Running a Small Group Ministry Program

This is a quick start guide for this specific program. There are more resources available if you need more. Start at https://www.smallgroupministry.net/

Planning:
1. Poll your congregation to find out how many people would want to gather in person and how many would prefer to meet online.
2. Assess the available spaces where groups could meet, including outdoors.
3. If meeting on Sunday morning, plan if you'd like to have announcements, music, joys and concerns, or other programming before going into breakout rooms.
4. Recruit facilitators. If your congregation already has a small group ministry program or practice with other circle practices, you likely already know who could facilitate well. If not, look for people comfortable facilitating groups and comfortable with silence. Facilitators could also take turns if some people will miss some sessions.
5. Decide how to get copies of the sessions to the facilitators and whether you want to provide copies for each participant.
6. Decide on the length of the program. If you plan for joys and concerns and announcements in the larger group first, you may want to have a very short check in time and keep the sessions to 45-60 minutes. If you do sessions at another time you may find people want to check in more deeply and would want a full 90.

Facilitation Tips:
- Start the meeting on time. Model a warm, open tone.
- Share the session outline with participants. (Post in the chat, write on a whiteboard, or distribute copies.)
- Help group members take turns reading from the session outline. As groups become used to this, you'll need to do less prompting. Remember that some people don't like to read out loud. You can even ask people to share this information at the first meeting so you don't ask people who really dislike it.
- Set a tone of active listening and sharing from the heart. This is best done through modeling it yourself. When you take risks and share what's real for you, you'll let others know that this is a safe space to do the same. When you actively listen to others, this prompts others to do the same.
- Monitor group interactions and intervene when necessary—Is everyone getting equal time? Do some people take over? Are there interruptions? You may need to intervene directly or you may want to prompt a discussion during Likes and Wishes.
- Some people, who have been in isolation for a while, may be tempted to "overshare", either dominating the time or going into graphic details. Help manage this with modeling and redirecting. If needed, offer gentle reminders in private.
- Consider setting a timer for both check in and sharing. With some simple math you can have a standard that allows you to be sure everyone has a chance.
- In online space please remember some people are not comfortable with their camera on all the time.