

WHAT ARE SMALL GROUPS?

Small communities are powerful vehicles for adult faith formation, providing opportunities for learning, prayer, mutual support, and the shared experience of Christian living and service to Church and society. (Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us, USCCB, 106)

BASICS

What are small groups? - Small groups come in all shapes but in small sizes of around 5-10 people. Your group can be a bible study, book club, running group, etc. Every small group includes hospitality, prayer, and discussion to help participants make friends, make disciples, and make a difference.

When do small groups meet and for how long? - Groups typically meet weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly if necessary, for 60-90 minutes each session. Your small group can meet anywhere from 5-10 consecutive sessions.

Small groups can be open for newcomers for the duration of the group, or you can decide to close the group after a certain number of sessions (e.g. after a third of the sessions). At the end of the series of sessions the group can decide to continue meeting if they would like, but this is not expected. Remember, the goal is to form a community on mission, not an insular group.

Where do small groups meet? - Small groups can meet wherever is comfortable and convenient: your home, church, café, etc. Be creative, but consider spaces or environments that help foster community, confidentiality, conversation, and connection.

Who are small groups for? - Anyone! Small groups can be formed around a special interest or activity like a workout group or bible study, or by life stages such as first time parents or widows.

Who can lead a small group? - Anyone committed to growing as a missionary disciple. If you're discerning leading a small group, talk with your pastor and seek out leadership training.

Have you been a part of a small group? How was it structured? What worked well and what could have been improved?

GOALS OF THE SMALL GROUP

Make Friends - We are created for connection and relationship. Whether it is a bible study, book club, or running group, small groups meet regularly and foster friendship.

Make Disciples - Regardless of the type of group, the purpose of a small group is to encourage us on our journey of holiness. Small groups create a place where we can grow in our faith and become more like Jesus.

Make A Difference - Jesus came with a mission to reconcile the world to God, to restore creation to its intended state, and He charged his followers with continuing that mission. Small groups are not insular communities. They help us discover how God is calling us to live out that mission in our daily lives.

WHY SMALL GROUPS?

Because Christ Asked Us To Do It - "Go and make disciples!" (Matt 28:19) Jesus did not come simply to die for us but to show us how to live. He lived in small group community, so it must be a good thing. (Luke 6:12)

True And Lasting Friendships Are Formed - Authentic relationship is something everyone is searching for. Faith-based friendships are essential to living the Christian life. "People will come out of curiosity, but only stay if they make a friend." -John Wimber

Opportunity To Be Formed In Virtue - Small groups help us to follow through with our practice of faith through accountability and sharing witness, to learn how others have grown in virtue and share our own successes in the Christian life. "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." (Prov 27:17)

Opportunity For Faith Formation - Catholic small group community offers us a chance to further our knowledge of the faith, capacity for discernment, and love of God through spiritual reading and discussion. This helps us to make mature, informed decisions about our faith journey.

Opportunity To Strengthen Our Faith - "Where 2 or 3 are gathered together, I am in their midst" (Matt 18:20). When we gather as a small group community in prayer and reflection, we become more sensitive to God's presence and work in our life.

To Be The Hands And Feet Of Christ - "Let us love one another, because love is of God" (1 John 4:7). Christ walked with His disciples in community. One way that we imitate Jesus is to build Christ-centered community where members feel loved and supported. Small groups are a place to live differently, pursuing holiness alongside one another.

SMALL GROUPS AND EVANGELIZATION

Small groups are intentional moments of Christian community where people at all stages of their spiritual journey come together to grow in holiness. Successful small group ministry helps people grow as missionary disciples by guiding members through all stages of evangelization.

Consider these stages of evangelization from the USCCB's document, *Living as Missionary Disciples*, and ways to foster spiritual growth at each stage in your small group.

Encounter

The whole purpose of evangelization is to draw people into deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. This does not happen in one moment but across a lifetime of transformative encounters with Christ within the family, through the Church, and in others.

How to facilitate encounters with Jesus in your small group:

- Ensure your small group is permeated with prayer
- Incorporate Scripture into prayer and discussion
- Discussion should focus on growing in closeness to Christ
- Establish boundaries and dynamics that encourage members to imitate Christ in their interactions

Accompany

Growth in holiness requires others to model Christian living in the context of non-judgmental relationships. A main function of small groups is to offer mutual support in Christian living. Fruitful accompaniment requires taking intentional steps:

How to foster accompaniment in your small group:

- Incorporate intercessory prayer
- Establish appropriate confidentiality within the group
- Model Kerygmatic witness
- Encourage mentor relationships

Community

Evangelization, in drawing us into relationship with Jesus Christ, also draws us into Christ's family where we receive God's love and grace on Earth. The small group is a place where we live and experience community. The successful small group also forms participants to be better members of their parish and domestic communities.

How to foster Christian community in your small group:

- Build in time for fellowship
- Follow up with members who miss a session
- Facilitate discussion that helps members reflect on: their vocation, sacramental living, and community life

Mission

"We become missionary disciples when we take our encounter with Jesus Christ out into the world." (LMD, 17) The formation we receive in our small group communities is not just for our own benefit, but to equip us to bring the Gospel of Jesus into the world. The fruitful small group helps members discern and live out God's plan for their life.

How to orient your small group to mission:

- Don't be afraid to ask "Now what?"
- Ensure that all are invited into small group communities
- Consider the barriers to participation in small group
- Incorporate questions of personal discernment into discussion

| Which stage of evangelization is most neglected in small groups? Why? What strategies might you add to foster growth at each stage of evangelization?

SMALL GROUP ROLES

Everyone involved in a small group can play an important role. In fact, the job of the small group leader can be divided between multiple people, even group members. Consider the below roles and recruit team members to share responsibilities.

Facilitator (& Co-Facilitator)

- Invite and welcome small group members
- Prepare materials ahead of time including readings, videos, and questions
- Lead the praise/worship and prayer, or invite others to do so
- Prepare for and guide discussion

Host

- Assist the facilitator in contacting members
- Prepare the environment
- Welcome guests

Group Members

- Invite others to the group
- Share your story, thoughts, and gifts

Which small group roles have you held? What role are you most or least comfortable with? Why?

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. (1 Cor. 12:4-6)