

Saint Mary - Hudson

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY



Complete Guide to Hosting

Small

A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS,

GATHERED IN THE NAME OF JESUS,

AROUND THE WORD OF GOD,

FOR FELLOWSHIP, SPIRITUAL GROWTH & PRAYER.

Group

4 essentials of SMALL GROUPS

Life, growth, mission, prayer. These four essentials combine to create intentional community that fosters friendship and strengthens each member as a disciple.

Life

Connect over the normal stuff.

- Catch up briefly on life since you last met.
- Bring the real stuff of your lives into group conversations.
- Do something fun together.
- Ask for help with tasks or projects and offer help to others.
- Keep a group chat going in between meetings.

Growth

Follow Jesus together.

- Read and discuss scripture passages or another text.
- Watch a video together and discuss.
- Share desires, struggles and victories in personal growth.
- Encourage one another in the Christian life.
- Ask for help and accountability

Mission

Go forth. Come back. Repeat.

- Share how you feel called to put the good news of Jesus Christ into action for the sake of others.
- Share your hopes, victories, and struggles as you put the good news discussed in your group into action in your daily life..
- Exchange ideas and encouragement.

Prayer

Lift one another to God.

- Begin and end group sessions in prayer.
- Pray as a group at the end of your discussion, taking time to lift up each other's needs.
- Pray for one another in between sessions.
- Share relevant words of encouragement and Scripture passages inspired by your discussions.

What are the Goals of Hosting...

Create an environment of friendship & trust
Lead a Spirit filled discussion

What Hosts Do...

Manage the clock (start & end on time)
Affirm contributions
Invite others to speak
Ask follow up questions
Seek clarification by paraphrasing
Listen attentively
Manage tangents

Rules For Hosts...

Don't speak first
Don't speak long
Use "I" statements

Prepare!

1. Pray over the selected reading. Spend as much time WITH God as you do reading ABOUT God.
2. Know your small group discussion questions well. Prepare your launching questions. Plan your prayer.
3. Pray for each participant by name. Pray over the space as you are preparing for them to arrive.

Pray!

Connect and Communicate

Here are some ideas to connect at the beginning of your small group and in between group meetings:

- As soon as you receive your list, contact each participant to welcome them and let them know the date, time, and location of the first meeting.
- Set up a group email or text (some groups use the *What's App* texting app - let us know if you need help walking through it).
- Send your first group text/email a few days before the group begins, reminding everyone to be there.
- Regular group communications help members feel responsible to everyone in their group. Touch base with them between meetings and ask members to use the group email/text to let the entire group know if they cannot attend.

*A Group Agreement establishes accountability among all members of the group.
The Host will read the agreement aloud during the first session.*

Small Group Agreement

- We share openly at the level that is comfortable for us.
- We engage personally with the material, sharing how it connects with our lives. We avoid using the material to comment on other people or groups, but share how its teachings affect us personally.
- We respond to what is shared with respect and humility, especially when we disagree. We won't interrupt, respond abruptly, condemn what another says, or even judge in our hearts. We listen receptively, and do not seek to fix each other or give unsolicited advice.
- Silence is a vital part of the experience. A period of comfortable silence often occurs between individual sharing. It's not awkward! We allow ourselves space to think and reflect as well as to listen for the Holy Spirit.
- All are enthusiastically encouraged to share, and at the same time we exercise care to permit others (especially quieter members) an opportunity to speak. We each aim to maintain a balance: participating without dominating the conversation.
- **We keep confidential anything personal that may be shared in the group.**
- We cultivate attentiveness to the Holy Spirit during our time together. For example: if the conversation seems to need help, we ask for the Holy Spirit's intercession silently in our hearts. Or when someone is speaking of something painful or difficult, we pray that the Holy Spirit comforts that person and that the Spirit aids the group to respond sensitively and lovingly.
- Since we are better together, we commit to attending sessions for the duration of this season of small groups. If we cannot attend, we will use the group email or text to let the entire group know.

Gets People Talking!

Some Great Questions

After a brief opening prayer, it's good to begin with a "Life Experience" question. These questions give everyone a chance to talk and learn about other group members.

Share a blessing or a challenge since we last met.

Where did you experience God this week?

What made you happy this week?

Any insightful prayer experience this week?

What are you thankful for today?

Who is a spiritual hero in your life?

What is something you are looking forward to?

Share something nice somebody did for you this week.

If you could vacation anywhere, where would you go?

What is your favorite movie?

If you had a time machine and could go to any concert in history, what would it be?

What snack food do you crave?

If you could go to any sporting event, which one would you choose?

What is your favorite song?

What books have influenced you the most?

What drives you crazy?

Share a favorite family tradition for Thanksgiving/Christmas/Easter...

What is your favorite month of the year?

The Main Event!

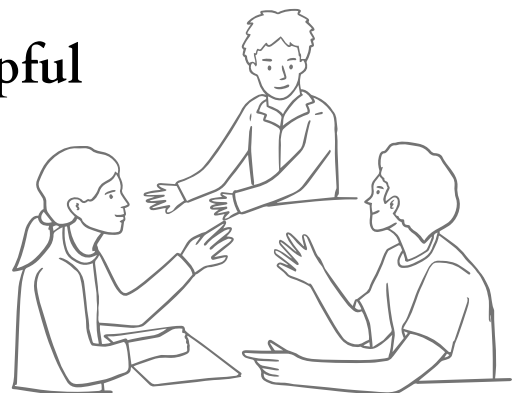
Facilitating Transformative Conversations

Lively, edifying, and transformative conversations start with good questions!

Every recommended parish resource will come with plenty of discussion questions and a suggested reading plan. Some important things to remember about questions:

- Small group questions are not about getting one “right” answer – they are about prompting discussion. Always allow room for several people to answer the question.
- Ask follow-up questions: *Tell me more? Anyone else? What else jumped out to anyone in this passage? Did anyone have anything to say who didn't get a chance to share yet today?*
- You don't have to get through every question!
- Resist the urge to teach.
- Of course you can answer the questions posed to the group, but let the group answer first. Always start with “I” statements. If someone asks something you don't know, offer to check the Bible, the Catechism, or ask one of the priests or Michael or Lisa.

The following pages share some helpful facilitation techniques.



FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

Facilitation is interactive. The goal is to involve everyone in mutual intellectual and spiritual discovery. It's not a monologue or a dialogue but a group-a-logue! Use these facilitation techniques to improve the quality of discussion.



Listen Attentively

It takes all our energy and attention to truly hear someone. Look at the person speaking. Focus on what they are saying. Try not to formulate a response while they are still speaking.



Paraphrase

The paraphrase is a helpful tool for seeking whether you understood what was communicated. Use paraphrasing in the context of asking whether your re-phrasing is what the speaker meant.



Model Trust

Model trust by letting down your guard. It is important to be comfortable and facilitate the comfort of others. If you are relaxed, others will likely follow suit.



Seek Clarification

Communication can involve misunderstanding. Re-state what was said and ask the speaker if that is what they meant. If the speaker disagrees, ask them to clarify with different words.



Re-Direct

Often, the facilitator becomes the “answer person.” Take the focus off yourself and avoid the role of “teacher” by directing the questions back to the group.



Reverence Each Person

Each person is a gift of God. We are a mystery, even to ourselves. Showing reverence for each person helps to create an environment of trust and good will between group members.



Start and End on Time

Show respect for your group members by setting and sticking to a start and end time. Help the group close the discussion if needed by asking for a final comment. Remember to leave time to pray together.

DISCUSSION DISRUPTORS

Group dynamics and behavior can be difficult to navigate! Below are seven common behaviors that disrupt group discussions. Everyone has a tendency to one or another of these behaviors, including you! Be aware of your own tendency to dominate, hang in the background, or get defensive. Use some of the strategies or talk to a person privately if their behavior is persistent or needs more explicit intervention. Do so with love and gentleness, remembering how you would want to be treated. Deal with difficult behaviors promptly to build trust and keep people looking forward to your group discussions.

Dominating Darryl



"Thanks, Darryl; does anyone else have any thoughts?"

Perhaps afterwards, ask Darryl to help you encourage the quieter members.

Perhaps sit right next to Darryl.

Shy Sam



Perhaps sit directly across from Sam, ask him to read a Scripture passage aloud, or ask an observation question.

Try to understand why Sam isn't sharing. If he's just quiet, that's fine. If he's uncomfortable, find out more and address the issue.

Derailing Dawn



"Are we getting away from our topic a little?"

"To go back to the earlier question . . ."

"Anyone who wants to talk about this can do so over snacks after closing prayer!"

Arguing Annie

"This is a question that has been debated for years. We are not going to answer this question tonight."

"Let's see what the *Catechism* has to say about it."

"Good discussion, but let's get back to the passage . . ."

Sensitive Sharon

"Thank you so much for sharing that with us. That can't have been easy. Can we pray for you right now?"

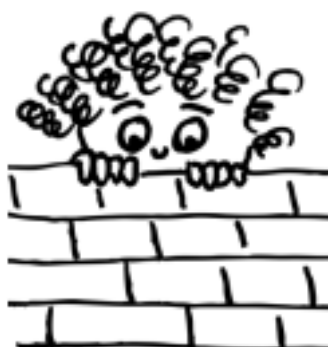
Be receptive, supportive, and good listeners. Resist giving advice unless the person asks for it. If appropriate, help the person get connected to a priest or counselor.

High Horse Harry

"How do you think this Scripture applies to our own lives?"

"Is there something you could do to address the problem you're pointing out?"

Redirect gossip or complaining back to the text or discussion outline.

Wary Wally

Remind the group to look for the good and not only where people or society fall short.

"How are we called to be salt and light here?"

"Have you prayed about what you might be called to say or do that could improve that situation?"

"Let's entrust some of this to God and ask to receive his peace."

IF THIS, THEN THAT FOR GROUPS

Some dos and don'ts for group life. Read this before starting a group, and re-read it occasionally if you already have one.

If your discussions are feeling aimless,

structure your time together using Life, Growth, Mission, and Prayer

If you gravitate toward teaching or dominating discussion,

ask others what they think. Listen more than you speak.

If discussion is staying theoretical and ideological,

lead by example by sharing vulnerably from the heart: joys, hopes, worries, prayer intentions, etc.

If your group is passively consuming loads of information through videos and other sources,

take in a short selection of Scripture, a book, or a formative video together, then process the message together for mutual discovery and personal application.

If people are “fixing” others’ problems or offering unsolicited advice,

ask questions like: “How / Where is God in this for you?” “What are you asking of God in this challenge?” “How can I/we support you and pray for you in this?”

If the group is complaining about other people or the problems in the world,

direct conversation back to Scripture and applying God’s truth to our own lives. “How will I/we live this out?”

If the group is being serious all the time,

start by catching up on life and keep it light at first. Have some fun together (in group and out of group). Share a meal or snacks.

If the group is being light and fun all the time,

invite the Holy Spirit to guide your time together. Prioritize a portion of group time to discussing and applying God's word, and to praying for and with one another.

If your discussion focuses only on learning and growing in faith,

discuss how each person feels called to mission in the world within their circles of influence. Ask how it's going and how the group can pray for one another regarding your mission.

If you meet too irregularly or infrequently,

ask the group for some level of commitment for a period of time, like six weeks to six months. Divvy up responsibilities, with one person in charge of scheduling and communicating about meetings. Change the meeting time or location if it becomes prohibitive for some. Collectively get creative and scrappy in whatever way the group needs (e.g. arrange childcare).

If you tend to rush through closing prayer,

review and implement A Path to Deepening Group Prayer

Ten Tips for Better Conversations

1. Ask questions!

This takes effort, thought, and intentionality.

2. Make them the expert.

Everyone is an “expert” in something and loves to talk about it. Find it.

3. Be genuinely curious, amazed, interested, and reverent toward people.

The Grand Canyon is a smaller miracle than each of us quirky humans.

4. Seek first to understand.

Everyone has a deep desire to be known and understood—including you. Sacrifice some of your desire to be known, for a bit, while you give another the dignity of being truly listened to / understood / the center of attention.

5. Ask about the details.

“Tell me more about that.” Who, what, where, when, why...? Avoid yes/no.

6. Use differences as help to conversation, not a hindrance.

Don’t worry if you don’t have much in common. Differences present an easy opportunity to ask more questions. “I don’t know the first thing about that! Tell me more about it...”

7. Be fully present and truly listen.

No multi-tasking (bodily or mentally). Not half in, half out. The person in front of you is the most important thing right now. Even when you think of something you want to say in response, keep on listening. Avoid formulating questions and responses while the other person is talking. Let those thoughts come and go as you continue to listen.

8. Watch your body language, and smile once in a while!

Convey warmth and care through your body. Relax your arms, smile, or show concern as appropriate.

9. Win the right to be heard.

People don’t care what you know until they know that you care. Eventually, they may ask you some questions. Then you can talk more about yourself and your thoughts.

10. Don’t jump to argue or defend.

Ask questions and seek to understand even when you disagree with what someone says. If they ask your opinion, share your thoughts and beliefs too, but remember: respect changes minds better than defensiveness!

A PATH TO DEEPENING

GROUP PRAYER

You can help everyone in your group grow in confidence about praying together. Here is one progression that may help you deepen the time of closing group prayer gradually over a few weeks.

Say, Then Pray (Level 1): Before beginning the closing prayer in the Sign of the Cross, invite people to say what they want to pray for conversationally. When all have shared, one person prays aloud including the various intentions the group mentioned. If you're with a group that feels uncomfortable praying aloud, take the lead!

Note Card Prayer (Level 2): Bring note cards to your group. At closing prayer time, instruct everyone to write down two prayers. At least one of the two must be a prayer for something they need for themselves. One person begins by praying for what they wrote on their note card. Then the other group members do the same, perhaps going around the circle. The leader closes the prayer with a memorized prayer such as the Our Father or Glory Be. Continue this prayer by passing the note cards to the person on the left. Everyone takes their neighbor's note card home to continue praying for their needs throughout the week.

Note Card Pass (Level 3): Write on the note cards again, but this time, everyone passes the note to their neighbor before starting the prayer time. A leader opens the prayer and then each person prays for the intentions on their neighbor's note card. The leader closes the time of prayer and everyone takes home the note to continue praying for their neighbor throughout the week.

Circle Prayer (Level 4): Before opening in the Sign of the Cross, everyone conversationally expresses what they want prayer for. Each participant should listen especially closely to the person on their left. A leader opens the time of prayer by praying for the person on their left. The prayer continues clockwise around the circle, each person receiving prayer from the person on their right and then praying for the needs of the person on their left extemporaneously in their own words.

Popcorn Prayer (Level 5): A designated leader opens the group in a time of free-flowing prayer. The leader can preface the time of prayer with suggestions such as "Let's pray prayers of thanksgiving today," or "Everyone pray to God about something that moved you from today's conversation." Before making the Sign of the Cross, encourage everyone to jump in and pray out loud whenever there is a moment of silence. We call this "popcorn" prayer since prayers "pop" from around the group when different people are inspired to pray. Open the time of prayer and let group members pray for as long as you are able or there are prayers flowing. A good measure of when to end is when the group has been silent for the length of a "Hail Mary" said silently in your head!

Recipe For Intercessory Prayer



It can help to have instructions to follow as you begin interceding on others' behalf. Use these steps as a guide to build your prayers, but of course the most important things are to approach God with trust and pray from the heart!

1. Talk directly to God. Prayer is a relationship.
Use one of the names of God as you address him in prayer.
Begin with "Jesus," or "Heavenly Father," "Lord," "Holy Spirit," or "God."
2. Be specific. Pray for people by name. Call out events or situations by name.
3. Name the darkness. What is broken and in need of help? What ought not to be?
Where is sin or sickness causing fear, bondage or pain?
4. Ask for light in the name of Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples:
"If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it" (John 14:14).
What grace or healing do you want God to unleash?
What light do they need to dispel their darkness? What could help their situation?
What obstacles do you want God to remove?
5. Make an act of trust or thanksgiving. In the end, we trust God: that he is good, that he is able to fight for us, and that his will is the best answer to our prayer.

STRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER...

Address God _____,

Be specific _____

Name the darkness _____

Ask for light _____

Act of trust _____.

"Heavenly Father, John was diagnosed with cancer this week. I know sickness and death was never a part of your plan, but somehow you make good out of it. Please shine your light and warmth into his life that he may experience you in this suffering. In the name of Jesus, heal him if it be your will. Jesus, I trust in you."

Modern man listens more willingly
to witnesses than to teachers,
and if he does listen to teachers,
it is because they are witnesses.

- Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 41

*Always be ready to give an explanation
to anyone who asks you
for a reason for your hope,
but do it with gentleness and reverence.*

~ 1 Peter 3:15-16