in a room at any given time, with the primary caregiver being at least 14 years old.
- Caregivers should be paid the same day that they provide childcare. A payment amount should be decided on and clearly communicated with the caregivers ahead of time.
- We recommend splitting the cost of childcare between all group members, or at least group members with children attending childcare.
- We recommend providing childcare in a separate room from your NazGroup meeting room.
- We recommend having children placed in childcare once they are walking age and older.
- Parents are responsible to provide any resources their child may need while with the childcare provider.
- We are happy to come alongside you to find potential childcare workers to watch kids in your home, and we are working in collaboration with Thrive Youth Ministries to help find teens who would be interested as well. Email Taylor at **taylor@woosternaz.org** for help.

NAZGROUPS LEADERSHIP TEAM

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