



## SMALL FAITH SHARING GROUPS

### Instruction Document

God wants to break into your life and enter your heart in a new way. Small life-sharing groups are an amazing way for Him to do that.

Some years ago, we had the Ecclesia programme offered by the Archdiocese Centre for Pastoral Development. It ran for several years / seasons until the programme ended. It was very successful in many parishes. Groups met in parishioners' homes to go through the weekly programme. Generally, the Ecclesia season was a 5 – 6 week period each year.

The formation of Small Faith Sharing groups is a fundamental part of creating a Catholic community within the parish. These groups allow people to form close bonds by meeting in a familial environment and discussing spiritual topics.

Small faith-sharing groups allow us to share our faith with others and to grow together in community. Using prayer, shared experiences, and explorations of faith, these small groups can create in a smaller seeing a community that enhances the life of the entire parish.

The small faith-sharing groups enable people to pray together to:

- Deepen their faith
- Grow in knowledge and understanding
- Find support and share fellowship with one another in an informal seeing
- Confidentiality is key to the success of the groups
- Friendships are formed as people 'connect' with one another

By participating in small faith-sharing groups personal faith is deepened and confidence is gained to be able to share that faith with others and be the evangelists that we are called to be by virtue of our baptism in Christ Jesus.

#### Structuring the Small Faith-Sharing Groups

Organizing into small faith-sharing groups requires balancing several factors: the number of leaders available, the size of the group, the time available for people in the group, the interests of the people, and the materials available.

## Group Leaders

Identify some people who can act as leaders of the small groups. The leaders don't need to be particularly knowledgeable about the Bible, but they SHOULD have some training in how to guide small discussion groups, and they MUST be willing to share their understanding of what the Scriptures (or your overall topic) mean in their lives and to encourage others in the group to do the same.

Generally, here is what the small group leader will be expected to do:

- Encourage participation and the sharing of faith
- Encourage communal prayer (singing, too) and a prayerful atmosphere at meetings
- Encourage participants to live out their faith commitments in daily actions
- Create an atmosphere of hospitality and trust among the participants

And here is what a Group Leader is NOT:

- A theologian – Theologians, of course, may belong to or lead small faith-sharing groups. But it is not a requirement. If theological questions arise, turn to your parish's priest or to a theologian, or to the various Vatican and credible online resources for such questions.
- A counsellor – Small faith-sharing groups are not an appropriate setting in which to handle emotionally intense feelings such as depression, anxiety, or extreme anger. If a group member moves in this direction, the leader should bring the discussion back to faith-sharing.

## Group Size

Typically, groups number 6 to 9 in size. With fewer than 6, you may not develop the diversity in viewpoints and perspectives that enliven reflections. With more than 9, you may not have enough time for all to share in ways that are most comfortable for them — and you may limit the spaces where you can meet.

But there is no hard-and-fast rule on group size. You may need to adjust a group's size up or down depending on the dynamics of that particular group.

## Guidelines for Participation

As noted in the meeting guidelines, silence (“silent reflection”) is an essential part of the faith-sharing experience. Silence also is important within each element of the meeting structure. Silence creates a reflective and unhurried atmosphere. It allows those less reticent to gather their courage and speak. It may serve at the start of each session as a way to focus thoughts on the gathering itself, away from the day's previous activities.

Additional guidelines that are useful to distribute at the first meeting:

- Respect each person and their contribution. Faith-sharing is not problem-solving, debate, or literary analysis. It is a shared encounter along our individual spiritual journeys.
- Each person shares on the level where he or she is most comfortable.
- Try to speak with honesty and openness to enhance the community's growth.
- Before sharing a second time, wait to be sure that all have had a chance to share a first time.
- Confidentiality is essential. What is shared within the group remains within the group.
- Silence is important to the process. Allow for reflections and for time to think before speaking.
- There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Indeed, there are no “answers” in faith-sharing — just a prayerful attention to the action of God in our midst.