

# SG101



## SMALL GROUPS 101

Leading Others to Christ through Small Faith-Sharing Community



Archdiocese of Washington

# PRAYER

## A PRAYER FOR SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Lord,

We know that you love us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
and desire us to experience that love in community.  
Help us to understand the place of small group ministry  
in your plan for Christian community.

Loving Father, you give us each gifts to serve our family of faith.

As we serve as small group leaders,  
help us to grow in the skills needed to draw others  
deeper into relationship with your son, Jesus Christ.

You desire above all things to be with us in the community of heaven.

Open our hearts to your Holy Spirit,  
that as we serve as small group leaders  
we may grow in holiness and build your kingdom on Earth,  
that we may one day joyfully behold  
the community of the Blessed Trinity face to face.

Amen.

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## 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?*



# PLANNING YOUR SMALL GROUP

Starting your small group with a committed team and prayer-filled planning process will help things go smoothly and help members feel comfortable.

## PREPARING

Consider the following questions as you begin planning your small group:

- Has your pastor asked you to start this group? What are his expectations and goals?
- Who will fill the roles on the previous page?
- When will your small group start? How long will it last? How many sessions? Will you meet weekly, every other week, monthly?
- What will be the focus of your group? Bible Study? Activity group (e.g. Christian Athletes)? Affinity group (young adults, single mothers, etc.)?
- Where will you meet?
- What resources or materials will you use?
- Are there pre-written discussion questions or do you need to write your own?
- How will you lead prayer? With pre-written prayers? Will you invite others to lead prayer?

### Pray as you Plan:

- Pray for God to give you wisdom as a leader.
- Pray that God enkindle the hearts of people to join your small group.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your group.

### Sample Small Group Session (90 min)

- Welcome/Hospitality (15 min)
- Opening Prayer (5 min)
- Content Study (20 min)
- Group Discussion (30 min)
- Vocal Closing Prayer (10 min)
- Fellowship (10 min)

### MAKE AN INVITATION

Consider the following the suggestions as you gather members for your small group:

#### Build your team

- Who is already on your team? What roles will they play?
- Consider inviting existing small group members to help lead.
- Select and invite a co-leader (co-facilitator).
- Meet with your team to talk about the goals and format of your small group.

#### Invite members to your small group

- Is your small group intended for a particular group of people? Is there a parish leader who works with that group regularly who can share contact information or make an invitation on your behalf?
- How are people made aware of your small group? Is there any way your invitation can be more inclusive?
- After building a list of potential group members make a personal invitation.
- Answer any questions potential small group members may have; consider drafting a list of FAQs on hand, send to all group members before the first session.
- Keep track of those who are not available for this small group series to invite next time.
- Send a reminder the day before each small group session with important details.

### HOST YOUR SMALL GROUP

Consider the below (and following sections) when planning to host your small group:

- Is our team all on the same page about how to provide hospitality in setting up the environment and interacting with small group members (see next section)?
- Have we prayed for the success of our group?
- Have we adequately prepared discussion questions, prayer, and other materials?

### FOLLOW-UP

Consider the below (and following sections) when planning small group follow-up:

- Are we connecting with members between each session?
- How are we inviting members to participate in parish life after the small group?
- Are we inviting some members to consider leading a small group themselves?

## OVERVIEW

Use this overview with your pastor and leadership team as you plan your small group. Assign roles, tasks, and establish a timeline to make sure that nothing is missed and no one is left out.

Remember to bring prayer into your planning meetings as well. Serving as a facilitator, host, or in some other leadership role can be very rewarding and an opportunity to grow spiritually.

### PREPARING FOR YOUR SMALL GROUP

Build your team and ask the big questions like "Whom do we want to reach, and what do we want them to get from this small group experience? Establishing this "mission" will keep you focused as you pick materials and plan logistics.

### MAKE AN INVITATION

Build a good contact list; make your invitations personal; and communicate clearly. The small group experience actually starts with that first contact with a leader so make it count!

### HOST YOUR SMALL GROUP

There is a lot to do, so try to share responsibilities if possible. Have one person concerned with the environment and initial welcome, and another focused on moving the group into and through prayer and discussion.

### FOLLOW-UP

The small group is meant to give people an experience of Christian community. That experience of community shouldn't end with the small group. Be sure everyone is personally invited deeper into parish life.

# HOSTING YOUR SMALL GROUP

## LEAD WITH HOSPITALITY

Pope Francis calls us to practice the virtue of hospitality in imitation of Jesus, when he writes the following in his exhortation, *Gaudete et Exsultate* (GE), on our call to holiness. Reflect on this passage and consider these tips for being a great host!

*Let us not forget that Jesus asked his disciples to pay attention to details. The little detail that wine was running out at a party. The little detail that one sheep was missing. The little detail of noticing the widow who offered her two small coins. The little detail of having spare oil for the lamps, should the bridegroom delay. The little detail of asking the disciples how many loaves of bread they had. The little detail of having a fire burning and a fish cooking as he waited for the disciples at daybreak.*

*A community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open and evangelizing environment, is a place where the risen lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the father's plan. (GE, 144-145)*

### **Consider their comfort**

When people are comfortable in their bodies they are more likely to share their hearts. You can help people feel comfortable by considering their needs. Do they know where the restroom is? Are they hungry or thirsty? If possible, always have some refreshment to offer. Also, try to plan to prevent interruptions from pets, etc.

### **Ambiance is important**

The environment can either distract from your event or contribute to it. If someone is thinking about that weird smell or awkward clutter, they're not engaging in conversation or opening up in discussion. Make sure bathrooms are clean, consider lighting a candle, put away clutter and make sure there is enough seating.

### **Little touches go a long way**

Pope Francis talks about "the little details of love." Little touches of beauty or consideration can make your guests feel truly cared for and special. Consider getting inexpensive flowers to place throughout the space or offering infused water (just add some slices of citrus or cucumber!). Guests will appreciate the thoughtfulness.

### **Make them feel at home - be generous**

It's always a little uncomfortable to be in a new place, especially with new people. If you're in a shared space like a parish hall, make it feel warm by using tablecloths, flowers, and picking a room not too big or small. Make your guest feel a part of a community. Put them at ease by playing down faux pas and awkwardness. If they bring children, offer a place to change a diaper or safe space to play.

"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." (Matt. 25:40). This begs the question, if we want to invite Christ into our hearts, shouldn't we be able to lovingly invite others into our lives? Hospitality involves more than just coffee and doughnuts and it should permeate our every relationship.

### **Make it personal**

When writing announcements, pretend you're speaking directly to one person. People want to feel invited not notified. Ex. "There will be a discussion in the hall at 7pm on Tuesdays." Instead, consider: "We're excited to announce a new opportunity to grow in your faith alongside other parishioners. We would love for you to join us and share your thoughts on our topic. Meet us in the hall....."

### **Be an ambassador - introduce yourself**

If you're trying to foster a sense of community in your parish through small groups, make an effort to get to know people after Mass and at other parish events. Be on the lookout for newcomers. Introduce yourself, exchange contact information, consider inviting them for coffee or even dinner to welcome them to the parish and get to know each other.

### **Consider your attitude**

Whether you're hosting guests in your home, welcoming them to an event or evangelizing on the street, your attitude and demeanor can have a huge effect on making someone feel welcome or comfortable. Consider your body language. Mother Teresa always stressed the importance of smiling. Are you making appropriate eye contact? Are your arms crossed or is your body language more open?

### **Get interested**

People want to be known, and they will feel more welcome if you are interested in learning about them. When making conversation stay away from charged topics. Instead ask them about themselves, their work, family, and hobbies. Get to know them and give them the opportunity to talk about things that excite them. They may not remember what you said but they will remember how you made them feel.

*This is not an exhaustive list. The only way to learn hospitality is to practice it!*

*Describe an experience of hospitality that opened your heart to Christian community.*

# **LEADING YOUR SMALL GROUP**

Like many other aspects of Christian leadership, leading a small group is a skill (or set of skills) that you can develop. Consider the following categories to help you reflect on different components of small group facilitation to develop or sharpen your skills.

## **PRAYER**

### **Praying with your leaders**

Pray with and for your small group. Invite the Lord to be a part of decision making: whom to invite, what to study, where to meet, etc. Pray for everyone involved, your leaders, members, and that the Lord will work in and through you! Make time to pray at least once before, during, and after each session. Consider these specific suggestions to ensure your small group is permeated with prayer:

- Meet before all arrive (even for 15 minutes to plan and pray)
- Commit to praying for each guest on a weekly basis.
- Encourage leaders to pray for members between sessions.
- When you first begin, have a new person open and close with prayer.

### **Praying within the small group**

As your group feels more comfortable, ask for intentions and pray for them out loud. Consider gently challenging members to go a little deeper as needed. For example: "We would love to pray for your Uncle Bob, how can we pray for you in dealing with your Uncle Bob's situation as well?" It is much easier to pray for others, but the beauty of a small group is to get to a place of vulnerability and feel able to ask for prayer for ourselves.

As you encourage your group to grow in prayer, consider the following suggestions:

- Go around the group and ask each person if there's anything they'd like prayer for.
- The host should start with a very short prayer; long eloquent prayers may be impressive, but they discourage others from praying.
- Consider a simple prayer like: *"Thank You God for bringing us together, we ask you to answer the prayers we share with you now....Amen."*

## QUESTIONS

One of the best ways to facilitate good small group discussion is to have great questions! Depending on the materials you are using, you may have been given questions already. Great! Get to know them beforehand in case you need to reframe a question for someone or pick key questions when you run short of time.

If you are writing your own questions, consider the suggestions below to get you started:

**Launching Question** - Use to start discussion.

Ex. *“What stood out to you in this reading or talk?”*

**Observation Questions** - Use to help people recall the reading or talk.

Ex. *“What story did the author/ speaker use to open up this reading or talk?”*

**Understanding Questions** - Use to deepen understanding of the reading or talk.

Ex. *“How would you state the theme of this reading or talk?”*

**Application Questions** - Use to help members apply the material to their lives.

Ex. *“How do you see yourself in the story/ talk we just read/heard?”<sup>1</sup>*

| *Draft additional questions that could be broadly applied below.*

### LISTENING

Small group leaders are called to listen non-judgmentally to members' joys and challenges, offering prayer, support, and encouragement when appropriate.

Pope Francis reminds us that "we need to practice the art of listening, which is more than simply hearing... an openness of heart which makes possible that closeness without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur." (Evangelii Gaudium, 171)

Consider the following to foster an environment where members feel heard and are brought closer to each other and Christ:

- Get to know small group members by sharing introductions and asking a casual follow-up question to show you're interested.
- Encourage everyone to participate in conversation. Consider asking everyone to contribute to a more open ended question.
- Don't be afraid of silence! Make sure there is time to process questions and what each person shares.

*What other strategies might you use to help your small group members feel listened to and known? Think of an experience when you felt heard and it made a difference for you.*

### DISCUSSION

**Introductions** - Introduce yourself to the group then ask each member to introduce themselves. Plan one or two questions ahead of time for each member to answer about themselves along with their name to break the ice and help build familiarity.

**Ground rules** - Have a brief discussion about the rules and expectations for your small group, encouraging people to listen actively, share freely and respect others without judgment. Consider these examples of "ground rules" you might include:

- What is said in the group stays in the group, unless it is determined that a person is in danger of hurting themselves or someone else.
- When someone is talking, everyone else will actively listen.
- Allow everyone to share by not dominating discussion.



Besides posing questions, guiding sharing and discussion is also an important role of the small group leader. Consider using the "ACTS" model as you guide discussion:

- **Acknowledge** everyone who speaks
- **Clarify** what is being said
- **Turn** the conversation back to the group
- **Summarize** what has been said<sup>2</sup>

### Tips for a successful discussion

**Begin and end on time** - Respecting people's time will make it more likely they return. If discussion is taking off, remind members they can connect with each other outside the group to reflect and share further.

**Be dependable** - If you say you will discuss something later, make sure you do. Little things build trust.

**Don't be afraid of silence** - Give people time to answer. If they have a puzzled expression, restate your question (don't just answer it yourself).

**Inject humor** - Laughter disarms people and builds bridges. Meaningful discussion often follows laughter.

**Encourage group members to be open** by being willing to change their beliefs and opinions, being open to new perspectives, and resisting the temptation to argue merely for the sake of argument.

**Incorporate emotion** - Living our faith is not just an intellectual pursuit. Don't be afraid to talk about feelings and emotions.

**Take notes** - If a personal issue or interesting point arises in discussion, take note and bring it up at the right time.

*Keep perspective - Consider the level of personal disclosure appropriate for the group. The goal of a small group is not to make people cry but to encounter Christ in honest reflection and prayer. If people do share intimate information, remember that all sharing should be kept confidential unless someone poses a danger to themselves or others, in which case report to an appropriate authority.*

### PERSONALITY TYPES IN YOUR SMALL GROUP

A key to a healthy and happy small group is having free and open discussion with everyone participating equally. And nothing bogs down a great discussion like a know-it-all or an over-the-top needy person. Every group is bound to encounter conflict and distractions. As you train yourself to identify and respond to these personality types, your small group will flow better and accomplish its ultimate goal: drawing people closer to Jesus and to each other.

People rarely derail group discussions intentionally, but there are five personalities frequently found in small groups that can disrupt group interaction unless the leader can handle them smoothly.

**Dominators** have an answer for every question, and every answer seems to go on forever. Dominators are usually very knowledgeable and kind-hearted. They just don't always have the social skills needed to help you keep things on track. Have the courage to help the dominator wrap things up. One of the best methods is to simply finish the dominator's thoughts for him or her then quickly allow someone else to speak.

#### ***What a small group leader can do:***

Remember that the group is usually desperate for the facilitator to intervene when someone is dominating. You should begin by working to draw others out. Look for a quick breath, no matter how short, to jump in and invite others to contribute. Dominators aren't the enemy. In fact, dominators will bring profound points to the conversation. Turn dominators into allies by talking to them after the get-together. Compliment the dominator's quick thinking and openness, explain the goals for drawing everyone into the discussion, and ask the dominator to help draw out everyone during future discussions.

**Hiders** are easy to ignore because they never bother the other group members. In fact, they've become experts at being ignored and missed. Hiders need very gentle coaching and encouragement to start allowing others to get to know them.

#### ***What a small group leader can do:***

Most hiders feel afraid of speaking in front of groups, so help them break the ice by allowing some sharing in pairs. Mix the pairs up so the hiders have a chance to get to know everyone in the group. Remind the group often that it needs everyone's contribution to grow.

**Scoffers** have the greatest potential to ruin a small group. Criticism is contagious and it can paralyze an inexperienced facilitator. Remember that, when it comes to scoffers, their bark is always worse than their bite. Their complaints are usually more about their own perceptions and hurts than the events they're criticizing. Don't ever let a scoffer derail an activity, and never take the complaints personally.

***What a small group leader can do:***

Humor is a great tool for reaching scoffers because it diffuses the power of their complaints. For example, if a scoffer complains that he or she is sick of pair shares, a skilled facilitator might say something like, “We’re doing it anyway, so get ready. For an extra treat, you can be my partner.” With consistent care and nudging, a scoffer can actually become an excited and motivated group participant. If the scoffing is extreme, have an honest conversation with the scoffer away from the group that helps him or her see the effects of the negative comments and how they interrupt your efforts for the group.

**Revealers** have a tough time knowing how much information is too much information. These members often bring details to their stories that leave group members feeling awkward or unsure of how they should respond.

***What a small group leader can do:***

The secret to facilitating with revealers is to help them find the proper context for the things they’d like to share. You could respond to a revealer’s disclosure by saying something like, “That must have been very painful for you. That’s the kind of thing we should discuss one-on-one. Let’s talk after the get-together so we can pray about that.” Known for being needy, revealers work best with facilitators who are very direct and very gentle at the same time.

**Problem Solvers** have a tough time seeing that others are in pain or confusion. With great intentions, the problem solver tries to fix other group members, often offering pat answers and solutions. Remind your group that each of us is in the process of learning and growing and need time to discover for ourselves how God is calling us.

***What a small group leader can do:***

If a problem solver gives a pat answer that’s received as judgmental or insensitive by a group member, don’t panic. Quickly respond by showing empathy for the person with the problem or question. You might say, “I’m sorry you’re going through that. Keep sharing and struggling forward. We’ll do our best to support you along the way.” If a problem solver doesn’t seem to catch your hints and redirection, talk to him or her after a get-together. Tell the problem solver that you appreciate his or her wisdom. Then remind the problem solver that you want everyone to have the freedom to talk, discover, and even struggle through things.

*What are your experiences with these difficult personalities? How did you or another small group leader handle the situations?*

### FOLLOW-UP AND ACCOMPANIMENT

The process of accompaniment which draws small group members deeper into Christian community and relationship with Christ requires leaders to personally reach out to members before the small group, communicate with them between sessions, and offer appropriate support after the small group has ended.

Consider the following suggestions as you walk with your small group members outside of and after sessions have ended.

- Email the group between each session thanking them for their presence, share any important information, and confirm the date, time, and theme of the next session.
- Send a personal email to any newcomers welcoming them individually.
- Be sure to answer any questions that you weren't able to address during the session either individually or to the group as appropriate.
- Take note of any resources that were mentioned during the session. Send a link or other relevant information to the group in your follow-up email. As members review a video, article, or book someone recommended, it often prompts rich discussion and deepens interactions.
- If your group has a period where it is open to receiving new members, be sure to continue making personal invitations and encourage existing members to invite a friend.
- If a member of the group regularly contributes to discussion, is eager to lead prayer, or has expressed an interest in helping, invite them to consider leading their own small group or consider other leadership opportunities at the parish.
- Encourage participants to gather outside of the small group to continue to grow in Christian friendship (Theology on Tap, holy hour, meet at a local coffee shop etc.).
- Be aware of any cliques that form within the group; encourage people to pair with someone new for discussion, introduce members who seem left out to parishioners you think they might relate to; or even get coffee with those members and get to know them better yourself!

*Draft a short sample email message responding to these three group members:*

- 1. Someone messages you who saw a social media post about your small group. They are new to the area and used to go to a Catholic Church but haven't been in a while. In their message, they seem interested in your small group but a little nervous.*
- 2. One of your group members who had been consistently contributing to discussion and volunteering to lead prayer missed small group without explanation.*
- 3. You have come the last session of your small group and follow up with the whole group but one member seemed not to really click with the other members and you don't think they are really involved in parish life otherwise. You want to send an individual follow-up message to them.*

## QUALITIES OF A SMALL GROUP LEADER

**Builds Trust** - Accompanying others in the midst of their Christian journey requires building trust. Small group leaders establish trust within their group by establishing healthy boundaries, maintaining confidentiality when appropriate, and fostering an environment where everyone feels known.

- Establish ground rules (and stick to them!).
- Model non-judgmental and active listening.

**Self-Aware** - As a small group leader your actions and attitudes can have a big impact on the group. Being aware of your own emotional, mental, and spiritual health will help you make more intentional decisions and guide others towards Christ.

- Maintain your own prayer life, frequent confession and Mass, and pay attention to the specific ways you need to grow in holiness.
- Identify your personal gifts and be aware of your weaknesses with the help of a trusted friend, counselor, or strength-identifying tool.

**Guided by the Holy Spirit** - The Spirit directs all of us on our pilgrimage toward heaven. Good small group leaders take care to allow the Spirit to guide the group in prayer, preparation, and discussion, offering up the success of the group to God.

- Pray that you can lead your group well
- Pray for each member by name and their intentions.
- If something is on the heart of a member or even the whole group, don't shy away. If you're not sure how to address it right away, at least offer it in prayer.
- Assess the direction of the group frequently and in prayer to make sure it stays faithful to its mission.

**Joyful** - The experience in a small group should be informal, relaxed, and fun. Small groups are an experience of Christian community, not a company meeting!

Avoid intensity and remember this is not therapy. If something of intensity derails the group consider stopping and saying, "Hey, let's pray about that right now," pray, and then go back to the small group. Remember that laughter is a key component of a good small group experience. While you want to encourage people to deepen their relationship with Christ throughout the small group, have fun and enjoy the journey.



## **REFERENCES**

Please refer to the following sources for further information on the Small Group Ministry topics in this workbook.

Catechism of the Catholic Church  
Christifideles Laici  
Evangelii Gaudium  
Gaudete et Exsultate

### **Endnotes**

- 1 *Adapted from Rich Cleveland, A Facilitator's Guide (Colorado Springs: Emmaus Journey, 2007)*
- 2 *This method is from Focus on the Family's Truth Project*







Archdiocese of Washington