

YOUNG ADULT
SMALL GROUPS

A GUIDE FOR
PARTICIPANTS



YOUTH, YOUNG ADULT,
& CAMPUS MINISTRIES
DIOCESE OF DALLAS

small christian communities

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your decision to participate in this small group! Our prayer is that this small group will help you grow in relationship with Jesus alongside your peers.

Your small group coordinator will provide you with the basic information about your small group such as purpose, location, time, frequency, duration, etc.

To prepare for your participation in small group, please take some time to read through the Spiritual Foundations and Expectations below. They are essential to the success and fruitfulness of the group.

GROUP: SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS

It is recommended that the following Spiritual Foundations are read aloud to the group at the first gathering. A simplified version of the statement may be read at every meeting. The Spiritual Foundations are the values that, when upheld within a small group community, allow the opportunity for the group to be successful. It is important that everyone is working together to uphold these values.

INTIMACY

Christians believe in a triune God who desires to have a personal relationship with each of us (1 Jn 3:1). That is the ultimate spiritual foundation of small groups. We believe we have a God that wants to grow in intimacy with us, a God who knows and loves us (Isa 43:1), and whom we can know and love in return. We believe God can speak to us in many ways, especially through the loving words and actions of a Christian community. This is our primary reason for gathering in small groups.

COMMUNITY

We need each other in the spiritual life. God didn't reveal Himself to us in isolation. He reveals Himself to us through His Body, the Church. And just like a body has many parts which all must work together to function properly, we also depend upon others to know and respond to Christ and His Gospel (1 Cor 12:12-26). We find developing deep friendships centered on Christ with other committed Christians to be indispensable to reaching our full potential in relationship with God.

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality refers to both the environmental elements that lead to comfort and the dispositions of hearts to embrace one another. People long to be welcomed. A warm reception will open newcomers to the group and make them more comfortable to share. Small groups, then, are to be emphatically welcoming (1 Pt 4:9-10). At times, groups run the risk of getting too comfortable, cliquish, and even closing in on themselves. Everyone should feel welcomed and loved since we are called to love everyone and to embrace the stranger (Mt 25:35).

RUNNING THE GROUP: EXPECTATIONS

It is recommended that expectations are read aloud to the group at the first gathering, and as needed in further gatherings. Expectations are essential in building the culture of the small group. A clear presentation of expectations will best ensure that everyone is on the same page about the purpose of the group, the investment required to build community, and how the community is to function together. You may wish to allow members to add or discuss expectations.

Your goal in presenting expectations is to create buy in for these practices that will allow your small group to be successful. Recognize that individuals may feel resistant to some of the practices, so your presentation ought to be presented gently without a controlling tone.

COMMITMENT

The commitment required for small group participation should be communicated along with the invitation to join and reinforced at the first gathering. As coordinator, stress that this small group should be a priority to group members when they are managing their calendars. You may also choose to define a particular number of small groups that you hope for members to attend. It may be helpful to establish how individuals are to let you know if they will be missing a meeting. If the small group looks completely different every week because certain people do or do not show up, it will take a longer time to develop trust.

Attendance is not the only element of commitment. One can be present, physically, without completely investing otherwise. Spend time allowing small group members to articulate what it means to be committed to one another and to “journey through life” together.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is key to creating authentic friendships with those who desire your ultimate good. It means, to some degree, being transparent in your walk with Christ before these friends and allowing them to encourage you in the spiritual life, and the other way around. Accountability can involve handling conflict within the group (Mt 18:15-17), exhorting one another to live a moral lifestyle (Lk 17:3), praying for one another (Jm 5:16), and encouraging one another in virtue (Pro 27:17).

AUTHENTICITY

In any true friendship, the individuals must be willing to “show up as they are”. God loves each person in the small group (Jn 3:16). In order to grow closer with Him and the others present, each individual needs to be honest and vulnerable about their relationship with God- their struggles, their joys, their questions, their fervor. Small groups are a place to respect each individual’s journey and accept them as they are. Small groups are not a place to hide, to pretend, to be overly concerned with other’s perceptions of oneself (Gal 1:10). It is a safe space where everyone is respected.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your parish or ministry may have specific protocol for when it comes to handling matters of confidentiality. Please seek to find this information before beginning your small group. To respect each member’s effort to be authentic, confidentiality is essential. It is helpful to remind participants that no personal information shared within the trust of the small group is to be shared outside of the small group. If there are any major concerns with the wellbeing or safety of an individual, consider the steps below.

- Set up a time when you can speak with the individual in private. If the individual seems to be in immediate danger, have this conversation happen immediately.
- Explain to the individual why you wish to talk privately and open with a prayer for guidance, support, and healing.

- Ask the individual to elaborate upon what they shared in small group. Listen attentively and with care.
- Determine whether or not the individual is in immediate danger.
- Involve a third party as seems necessary. It might be best not to handle this on your own, but with another member present.
- The parish or ministry contact
- A member of the individual’s family
- Another small group member, for the sake of counsel
- The services of a counselor
- The guidance of a priest
- The police- if you believe the person is in immediate danger.
- Make a game plan with the person.
- Close in prayer.

TIMELINESS

Small groups should begin and end at the communicated time to be respectful to the individuals involved. This means there needs to be a concerted effort from the attendees to arrive on time, an intention of the coordinator or facilitator to move the small group along on schedule, and an awareness of guests to make sure they don’t overstay their welcome after the conclusion of small group.

PARTICIPATION

Many personalities will compose the dynamics of your small group. There are a few expectations that pertain specifically to discussion.

- Extroverts and introverts need to be able to share equally in small group.

This requires everyone to be aware of the other members in the group to make sure that they are neither monopolizing the conversation nor neglecting to add to it.

- Individuals may add to a person's comment, but be sure not to volley back and forth with only one other person, inhibiting anyone else from contributing to the conversation.
- This is not a place for advising or being directive.
- Speak in "I" statements. Instead of "we live in a materialistic culture and we struggle with the pressures from social media", say "I struggle with the pressure I find in social media because it promotes a materialistic culture."
- Focus on less theory, more on personal relationship with God.
- While being open to the direction the Holy Spirit moves the conversation, do your best to stay on topic and relevant to the discussion content.

RUNNING THE GROUP: BEST PRACTICES

1. Always begin and end with prayer.
 - If you are sharing the responsibility of formal prayer at small group, ask a person to lead prayer BEFORE the day of the small group so they can prepare if necessary.
 - In the concluding prayer, mention some of the intentions shared throughout the small group.
 - Try to gauge the spirituality and comfort level of those in your small group. It's important that no assumptions are made that could make someone feel out of place or closed off; for example, don't assume everyone knows the words to a worship song simply because it's popular at the time.
 - Here is an example of a prayer that could be said at the beginning of small group: "Lord Jesus, you are good, and loving, and all-mighty. Thank you for being present here with us when we gather in your name. We ask that you bless our time together in small group and that you guide our conversation. In your name, we pray: Amen."
2. Have everyone sit on the same level in discussion to communicate equality.
3. Affirm the importance of each member's presence by referring to them by name in conversation.
4. Ask open-ended questions that provoke conversation.

5. Manage silence, don't be afraid of it.

- After receiving the formation, allow a few moments of intentional silence for members to think and pray about a prompt or discussion question. This will allow time for individuals to collect their thoughts.
- If no one speaks up when it is time to share, allow the group to sit in silence. After a few moments, inquire whether or not anyone would like to contribute their reflection.

6. Keep track of attendance so you can use the metric to assist in assessing the success of the small group.

7. Clarify the use of cell phones/technology during small groups.

8. Go easy on the content for your first gathering.

- At your first gathering, you want to allow for a relaxed environment that facilitates attendees getting to know one another. Plan more time for this on the first gathering than you typically would for the following gatherings.
- At the beginning of the discussion portion for your first gathering, go through both the Spiritual Foundations and Expectations of small group. Be sure to read them all. It may also be smart to remind attendees of these at the next few gatherings.
- As your attendees come to know one another and be more comfortable, you will be able to spend less time on activities designed to help with bonding.

9. Stay in contact with any organizer.

10. If you are coordinating your small group through the venue of a parish or ministry, stay in communication with the organizer, sharing with the organizer successes, struggles, etc.

11. Support members beyond small group.

- During small group, challenging topics or personal hardships may be shared. Seek and share resources to help each other grow in knowledge and find necessary support. As a leader, this is very important step in walking with another individual in his or her faith journey.
- Research, recommend, and potentially plan gatherings that take place outside of the small group commitment and connect the members to larger faith communities.

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This document is produced by the Office of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries in the Diocese of Dallas. The office is devoted to the evangelization of youth, young adults, and campus students by supporting the Ministry Leaders in the field who serve these populations. We are here to answer questions, provide guidance, and recommend resources. Please contact the office if in need of support. We are happy to serve you!



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The electronic version of this document can be found on our website, as well as the guides for facilitators and participants.