

## Starting Small Faith-Sharing Groups in a Parish

### 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, and resources.

### Where to Start

There are various ways to start:

1. **Step One: A leader or director** for small faith-sharing groups must be selected.
2. **Step Two: A Core Team for small faith-sharing groups** needs to be formed.
  - a. The director, the pastor, or pastoral staff can collaborate with the leader to find four or more parishioners (depending on size of parish) to serve on the core team.
  - b. This core group needs to **become very familiar with the resource** to be used.
  - c. **One option** that core team might consider is to organize a parish event that attracts as many parishioners as possible, such as a mission, parish retreat, lecture series, etc. The aim of this initiating event is to create a common spiritual experience or bond that ends with an offer to continue that experience through small faith sharing groups.
3. **Step Three: Promotion and advertisement** of the small group faith sharing program to be initiated needs to start early on. This is very important for a Lenten Program such as *Disciples on the Journey*.
  - a. **Early Fall**
    - i. In **October**, bulletin blurbs could be written to pique the curiosity of the parishioners. Coming soon a Big Event – stay tuned, etc.
    - ii. In **November**
      1. Put a brief explanation of the program in the bulletin
      2. Encourage parishioners to begin praying for the success of this program.
      3. Each Sunday include in the Prayers of the Faithful a petition for the success of the Lenten program.
    - iii. In **December** a full-page flyer could be inserted in the bulletin or handed out at Mass explaining the program and asking parishioners to pray and discern their participation.
    - iv. Call or contact persons you think would be willing to host a group in their home. It is good to have some leaders in place before you begin the general solicitation.

v. Options

1. The pastor could write a letter to parishioners inviting them to participate. This letter could be mailed or inserted in the Sunday bulletin.
2. Letters can be sent to organizations to invite them to get their members to participate.

**4. Step Four: First Sign-Up week**

**a. Pulpit Talk** Six weeks before Lent, arrange for a pulpit talk at all the Sunday Masses.

i. Have the program director and/or Core Team members announce that the parish will be offering a Lenten program, *Disciples on the Journey*.

1. Explain the program and make sure people understand

- a. This is **not** a Bible study, but faith sharing.
- b. There are no right or wrong answers. You will not have to answer every question, no pressure.
- c. There will be various times and days to participate
- d. Ask parishioners to consider hosting a group in their home or leading a group at the Church.

ii. Testimonies would be great if you have people with small group sharing experience. Invite these parishioners to share how this experience helped them in their spiritual and faith life.

**b. Lenten Program Flyer** At the First- Sign-Up Sunday Mass/es provide or pass out a flyer that explains the Lenten program and what is expected of participating parishioners.

**c. Sign-up Forms** Have cards or forms in the pews so that participants and leaders both can indicate what day and time would be best for them to host or participate in *Disciples on the Journey*.

i. **Host and lead a group** Have a place on the form for parishioners to sign up to lead a group.

1. They will indicate the day and time they can host/lead the DJ group.
2. If they like they can list friends, family, or neighbors they wish to invite to join them at their home each week.

**ii. Sign up to participate**

1. Parishioners can fill out the forms after the talk if they are ready (give them a few minutes to do this).
2. They need to indicate the day and time they prefer to meet as well as contact information.
3. Parishioners are to put the sign-up form in the collection basket, bring it to Mass next week, or drop the form off at the parish office sometime during the week.

**d. Parishioners pray and discern.** Ask parishioners to pray and discern God's call for them to do something special this Lent by **participating** in a faith-sharing group, and perhaps **hosting** a group of 8 to 10 persons in their home.

**e. Second Sign-Up Sunday**

- i. Repeat the process asking those who were not present last Sunday or who have not yet filled out their form to do so at this Mass or bring them next week.
- ii. Again have forms and flyers available.
- iii. Core group members might want to form a phone committee who will call parishioners they know who have not responded and encourage them to sign up. A personal invitation works wonders!

**5. Step Five: Organizing the Small Groups**

- a. Have a committee take the forms that have been turned in and sort them into those who volunteered to host a group and those who signed up to participate.
- b. Then take the participant forms and put them with the host/leader who has indicated the same day and time that they have. When you have ten persons, start another group and continue until all those who signed up are in a group.
- c. If you do not have enough hosts/leaders, call parishioners who are leaders in other parish groups or whom you think might be able to do this and encourage and invite them to become a group leader.
- d. If you have more leaders than needed, put the extra leaders into a group that matches their preferred date and time. Perhaps they could co-lead the group.

**6. Step Six:** Continue to announce each Sunday that it is not too late to sign-up and encourage people to do so.

## 7. Step Seven: Leader Training

- a. Two or three weeks before Lent call a leaders' meeting to go over the leader's duties. You may have to schedule two meetings because of people's busy schedules. Several dates and times give people a choice.
- b. Training session/s
  - i. You can have group leaders sit in groups and work through the first lesson. This will acquaint them with the resource and better help them know what is expected.
  - ii. Group leaders are:
    1. **not** teaching or explaining the Scriptures to the group.
    2. **facilitators** helping their small faith sharing group process run smoothly. Encourage them to help everyone feel welcomed and at ease.
    3. expected to invite everyone in their group to participate without forcing or embarrassing anyone.
  - iii. The leader or another person in the group can provide light refreshments for the first meeting. Suggest that they might want to take turns among the participants in providing refreshments for the sessions.
  - iv. The leader needs to read each session in advance and make sure that everything is ready for the prayer table and prayer rituals.
  - v. Have resources and group lists available if possible. Give these to the group leaders so they will know who is in their group and will have the books they need.
  - vi. With the list of names, be sure that there are phone numbers and emails for each participant so that the leader can contact them when necessary.
  - vii. Encourage the leader to call or email each participant in her group to welcome them, reiterating the time, date, and place of the meeting. The leader will need to give the participants her address and directions to find the home.
  - viii. The leader can deliver the books to her group a week in advance of the first meeting or participants can pick up their book at Sunday Mass or at the parish office.
  - ix. **Evaluation**
    1. Have copies of the evaluation available.
    2. Tell leaders that they are to give the evaluations to participants the second to the last week.
    3. The leader or another member of the group could collate the evaluations and email them to *Disciples on the Journey*.

4. **Optional Collection** This is for parishes that may find it difficult to fund this program.

- a. At the first meeting with the small group, the leader can announce that a collection will be taken at the last gathering to help the parish pay for the resources.
- b. At the last meeting, a collection can be taken and the money given to the parish as reimbursement for resources.

**c. Celebration**

- i. Some groups like to come early at the last meeting and have a meal together.
- ii. Other groups prefer to gather after Easter to celebrate a meal together.
- iii. Still other groups might want to continue to meet after Easter and they can decide on this at a meeting after Easter where only those who are interested would attend.