



STARTING A LINKS FELLOWSHIP

Throughout the United States, men and women with golf in common are discovering that there are things much more valuable to be shared in life than stories of birdies and bogeys. At the same time, they are comfortable among their golfing friends, and enjoy spending time with these people.

In Links Fellowships, golf meets life. Men and women open the Bible together, studying the essential matters of Scripture. They pray for one another, rejoicing in God's amazing answers. They challenge one another to live more completely for Christ. And they reach out to those outside their Fellowship, offering the Good News of Jesus and the ministry of reconciliation between us and God.

Through the years, many people have asked us how they can start a Fellowship at their course or club. It is not so difficult, as long as:

- Your heart is ready
- You know the gifts God has given you
- You have a partner or team
- You are equipped

Starting a Links Fellowship

WHAT IT ALL LOOKS LIKE

OK, let's get to the nuts and bolts. If you start a Links Fellowship, what will it look like? First, let's say that there is no "standard." Ideally, Fellowships are good fits for the courses or clubs where they reside, so they will look different according to some of the characteristics of their local meeting place and leadership team. But here we will help you see what is possible.

Where should we meet?

The advantage of meeting at a course or club is that your gatherings will become evident to others, both those who would be initially inclined to join you and those who would not. In fact, people who would never make their first contact with the Bible or the God of the Bible in a church will sometimes dare to make such contact in a familiar place like their course or club. So we would encourage the golf course as your place of meeting, if at all possible. We know of Fellowships that meet in the dining rooms, smaller meeting rooms, and locker rooms, usually during the club's slow hours, often early in the morning.

If you cannot meet at the course or club, we suggest meeting at a home near the course, especially if the home is seen as part of a recognized golf course community. Again, this offers more tentative guests a place of familiarity to investigate the claims of Scripture.

Failing either of these options, you may find that a local restaurant offers a good option for meeting. And yes, we have had some Fellowships meet in churches themselves, but this makes the outreach aspect of their meeting less likely, so these Fellowships have kept their eyes open for other spots.

How often should we meet?

Most Fellowships meet weekly. Using Links Players Bible studies and other series requires this sort of regular meeting, as does a

constant commitment to supporting one another in prayer and practical ministry. However, some Fellowships are organized around meals and golf outings more than regular Bible study, and these Fellowships may meet monthly during the golf season (which varies with the region). Finally, there is at least one existing Fellowship that meets only once per year, for an annual trip, but whose members intentionally stay in touch throughout the year, with specific intent to support one another in prayer.

What time of day should we meet?

Again, this will vary. Many Fellowships gather first thing in the morning, which seems to be typical of groups that are all men. Others meet over lunch. Still other groups get together at the end of the day. As a special note, where we have presence in retirement communities, we find that a 5 o'clock gathering is popular, after which many will go to dinner together.

Should we be playing golf together?

This may come as a surprise, but not all Fellowships make a regular habit of playing golf together. Usually, though, if the Fellowship meets at a golf course, at least some of the participants will stick around for a game of golf. Many Fellowships, however, include golf every time they meet, though these groups often come together just once a month. And some Fellowships sponsor annual golf events, either as trips or as tournaments. These special events are especially good for introducing more people to your Fellowship.

Does our Fellowship have to be 'open'?

Because of the rules in place at private clubs, some Fellowships cannot open their doors, except by invitation of a member. This is not always the case, however, particularly if the Fellowship meets in the early morning when few members are around. In these cases, there is often an understanding among club staff that some guests will be attending, but members are always present as their "sponsors." Other than this kind of restriction, all Fellowships should seek to be welcoming to those who want to find out what the group is about.

Special question: What if our club won't have us?

When missionaries look to establish a presence in a country, they will sometimes find that the laws of the land shut them out if they go in as “missionaries.” But if they come in as business people or educators, they are welcome to contribute to the life of the nation—and while they are there they keep eyes and ears open for opportunities to share personally with others about Christ. Similar circumstances exist at some clubs. When a Fellowship's leaders look to set up a regular gathering time and place for the Fellowship within the club, they meet opposition from the club, either at the managerial or the board level.

The line of reasoning often presented in apprehensive clubs is this: “If we allow a Christian group, then we will have to allow a Jewish group or Muslim group.” This may be true. However, it is also true that they will likely not be asked to make room for such a group, as non-church gatherings like this are not common in other faiths. Still, you want to respond carefully and respectfully, so that the doors may swing open at a later time. You may find it possible, though, to state an understanding of the “if we allow...” argument and ask to get started all the same, with a willingness to revisit the decision with the board if they are indeed later asked to make way for other religious groups.

If you find that the answer is still no, find another place to meet and establish yourselves as a meaningful group. Faithfully pray together that you might gain access to the club in the future. We have rejoiced with Fellowships that have done just this, made a respectful name for themselves, and found the club's door open to them a few months or years down the line (sometimes once the club leadership changes).

BECOMING AN OFFICIAL LINKS FELLOWSHIP

We invite and encourage you to become an official Links Fellowship. This allows you to use the "Links Fellowship," "Links Players," or "Links Players Fellowship" names. We will include you in the communications we send to all Links Fellowships, list your group as a local Links Fellowship on our web site, and supply you with the Links Players logos for use in promoting your Fellowship.

In order to become an official Links Fellowship, we ask that you join us in ensuring a common mission among all groups identifying themselves in this way. This is accomplished by having the principal contact person and two other founding leaders in your group sign the Links Players Mission as stated below. *By having three people sign this statement, you are demonstrating a unity of commitment to the biblical doctrines of the Links Players Mission.* There is no other financial or administrative obligation to becoming a Links Fellowship.

LINKS PLAYERS MISSION

Love God and others, according to Matthew 22:37-39: *Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

Integrate Christ's reign and authority into all of life, according to Matthew 6:33: *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

Network friends together in Christ, according to Acts 2:42: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*

Kindle compassion for the poor and needy, according to Matthew 25:40: *"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"*

Share Christ through the great game of golf, according to 2 Corinthians 5:20a: *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though Christ were making his appeal through us.*

SIGNATURES

_____ Printed name: _____ Date: _____

_____ Printed name: _____ Date: _____

_____ Printed name: _____ Date: _____

FELLOWSHIP INFORMATION

Name of fellowship: _____

Principal contact: _____ Phone: _____

City/State: _____ Email: _____

Meeting when/where: _____

**(Send this completed sheet to linksplayers@linksplayers.com or
Mail to: Links Players, 755 N. Peach Ave Suite E11, Clovis CA 93611.)**