



## SMALL GROUPS – WHY BOTHER?

Have you ever been successful in growing or building something in total isolation? No? We are always part of communities and quite often small communities such as our family, our group of friends, our neighbours or colleagues. They give us support, encouragement, nurturance, assistance and gifts for doing things we could not do alone.

This is the role of small faith sharing groups – to bring people together to share their lives and the ways in which Jesus is working in them through the Holy Spirit.

In small faith sharing groups we can especially invite people who aren't regular church goers. They are places where we can safely share our lives and faith with one another in a welcoming and friendly environment. Through sharing and reflection faith is deepened, knowledge increases and insight happens. This growth in intimacy with others and with the Spirit gives us the courage to live our lives as Christ has taught.

Small faith sharing groups provide a place where each person can grow in their faith journey. They are not support groups for dealing with problems, issues, addictions, etc. Faith sharing groups focus

rather on the ways in which the Spirit is calling us to live more lovingly, actively, deeply, joyfully and fruitfully our relationship with God, our Church and our World.

Come on the adventure in deepening your relationship with God and each other today!

### SMALL GROUPS ARE WONDERFUL PLACES FOR

- Reaching out to those who don't come to church
- Commencing a faith journey
- Developing genuine relationships with each other and Jesus
- Discussing freely our thoughts and feelings in relation to faith and life
- Learning to pray together
- Training others to lead

## HOSTING A SMALL GROUP

Have you ever invited people you know over to your house, or down to the local coffee shop and just started conversation with them? Easy, wasn't it!

That is really how small faith sharing groups work! Getting together with other people and talking about life and faith using the material provided. This could be done weekly, fortnightly or monthly and even built into your normal regular catch-up with your circle of friends.

Thus hosting a small faith sharing group is similar to hosting a small party. Here are a few ideas that could help:

### Creating the Environment

We all know how important the surroundings are for good conversation. Noise and distractions don't help us connect. When starting your group how about doing the following:

- When inviting people to come, be natural and simply offer a time for sharing a cuppa and using the Faith Circles resource.
- Arrange the room beforehand in a way that enables everyone to see each group member, perhaps have a coffee table in the middle with easy access.
- Create a welcoming atmosphere: put on some background music, think about background lighting and remove any distractions.
- Welcome people as they arrive, find out their name and give them a name badge if it's the first time with people unknown to each other.
- Introduce people to one another.
- Cater for the needs of each guest: make sure they have food and drink.
- Put your guests at ease: avoid heavy or religious topics straight away, ease into it all and facilitate conversation.
- Finish on time. Adhere to a finish time so people know when they are free to leave without feeling uncomfortable. Stick to the finish time.

### Using the Resource

Once the group is welcomed and settled you can begin to use the resource itself. Here are a few suggestions on how this could be done:

#### 1. *The Gospel and Reflection*

- Have a different person read each of the sections:
  - Sunday Gospel
  - Gospel Reflection/Homily

Pause after each section to allow people some time to quietly reflect upon what has just been read.

#### 2. *Discussion Points*

- Ask the group what stood out to them from the Gospel or Reflection
- Move through the three discussion points

Keep the discussion on topic. It's OK to only cover one question.

### NEW IN 2023

The discussion points will cover **three** themes each week:



#### HEAD

What do I **think** about a certain verse, concept or teaching from the Gospel or Reflection?



#### HEART

What has been my experience? How do I **feel**? How is this related to my life?



#### HANDS

How can I put this Gospel or Reflection into **action**?

### 3. *Prayer Points*

- Finally spend time in prayer with one another.
- Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/describe their prayer needs.
- Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
- Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God
- Prayer for each other’s prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
- Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.

### ROLE OF THE LEADER

Someone has to start things off, keep discussion moving and ensure the gathering finishes on time – this is the essential role of the leader.

The following points outline the main tasks:

1. Get the discussion going through asking simple ‘open ended’ questions. We’ve provided these in the ‘**Discussion Points**’ .
2. Gently keep discussion on topic by drawing a connection from the discussion back to the reading or material provided.
3. Make sure the group ends on time, this will encourage people to come again.
4. Encourage respect so that all members feel comfortable sharing. Thus don’t allow any one person to dominate discussion.
5. You don’t need to be the answer person – there are no ‘correct’ answers. Everyone’s opinion and thoughts are valued and respected. Rather keep the discussion going and moving along the lines of faith and life using the questions provided.

### Keeping the Discussion Going

Keeping discussion going can be easy, it just requires a listening ear and some open-ended questions or affirmations. Here are some suggestions:

- “That is interesting”
- Ask follow up questions (open-ended)
- Identify with their pain, difficulty & struggle
- Do not defend; people, places or events
- Affirm the person; their risk in sharing or honesty
- Allow for silences

### Questions you might like to ask:

- Yes, good question!  
What do the rest of you think?
- Can you explain a bit more,  
or give an example?
- Are you wondering if....?
- Has anyone else felt that way too?
- How does that make you feel?
- Any other comments about....?

### Ways of affirming those in the group

- Thank you for sharing that piece of your story.
- I appreciate your honesty.
- Yes, I can relate to that too!
- It’s OK to have different opinions and disagree. Discussion helps us learn other viewpoints.
- I’m glad you’re here.

Allow people to express their opinions without correcting, challenging or insulting them. Convey concern, acceptance, empathy, and interest. Don’t show shock, disgust, or surprise. This may be misinterpreted as judgment. Use your ‘poker face’.

*Material sourced from Alpha International and Diocese of Wollongong*