

Suggested Procedures for Support Groups

Submitted by Deacon John O'Neill

6/1/2001

The Austin diocese encourages all deacons and wives to belong to a support group. The following information is provided to aid in organizing or enhancing such groups. It cannot be overemphasized how important it is for deacons and wives to maintain close relationships with their peers. There should be no loners among deacons. If we are to model church to our parishioners we should model church in the closeness and mutuality of our vocation.

Models for Deacon Couple Support Groups

Scripture-Based Model - After opening prayer the designated leader reads from a scripture of his or her choice. The leader then shares how he or she felt that the reading related to the events and feelings of their life. Then each participant has an opportunity to share in the same way. Leadership rotates through the group.

Open Topic Based Model - After opening prayer the designated leader presents a topic that relates to his or her life as a deacon couple. The leader then shares how he or she felt that the topic related to the events and feelings of their life. Then each participant has an opportunity to share in the same way. Leadership rotates through the group.

Feeling-Based Model - After opening prayer the designated leader reveals the dominant feeling in their life (sadness, joy, fear, confusion, doubt, anticipation, etc.) The leader then shares how he or she felt that the feeling affected his or her life as a deacon couple. Then each participant has an opportunity to share in the same way. Leadership rotates through the group.

Support-Based Model - After opening prayer the designated leader asks if anyone present is experiencing challenges (illness, concern, relationship problems, family difficulties, parish conflicts, etc.) Anyone experiencing such circumstances can express their need for understanding, support and non-critical advice from the group. All are invited to respond if they feel they can help. In this model the roles of "needers versus givers" shifts with the life of the group. Leadership rotates through the group.

Eclectic Model - After opening prayer the designated leader asks if anyone present is experiencing challenges (illness, concern, relationship problems, family difficulties, parish conflicts, etc.) Anyone experiencing such circumstances can express their need for understanding, support and non-critical advice from the group. All are invited to respond if they feel they can help. If there is no one in need, the meeting reverts to a scripture or topic-based meeting...leader's choice. Leadership rotates through the group.

(Note: Groups can be organized as a hybrid of these models and groups may wish to change or modify models to meet changing circumstances.)

Rules For Sharing at the Deacon Support Group

Sharing the significant events and feelings of our lives with trusted friends is a special opportunity. To share with fellow deacons and wives is a unique bonding experience and a chance to grow spiritually. The intent of the Deacon Support Group is to allow people to share deeply, not superficially, as well as to receive the emotional support and prayers of others. Some guidelines for developing trust and to feel the freedom to share are listed as follows:

- Absolute confidentiality. What is said is not to leave the room.
- No interruptions by members of the group while someone is sharing. The member who is sharing should be allowed to speak while the rest listen and do not interject their own thoughts, opinions, experiences or suggestions.
- No counseling while people share.
- The object of sharing is to develop spiritual and emotional strength among the members by each sharing in areas of:
 - My ministry
 - My spirituality
 - My significant life events
 - My important relationships
 - My concerns, fears, and struggles
 - My joys, victories and accomplishments
- Our blessed children are best appreciated in more appropriate surroundings not with the support group.

Members who join the group are asked to make a commitment of ONE year to the group in order for quality sharing to take place. Although each member is invited to share, there is no requirement to share at all meetings. At times one member may need more time than normal. Another member may want to give up their time if they don't have any concerns.