

Small Group Leader Guide

How to Run a Small Group

Sample Meeting Structure *(approximately 90 minutes; 2 hours if including a meal)*

Pray with and Study the Material (before the meeting)

For Online Groups - Launch the Online Meeting (10-15 minutes before Start Time)

Be there to greet people as they arrive.

Welcome (10 minutes)

Welcome and engage in fellowship. For groups meetings digitally, go over any reminders for online etiquette or user controls. If your group would like to share a meal together, consider adding 30 minutes to your socializing time at the beginning of your session.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Lead the group in a simple opening prayer or have members take turns leading, inviting them to do so ahead of time.

Content and Discussion (1 hour)

Read through the selected Bible passage, the upcoming Sunday Gospel, or the faith study content. Using the questions you have prepared or selected from the study, facilitate a discussion around the content.

Closing Prayer (10 minutes)

Members share their prayer intentions. Lead the group in a closing prayer or have members take turns leading, inviting them to do so ahead of time.

Reminders/Other Business (5-10 minutes)

Confirm the next meeting time and any other practical things the group might need to discuss or be reminded of.

How to Be a Great Group Leader

There is a lot written on how to lead a small group and how not to lead one. Here is a compilation of some best practices that will assist you in making the small group a life-changing experience for all.

1. Pray

- *Pray for each member of your group, for your leadership, and before each meeting.*

2. Demonstrate Hospitality

IN-PERSON:

- *Decide the best place for your group to meet (someone's home, a coffee shop, restaurant, park, parish, etc.), a place the group can comfortably sit, see and hear one another, and have enough privacy for the conversation.*
- *Set up the environment to be welcoming, organized, comfortable, and clean.*
- *Make sure your participants know where the bathrooms are located, and that they are clean.*
- *Consider a simple setting like a candle or centerpiece.*
- *Have snacks and water or other drinks available if not meeting in a venue where food is readily available—consider having group members rotate providing snacks if appropriate.*
- *Consider sharing a meal together each week, having members contribute to each meal or rotate meal preparation responsibilities.*
- *Be mindful of allergies (food, pets, etc.) and other health concerns.*

How To Be A Great Group Leader

1. Pray
2. Demonstrate Hospitality
3. Know Your Role
4. Prepare the Participants
5. Use Communication Expectations & Etiquette
6. Prepare for Temptations & Challenges

- *If you are meeting at the parish, be sure that you are on the parish calendar in a room reserved for you, and be sure that the doors will be unlocked for participants to easily find their way in.*

ONLINE:

- *Decide the best online tool for your group to use (see list of some options below).*
- *Make sure what people will see behind you is clean and presentable. If possible, set the tone in the background with decorations, candles, images, etc.*
- *Set a welcoming tone, greeting each member as they enter the meeting.*
- *Remind members about online etiquette and provide any help with how to use their controls. (See Online Communication Etiquette & Suggestions below for details.)*
- *At the end, thank everyone for coming and say goodbye to each member as they leave. Be the last one to leave the online gathering.*

3. Know Your Role

As a small group leader, you take on the following roles:

Facilitator

- *You are not the teacher, but you facilitate the discussion, and create an environment of encounter with Christ through the Word, discussion, and prayer.*
- *Listen carefully; do not interrupt.*
- *You do not need all the answers but are willing to help each other find answers.*
- *Your role is not to be used as a platform to encourage dissent from the Church. Turn to trusted sources for help in understanding Church teachings with which you struggle.*

Encourager

- *Give positive and genuine affirmation for everyone's contributions.*
- *Maintain a positive attitude.*

Director of Conversation

- *Avoid unhelpful tangents.*
- *Encourage participation from everyone.*
- *Ask open-ended questions.*
- *Do not dominate the conversation.*
- *Prevent others from dominating.*
- *Re-phrase comments for clarity. For example, "What I hear you saying is . . ."*
- *Allow for periods of silence as a normal part of small group discussion.*
- *Maintain healthy boundaries in group sharing.*
- *Pace the conversation, and keep it pleasing to the Holy Spirit (avoid gossip, excessive complaining, etc.).*
- *Start and end on time.*

Preparer

- *Review and pray with discussion material in advance.*
- *Prepare questions to encourage conversation in advance.*
 - *Launching Questions – What are your initial thoughts? What stands out to you?*
 - *Observation Questions – What does this content/passage reveal to you? What do you observe about the content/passage that was shared?*
 - *Understanding Questions – Why is this content/passage important? Do you understand what it means?*
 - *Application Questions – How does this content apply to you? What will you do now?*
- *Come with 2 or 3 key things you are ready to share with your group, when needed.*

4. Prepare the Participants

Before you begin your faith study, prepare the participants by clearly communicating the goals of the group and reviewing the way it will operate. For in person meetings, this could

take place during your first meeting. For digital groups, you may consider doing this ahead of time in order to give the group the opportunity to test the technology. Here are some things to discuss as a group:

Introductions

- *Ask each member to introduce themselves (name and one or two facts about themselves), going first as the leader, setting an example of a brief self-introduction.*

Share the Vision and Format

- *Share why you are excited to lead the small group and why you chose to do this.*
- *Share the vision and specific goals of the small group (i.e. that it leads to greater growth in relationship with God and each other. The hope is that this experience also inspires members to share Christ by inviting others to the small group or by eventually forming an additional one to lead on their own.).*
- *Explain the basic format of how each meeting will be structured, and select the content you will be using, if it has not already been selected.*

Time and Date

- *Agree on the group meeting time and dates.*
- *Get a commitment from group members that everyone will make this a priority as much as reasonably possible.*

Group Communication Outside Meetings

- *Decide as a group on the best method of communication outside of meetings (texting, email, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, GroupMe, etc.).*

Group Communication Within Meetings

- *Communicate and agree to the following expectations and etiquette for group communication within meetings.*

5. Use Communication Expectations and Etiquette

General Expectations

- *Members are expected to be on time for meetings.*
- *All members have a responsibility to set a tone and group culture that is respectful, humble, open, honest, non-judgmental, and loving.*
- *Silence in group discussion is to be expected and an important part of the experience.*
- *Members are encouraged to share while maintaining a balance of participating without dominating.*
- *Members will listen respectfully and not interrupt one another.*
- *All members agree to keep confidential anything personal shared in the group, unless there is risk of someone harming themselves or someone else.*
- *Members are encouraged to pray for one another in between meetings.*

Online Communication Etiquette & Suggestions

- *Make sure all members are comfortable with their controls (muting, video on/off, chat options, speaker vs. gallery view, etc.).*
- *Remind members that while their video is on, they can be seen by everyone, and while their microphone is on, they (and all household noises) can be heard by everyone.*
- *Encourage members to turn their video on during the meeting to help people connect by seeing each other.*

Ten Commandments of Small Group Discussions

1. Be open, humble, non-judgmental, and loving.
2. Allow silence.
3. Do not dominate the conversation.
4. Listen respectfully.
5. Do not interrupt.
6. Be encouraging.
7. Ask clarifying questions.
8. Maintain confidentiality.
9. For online meetings, turn your video camera on.
10. For online meetings, mute your microphone when you are not talking.

- *When members are not speaking, encourage them to mute themselves to avoid background noise and echoes.*
- *During group prayer or readings, have one person say the prayer or reading out loud while others are muted, or have members take turns with different parts of the prayer or reading. If everyone is speaking the prayer/reading out loud at the same time with their microphones on, it creates a delay in the sound, causing a significant distraction, and will prevent everyone from being able to pray/read in sync with each other.*
- *Consider using screen share options to share prayers, readings, videos, etc. with the group.*

6. Prepare for Temptations and Challenges

- *Expect to experience spiritual resistance through frustrations, temptations, and challenging situations when doing something for Jesus. Spiritual warfare is common when people are growing in their faith. Pray and rely on Jesus and His Spirit to lead, guide and steady you.*
- *If there are any pastoral situations that arise in your small group, contact a parish staff member for assistance and guidance.*
- *Remember Legal Obligations*
 - *If a small group consists of any members who are vulnerable adults or people under 18 years old, the group leader is required to undergo a background check, participate in the Protecting God's Children training program, and abide by the Archdiocese of Detroit's Safe Environments Policy and Volunteer Code of Conduct.*
 - *Small groups are sometimes the only safe and intimate environments where members of your community can disclose the more painful aspects of their lives. For this reason, it's not uncommon for a small group leader to become aware of activities that are illegal or harmful such as substance abuse, neglect or abuse of a child or adult, suicidal ideation or mental health problems, and domestic issues. Small group leaders should be aware of any legal or moral obligation to report these activities or connect their small group members to parish staff members who can provide helpful resources. Government agencies, such as the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services, and the Archdiocese of Detroit Department of Human Resources are available to help parish staff members identify such resources when needed. More information can be found at <http://protect.aod.org>. These policies and procedures will ensure that your small groups remain a safe and accountable place where all group members can flourish!*

Digital Tools for Online Groups

Many platforms exist to connect people digitally. Here are just a few to consider:

1. **ZOOM - Meet for 40 minutes for free or upgrade to a paid plan for unlimited time video conferencing on a mobile device or a desktop computer. Find out more by visiting zoom.us**
2. **GOOGLE HANGOUTS - Each Hangout allows an unlimited amount of time via the web browser or Google Hangout app. Please note: all participants need to have a Google account. Visit hangouts.google.com for more information.**
3. **FACEBOOK MESSENGER - Using the Messenger mobile app or a web browser, this free option from Facebook permits groups to video chat. More details can be found at messenger.com**
4. **SKYPE - Connect with others via the desktop app, mobile app, or the website using this free video chat option. Additional details can be found at skype.com**