

Small Group Ministry 101

(For Small Group Facilitators)

What is a Small Group?

A small group is a group of 6-8 adults who commit to gather together on a regular basis to eat, share life, ask questions, learn, grow, support, pray and accompany one another in their faith journey through life's challenges.

Why Small Groups?

Unlike parish programs that focus on content, the Small Group's focus on relationship allows for that content to take hold in daily life more effectively. Smaller gatherings foster intimate community where people can get to know others and be known. *Small Groups are the process that makes disciples.*

What is the Purpose of Small Groups?

The central mission is to bring people into communion with God through relationship building and faith exploration. Small groups serve as a vehicle to build and be in relationship with one another on a deeper level. These groups are where people can process the loss of a job, a cancer diagnosis, or the death of a loved one through the lens of faith.

Through small groups we have opportunities to reach those less interested in faith (think of spouses who don't attend church with their families) as well as make dynamic disciples of Jesus. Wherever someone might be on their faith journey, small groups are able to meet them where they are.

Preparing for your Small Group Gathering (Meal recommended but not required):

1 week prior: Facilitator invites members to the gatherings including dates, location(s) & focus (with potluck sign up).

1-2 days' prior: Facilitator reminds members of upcoming gathering (time, date, location)

Sample Small Group Gathering Schedule (meet minimum 1/month):

6:30p	Host prepares home, sets up for potluck & Facilitator reviews content
7:00p	Host & Facilitator welcomes Small Group members
7:15p	Opening Prayer, start of meal & initial check in (Name, Vocation, Highlight/Lowligh of month). *Get around to everyone
8:00p	Transition to Discussion Space & Intro Focus
8:05p	Small Group Questions & Discussion
8:45p	Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer
9:00p	End & Reminder for next gathering

KEYS TO FACILITATE A SMALL GROUP:

- **Ground Rules** – Make sure to reiterate that this is a safe place to share. What is said here stays here. The authentic Catholic view should always be presented. Everyone is invited to share their honest viewpoint (even if it departs from Catholic teaching). The facilitator should prevent confrontation or argument, while at the same time leaving room for tension between the Catholic view and the individual's perspective.
- **Tone** – The facilitator sets the tone that this is a safe open place to ask questions, disagree and share personally. Create an open prayerful environment by listening well and affirming those who share. This builds a sense of community and accountability.
- **Listen** – The biggest mistake of a small group facilitator is not allowing time for people to process the question. The facilitator should foster discussion not lead the conversation. Speak as often as the person who speaks least – but do ask clarifying questions.
- **Navigate** – Help direct the conversation as the facilitator. Keep things on track, minimize drama/gossip, and redirect. Allow for each person to share their thoughts and make sure no one monopolizes the conversation (especially you).
- **Environment** – The group should be seated in a way that everyone can see and hear each other with minimal distractions. Make sure everyone is on the same level, facing each other. The larger the group is the harder it is to manage.
- **Facilitate** – Help connect the conversations to keep the discussion going. Rephrase the question if necessary so everyone understands. Make sure everyone is heard that wishes to share by redirecting (Ex. Thanks for sharing, Would you all agree, etc.). Try to get everyone involved – but don't single out any particular person by putting them on the spot. Let them jump in when they are ready.
- **Silence** – The pause after the sharing the question is absolutely key. Don't interrupt the groups thought process by speaking up. The uncomfortable silence is often what prompts members to finally speak up. Allow for the Holy Spirit to move here.
- **Encourage** – make sure to affirm each person for sharing their thoughts, feelings, and input. Affirmation can happen during (thanks for being honest) or after the gathering (I appreciate your thoughts last week on...)

SMALL GROUP TIPS:

- Start & End with prayer
- Have everyone introduce him or herself at the beginning
- Review small group questions ahead of time, knowing where the conversation could lead
- Personally reach out to members of your small group & if your group dwindles (as is normal over time) – be intentional about inviting other to join
- Make eye contact as each member shares
- *Use open ended questions* and ask *Why?*
- Remember small group can be uncomfortable because no one can hide – so be patient and help members relax. This will get better over time.
- Share your own personal experience by being vulnerable when the time is right. But, remember not to get preachy or take over the conversation.
- Don't be afraid of laughter or tears - welcome it! It helps break down walls.