



Small Faith Community Member Guide

The Small Faith Community.....	2
Ways to Strengthen the Bonds of Community.....	3
Responsibilities of the Small Faith Community Members	4
The Small Faith Community Meeting	5
Scripture Application Passages and Questions	17
Topics for Christian Living.....	18
Spiritual Edification Tracking Chart.....	19
Sample of Small Faith Community Meeting	21
Facilitating in a Small Faith Community Meeting.....	22
Facilitation Guidelines for Small Faith Community.....	23
Effective Listening.....	24
Dealing with Conflict in Community Life.....	25
First Four Study Materials	26
Additional Suggested Readings	28
Suggested Readings for Personal Study.....	29
Developing a Personal Prayer Life	30
Giving God Twenty	31

The Small Faith Community

Why a Small Faith Community is Important

“Small communities are powerful vehicles for adult faith formation providing opportunities for learning, prayer, mutual support, and the shared experience of Christian living and service to Church and society.” (OHWB, USCCB,106)

“Adults do not grow in faith primarily by learning concepts, but by sharing the life of the Christian community” (OHWB, USCCB, 83)

The parish is to be the first church community, the basic setting for building connections and communion of people (koinonia) and the first line of pastoral care of souls. This is easier within small groups of 10-12 individuals who meet on a regular basis. It is only by getting to know and trust others over a period of time, that sharing of our faith, our lives, our questions, and ourselves at a deeper level is possible.

A Small Faith Community.....

- commits their lives to each other and walk together through life’s ups and downs.
- meets together weekly to grow closer to each other and Christ, to carry out the mission of His Church.
- grows together in unity, building up and strengthening the body in love. (Eph.4)
- communicates and shares what it is to be human, Christian, spiritual, material, religious, social, as well as eternal.
- strives *TO BE* not *TO DO*. They listen to each other’s individual’s story and history, valuing each person’s situation, vocation and mission NOT just what they do or how they function.
- consists of evangelized people who are centered in the Lord Jesus and led by the Holy Spirit. They are responsible in mutual love, service and caring for one another.

A Small Faith Community <i>IS</i> a	A Small Faith Community <i>IS NOT</i> a.....
faith sharing group	Bible study
time for personal testimonies	time for religious instruction
time for personal sharing	time of intellectual discussion
place where sharing is kept confidential	gossip session
place to give and receive support	counseling session

Ways to Strengthen the Bonds of Community.

1. Share the commitment to attend the meetings. It **should be the highest priority** after family and job commitments. Being too tired is not a sufficient reason to miss a meeting. You may not always *feel* like attending meetings, but if you persevere the Holy Spirit will bless you over and over.
2. Name your community; make a banner with your community's name on it to display at functions like Community of Communités.
3. Share responsibilities within your community. Use the gifts that God has given you to help your community.
4. Build trust within your community.

Ways to increase TRUST

acceptance ♥ active listening ♥ consistent commitment ♥ self-disclosure ♥ sharing of feelings ♥ **confidentiality** ♥ truthfulness ♥ caring ♥ common values and goals ♥ non-judgmental interactions ♥ presence in times of need ♥ times of celebration and joy ♥ shared prayer

Ways to increase FEAR

judging ♦ breaking of confidentiality ♦ gossip ♦ unresolved conflict ♦ unsought advice ♦ isolation ♦ people trying to fix us ♦ bragging ♦ conflicting values and goals ♦ humor aimed at making fun of us or others ♦ criticism ♦ comparison with others ♦ feeling inadequate ♦ focus on self instead of on God ♦ threats of people to leave the group

5. Share your stories, stories from your life's experiences. Even though you may not *feel* like sharing, when you choose to trust the others in your community by sharing, the feelings of trust will follow.
6. Share your ears. When listening to others, do not be thinking about what you are going to say next, but fully concentrate on what they are sharing. Be able to listen. Appreciate the silence also, and don't feel like you need to jump in to say something simply to break the silence. Allow the Spirit to work in these times.
7. Share your struggles. Dare to be vulnerable to others. Entrust your woundedness to your community members, who will keep what you share in confidence.
8. Share your compassion and understanding. When someone shares a problem, don't try to "fix things" rather let Jesus do it. Listen with "passion", which is what "compassion" means. "Passion" means "suffering love".
9. Share your prayers. Pray for each other throughout the week.
10. Share your food. Jesus loved to share meals with His community of believers. Have snacks and a social time at the END of your meeting.
11. Share your fun! Have at least 2 fun social solidarity activities per year that include the whole family.
12. Share yourselves with the larger community (parish). Attend parish functions together as a group.

Responsibilities of Small Faith Community Members: The 4 P's

The Holy Spirit has placed us in these communities for a reason. We have been brought together to complete each other, not mirror or compete. By recognizing the Holy Spirit's role in bringing us together we can more easily embrace our responsibilities to our community, especially in the beginning when strong bonds have not been established.

1. Pray

Prayer should be the beginning of everything we do. Before we start a new task, we should thank the Lord and ask for guidance. Our prayers should also extend to our family. We have entered into a new family, our community, our spiritual family. We should pray for our community daily.

2. Prepare

Each of us has the responsibility to our community to prepare for our community meeting. That means reviewing the Study material that will be discussed, if possible. Ideally, this should be done throughout the week to get a better understanding of the lesson rather than waiting until the last minute. Reflection on the Spiritual Edification question to be discussed is helpful so that all community members can contribute to the meeting. Remember, any number of heads is better than one.

3. Participate

Each of us is called to participate in all parts of the meeting. The more you contribute to the weekly meeting, the more you will receive. This is especially true of Spiritual Edification. The more we share and give, the more we will learn about ourselves and others. Insights that we share and think are insignificant may make a profound difference to a fellow community member. It's amazing how many of us struggle with the same problems.

It is the responsibility of each community member to be on time, to be prepared and to contribute to the meeting. It is everyone's responsibility to stay on the topic being discussed and lead others back who are straying from the topic.

It is the responsibility of each community member to notify the Internal Coordinator if they cannot attend a meeting. It is the responsibility of the Internal Coordinator to brief absent members of what took place during community and inform them of the Study material and Spiritual Edification for the next meeting so that they can be prepared. (Helpful Hint: Some communities have a book to record planned absences of members).

4. Practice

Our spiritual growth comes from putting into practice what we have heard or learned at our meetings. Only by reflecting during the week on the insights and information discussed at our meetings and invoking the Holy Spirit to help us apply them to our daily lives, will we encounter true changes in our hearts and lives.

The Small Faith Community Meeting

The Light of the World Small Faith Community meeting has six parts. It's important to try to include all parts in every meeting and keep each part within its allotted time. Note that Spiritual Edification (Heart Talk) is given 50 minutes whereas Study (Head Talk) is only given 30 minutes. It's important to try to follow these guidelines because this is a faith sharing group not a religious instruction session. We have to resist our natural tendency to gravitate towards more head talk and *work* at sharing more heart talk.

A Light of the World Small Faith Community meeting is designed to take two hours, followed by fellowship. It is a sign of respect between members to begin and end meetings on time.

The six parts and time allotted for each part of a two hour meeting are:

1. **Gather and Greet10 minutes**
2. **Opening Prayer - Praise20 minutes**
3. **Study.....30 minutes**
4. **Spiritual Edification.....50 minutes**
5. **Closing Prayer – Petitions10 minutes**
6. **Fellowship & Announcements ? minutes**

Community Meeting Part 1: Gather and Greet (10 minutes)

This is an important and realistic part of every meeting. It allows everyone time to greet and reconnect with one another but it should be **limited** and Opening Prayer **should begin on time** after the allotted ten minutes.

If people arrive late, please continue with meeting and all will know they will be greeted before going on to the next section. Please do not interrupt prayer time to greet people who are late. We are all late sometime or another. We just need to understand that the group is happy you're there, but will greet you after prayer. Just join in the group which is underway.

Community Meeting Part 2: Opening Prayer - Praise (20 minutes)

During this time we focus on giving praise to Our Lord. This can be done with music, reading of Scriptures, spontaneous prayers of thanksgiving. Praise and thanksgiving should spring from the heart and be filled with ardent faith in Jesus Christ. These prayers should be shared out loud. When Scripture is read, it is important to leave a time of silence so that all may reflect on the reading for a few seconds. It is important to recognize that this particular part of the meeting should be used to give thanks to God. This is not the time to be asking God for things; petitions may be voiced at the end of the meeting.



Psalms of Praise and Thanks to God

Psalms 1, 9:1-15, 21, 30:1-6, 33:1-5, 34:1-11, 41:14, 47, 48, 50, 65, 66, 75:2-4, 92, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106:1-5, 107:1-3, 111, 113, 117, 118:1-4 & 19-21, 122, 134, 135:1-4 & 19-29, 122, 134, 135:1-4 & 19-21, 136:1-3, & 26, 138, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149

A Good Idea: The next 2 parts of the meeting, Study and Spiritual Edification, can be rotated week by week. For Example: the 1st and 3rd weeks of the month Study is covered first and then Spiritual Edification is first on the 2nd and 4th weeks. This guarantees that the proper balance takes place between head and heart discussions because groups tend to give the most time to what they cover first.

Community Meeting Part 3: Study (30 minutes)

This is a time of the meeting set aside to study our Catholic faith together. It is meant to transform us into knowledgeable and strong disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. Study is divided into three broad areas:

- Area 1: General Spirituality
- Area 2: Catholic Catechesis
- Area 3: Scripture Study

Since different areas will appeal to different personalities within the community, it is recommended that the area of study is rotated at least every 3 to 4 months to give everyone variety and keep things interesting.

LOTW offers a discerned formation program to new Small Faith Communities which models this rotation of study areas and gives a strong foundation for Small Faith Communities to build on (See p. 26). It is strongly recommended that communities follow these guidelines initially and then seek guidance from their Small Faith Community Coordinator and Pastor for further faith formation.

It's important to note that Study is only one part of a Small Faith Community meeting and much of our spiritual growth takes place through our own personal prayer and study time. Sincere reflections on this personal prayer time will be helpful in community life (See *Developing a Personal Prayer Life*, p. 30).

Community Meeting Part 4: Spiritual Edification (50 minutes)

This section of the meeting is the *heart* of a Small Faith Community meeting. Praise and worship opens up the heart and fills us with the love of God. Study of our Catholic faith nourishes us and leads us to live an authentic Christian life. Spiritual Edification brings to life that which we already have within us.

The primary function of the Small Faith Community is to build fraternity in Christ. It is Spiritual Edification which accomplishes this. Spiritual Edification flows spontaneously from peoples' hearts once they have experienced a personal encounter with God. It is during this time that members share with their brothers and sisters how God is taking action in their lives.

These components describe Spiritual Edification: mutual identification, interest in each other, responsibility for each other, care, service, concern, sympathizing with each other.

Spiritual Edification should lead each other to the Lord. Through Spiritual Edification we learn to be concerned about others and allow others to be concerned about us.

There are eight different topics for Spiritual Edification, each serving a different purpose in bringing to life that which we already have within us. The Small Faith Community should focus on one topic per meeting and then move down the list to the next topic. When all eight topics have been covered the community should begin again at topic one. Community members will have changed enough since last discussing the topic that a different response will be given. By rotating topics in this manner, all topics will be covered equally.

Since a complete cycle of Spiritual Edification topics is quite lengthy (56 topics!) and can take awhile to complete, it is helpful to use the “*Spiritual Edification Tracking Chart*” provided (pgs. 19-20) to note the dates you cover each topic.

The Eight Topics of Spiritual Edification

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Testimony | 5. Christian Living |
| 2. Exhortation | 6. Seeking God's Will |
| 3. Scripture Application | 7. Social Solidarity |
| 4. Review of Life | 8. Witnessing to Others |

Practical Application of Spiritual Edification:

A question that should be asked each week before a planned Spiritual Edification topic is presented is “**Does anyone have a decision or problem that you wish to share with the community?**” If someone wishes to share, they should be able to do so in a loving environment. After the problem is shared, another community member or Internal Coordinator should ask if they are looking for guidance or opinions for the situation, or if they just wanted the community aware of the problem. Discussion could continue for all or part of the Spiritual Edification time. If appropriate, the community might pray

together at this time for the person's intentions or problems. Continued prayer throughout the week by each community member would be a wonderful expression of love and solidarity.

Spiritual Edification Topic 1: Testimony

The facilitator will ask the others to share an experience with the Lord. The testimony can be an experience from any area of one's life: family, work, community, parish, service to others, etc. We let others know how the Holy Spirit is moving in us. We describe ways we have left behind our old self and how the works of the flesh are being crucified. We share about the ways we identify with the Lord and continue to be transformed by Him. We tell others how the Lord is changing our hearts and lives. We tell about His work and His love. These testimonies need to be authentic, **brief**, and centered in Christ. By selecting one set of questions and equally rotating them each time you address "testimony" during spiritual edification, you will more deeply explore this topic.

Testimony Questions #1

How has the Lord worked in your life this week?
Have I felt the Father's love, peace, care, protection, presence, abundance, comfort, guidance, inspiration?
How has God worked in the lives of your family or friends?
Have you had a change of heart about anything?

Testimony Questions #2

How has God worked in your life this week?
Spiritual gifts?
Material gifts?
Physical gifts? (healing)
Did you thank Him? Why or why not? How?

Testimony Questions #3

The facilitator reads the following:
"You put gladness into my heart, more than when grain and wine abound." Psalm 4:8
"A joyful heart is the health of the body, but a depressed spirit dries up the bones."
Proverbs 17:22
"Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!" Philippians 4:4
"I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely." John 17:13

Answer the following questions:

What things in the past month have I lived and experienced that I know have brought joy to the Lord?
What things that I have not personally experienced but that I know about have made the Lord very happy?

Which of the experiences mentioned has not made me joyful as well?

Testimony Questions #4

Briefly share a testimony of what the Lord has done for you and your family during the last month.

If I have no testimony, what is the reason? Do I need to give the Lord, in prayer, a certain area of my life? Have I not made Him Lord of that area of my life?

Perhaps I have not been able to praise God and thank Him for the situations that I have been experiencing. Is there another reason?

If there is time, share testimony in regard to work, school, service in building up the Kingdom, and of the community's service and growth.

Spiritual Edification Topic 2: Exhortation

The facilitator encourages the community members to live the new life in Jesus. This dialog focuses on the meaning of service to the parish. Members are thus motivated to serve the essential mission of the Church. Each person is helped to discover his or her own call to service from God. The community helps each other to overcome the obstacles to their commitment. By selecting one set of questions and equally rotating them each time you address "exhortation" during Spiritual Edification, you will more deeply explore this topic.

Exhortation Questions #1

How do I feel about all those who don't know the Lord?

What is stopping me from doing more so all those people can come to know the Lord?

Have I asked the Lord what He wants of me? How do I do that?

Exhortation Questions #2

Do I feel God calling me to become more active in my parish?

What is stopping me from making more of a commitment?

Where do my talents or interests lie?

Exhortation Questions #3

What have I done in order to serve the Lord?

Do I know where more people are needed to serve the Lord?

How have I benefited from serving the Lord? Tell about it.

Exhortation Questions #4

How can I better serve the LOTW process? My parish or diocese? In spiritual work? In promotional work? What talents do I have to offer?

Spiritual Edification Topic 3: Scripture Application

The facilitator will choose and read a scripture verse and then the group applies the scripture application questions to that passage. See “Scripture Application Passages and Questions” on p. 17.

Spiritual Edification Topic 4: Review of Life

The facilitator asks questions of members to share how they are doing in different areas of growth. The areas of growth are: Bible reading, personal prayer, receiving the sacraments more frequently, community, and virtue. We can and should listen and encourage each other in reviewing these areas of our lives and growing in each of them. By selecting one set of questions and equally rotating them each time you address “review of life” during spiritual edification, you will more deeply explore this topic.

Review of Life Questions #1

What am I doing to deepen my relationship with God?

Review of Life Questions #2

How do I feel about my participation in (prayer and praise) (study) (spiritual edification) (petitions) in our community meetings?

How do I imagine a community with a strong prayer and praise, study, spiritual edification, petitions?

How is my conversion, change of heart, evident in my life?

Has my personal prayer improved? Is it better quality?

Do I continue to encounter Christ and live my faith?

Has my personal time spent reading Scripture increased?

Do I use the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be a witness to others and rely on Christ for the results?

Do I participate in the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist more often?

Do I have a deeper sense of belonging and participation in the Catholic Church?

Do I participate in the transformation of your family and society?

Review of Life Questions #3

What am I doing to deepen my conversion and my encounter with Christ?

How do I think my conversion and my encounter with Christ could have been better?

What can I do to improve my conversion and my encounter with Christ?

Review of Life Questions #4

(This set of questions may take two meetings to cover)

How is our communities Prayer and Praise?

Is it joyful? Are we glad to be praising the Lord?

Do we use songs of praise? Poems? Psalms? Or some other material that praises the Lord?

Does everyone participate?
Do we enter into worship? Do we feel the Holy Spirit's presence?
Do we unintentionally slip in some petitions at this time? Most formal prayers are prayers of petition or intercession.
How is our Study?
Does everyone participate?
Do we come prepared?
Are we learning about our faith through this Study material?
Are we staying within the Diocesan guidelines for Study material?
How are we applying what we've learned?

How is our Spiritual Edification?
Are we spending half of our meeting on spiritual edification?
Does everyone participate?
Is there an openness to share problems and ask for help?
Does everyone feel safe sharing their thoughts?
Are we touching on the all 8 topics of Spiritual Edification or just staying with what is most comfortable?
Do we speak from our own experience and own hearts or do we generalize our answers and speak of other people's experiences?

How is our Petition time?
Does everyone feel comfortable participating?

How is our Social Solidarity?
Do we do something for ourselves or the community at large every 6 to 8 weeks?
Are our families able to participate in some of these activities? Do they participate?
Do we attend Retreat Reunions and Community of Communities events? Why or why not?

Review of Life Questions #5

Share about a hard situation that you have lived through and later discovered that the situation was for the good. What benefits can come out of any hard situations we may be living right now?

Review of Life Questions #6

Classify yourself as one of the following persons

- ✓ A person who has time only for the household
- ✓ A person who has time to work besides time for the household
- ✓ A person who has time to pray besides time for work and home
- ✓ A person who has time to serve besides time for all of the above

They say no one has more time than others, but some people organize their time better. You can find mothers with 2 children that have no time for anything else and mothers with 10 children who have time to spare.

Could I pass to the next level? Why or why not? What makes it difficult?
Why is it desirable?
(We are not trying to convince anyone; each one will just express their possibilities.)

Review of Life Questions #7

(Evaluation of our personal prayer)

How much time have you dedicated to personal prayer this week? The last few weeks?

What is your position while praying? (sitting, kneeling, standing, walking) Has it always been the same?

What time of the day have you been praying in the past month?

What elements of the list below is part of your personal prayer?

Praise♦Rosary♦Praying in tongues♦Meditation♦Praise for material things♦
Bible Readings♦Petitions♦Thanksgiving♦Memorization of Scriptures♦ Sharing
with God what has happened♦Trying to think of what God is thinking, feeling,
etc.

Spiritual Edification Topic 5: Christian Living Discussion

The facilitator will choose and read a topic and then the group applies the Christian living application questions to that passage. See “Topics for Christian Living” on p.18 for topics and application questions.

Spiritual Edification Topic 6: Seeking God’s Will

Each community member must seek God’s will in his/her life. The community members are there to assist us in this but are not superior to another or subject to one another. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We need to be open and listen to what our community tells us as we’re seeking God’s will in our lives. We need to take their input into our general discernment, but we are not obliged to do what the community says. We seek God’s will in Scripture, Church leaders, inner inspirations of the heart and the Body of Christ. Criteria for discernment include that the decision is in total agreement with the doctrine of the Catholic Church, leads to a greater fidelity to God and to a better service of God, produces peace, witnesses to love if it affects others, is marked by the presence of humility and docility, and is normally followed by a spirit of serenity. By selecting one set of questions and rotating them equally each time you address “seeking God’s will” during spiritual edification, you will more deeply explore this topic.

Seeking God’s Will Questions #1

Share your schedule of activities for a normal day. What is the worst time of the day? What is the best time of the day?

Afterwards, read the following and then discuss your feelings:

To have Jesus at the center of my life means that, because of the deep love I feel for Him, I desire that none of the things I do each day be against His will. Since my heart has been seduced by Jesus, I do not think that this is an imposition, but it makes me happy to surrender my life to Him moment by moment.

The Bishops in Puebla stated: *“Since the Father is the principal protagonist, Jesus tries to follow His pathways and rhythms. His constant concern is to stay in strict and loyal harmony with what the Father wants. Knowing the goal and pushing forward is not sufficient. One must try to know and wait for the hour (John 2:4, 13:1) that the Father has fixed for each step by scrutinizing the signs of His providence.*

(Document of Puebla 277)

If every time we changed our activity, we took 5 to 10 minutes to seek God’s will for us, we would be astonished to discover the way God is guiding us.

Seeking God’s Will Questions #2

Objective: To value more the word of God.

The Word of God is alive and effective and always speaks to us. This is clear when we discover ourselves as the paralytic that has to be healed; as the apostle who is in the upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit to come; as Abraham that leaves his land and does not know where he is going to; as the blind man that wants his eyes to be opened and later discovers the presence of God.

When we read the Word of God from these perspectives we will find that it always speaks to us. At times we misunderstand Scripture because we want the Word of God to speak to us but in a preconceived manner which we have chosen. In our dialogue with God, it is best to let Him choose the theme of conversation. The Word will always talk to us when we are open and we allow God to speak to what He chooses.

The facilitator should select 3 references of the Word of God from the most recent Sunday readings. Share what the Lord is personally saying to you.

Seeking God’s Will Questions #3

Do I use all means possible so that God may communicate with me?
Is it possible within my daily routine to be able to listen through the following means?

The Word of God: Do I read it daily and reflect on it? How would God speak to me through His word?

The Pastors: Do I have spiritual direction or do I at least go to the priest? Do I know what the church teaches?

The Community: Am I open to what God may tell me through the members of my community?

Interior personal inspirations: Do I have personal prayer? Am I open to the possibility that God may speak to me?

Events: Do I have time to examine what happens to me to discover the way God speaks to me?

Seeking God's Will Questions #4

The facilitator will read: If I want to know God's will for some situations of my life (work, family, attitudes I should take, problems I am going through, etc.), I need to fulfill two requirements:

- 1) To be free to know God's will,
- 2) To be constant in searching God's will

To be free to know God's will implies that I am open to hear God's voice directing me in my decision; that I have not already chosen to do what I want. It also implies that I am detached from the problem. It is important for me to remember that if I allow the situation to affect me extremely, it may hinder my ability to listen to others and to God.

Secondly, seeking God's will is to invest time to discover His will through various means such as scripture, current events, spiritual directors, inner inspirations, the small community. The discerning process cannot be limited to solely one means of listening to God's voice.

Each person will put into the community's hands something for which they need to discover God's will. Everyone will pray during the week and will communicate with the person who is discerning, if he or she feels God has spoken to them with a thought or an insight.

Spiritual Edification Topic 7: Social Solidarity

This is an opportunity for the community to analyze and reflect on ways that the community can act to make a difference in their parish, town, or society. We are called to transform the world in which we live to be more in line with the kingdom of God. We will look at a need and then discuss a plan of action. When looking for those to serve we should look first of all at those closest to us who might be in need, our families and community, then our parish, local community and world. If the act of social solidarity chosen takes place outside the regular meeting, it can replace the meeting for that week. The Social Solidarity plans are arranged approximately every other month.

Practical Application of Social Solidarity

Community service should be hierarchical – community needs first, then parish followed by surrounding community and then the world at large.

A community that has members who have special and immediate needs could spend three or more of the six social solidarities per year on addressing those needs. The other meetings could be spent in a mix of doing community service for others and socializing with their families.

A community that has members who have fewer needs could spend four of the six solidarities per year doing community service. The remaining two solidarities could be spent socializing with the community members' families.

Spiritual Edification Topic 8: Witnessing to Others

A witness of Christ is telling another of an authentic encounter with the Lord. By selecting one set of questions and equally rotating them each time you address "Witnessing to Others" during Spiritual Edification, you will more deeply explore this topic.

Witnessing to Others Question Set 1

How is my Christian witness?

Have I changed enough since my evangelization experience that people have noticed my transformation? Example?

Am I willing to share the love of Jesus with others? What is keeping me from sharing? Have I asked the Lord for help with this?

Is our community being "light of the world"?

Witnessing to Others Question Set 2

If I had the opportunity, what would I say about the Lord?

Think about your daily or weekly activities. Do I see situations that arise where I could share my love of the Lord?

Fraternal Correction

This means of Spiritual Edification is used very rarely and only on a one-one basis. It needs to be done with unconditional love and only in grave situations when the eternal salvation of the other person is at stake. Only God can change lives and the direction our brothers and sisters take.

Community Meeting Part 5: Closing Prayer -Petitions (10 minutes)

At the end of the weekly meeting, the community takes a few minutes to ask the Lord for personal needs.

Petition Guidelines

- *Begin by thanking God for His guidance during the meeting*
- *Ask for forgiveness for all the times you have not done His will*
- *Ask for the grace to do better in the future*
- *Ask for personal petitions. Make these succinct, details are not necessary; ex. I pray for Mary and Bill, peace and the pro-life movement.*
- *Allow all who wish to participate an opportunity to add their petitions.*

- *Close with “For these intentions and all those we hold in our hearts, we lift them to the Father in Jesus name” or something similar. This helps the participants to know that Petitions are over.*
- *Close with the Our Father, holding hands as a sign of unity*

Community Meeting Part 6: Fellowship and Announcements (? Minutes)

Following the other five parts of a two hour community meeting is Fellowship and Announcements. This part is vital to strengthen the community and all community members should participate when possible. This allows community members the opportunity to socialize and share food and refreshments with one another. During the beginning of this time while everyone is still present the Internal Coordinator should relay any announcements from the Small Faith Community Coordinator or parish in general.

In conclusion.....

If any of these elements are slighted or ignored, over time, the community will suffer in their connection to one another or in their faith connection with God.

- If there are not deep times of prayer, the sense of a community’s being filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit suffers.
- If there is not time spent on “Study” of our Faith or Catechesis, there is no sense of growth in our knowledge of God’s ways. Once we come to a living relationship with Jesus we need to know more about Him and His teachings to grow more like Him through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- If there are not adequate times for deep sharing of life and faith through Spiritual Edification the community members do not bond and aren’t challenged in their walk with Christ.

Scripture Application Passages and Questions

Pick one of the following passages. Read the whole paragraph in which it exists to get the context of the passage. Then answer the questions as they relate to you and the scripture passage.

1. How can I relate this scripture to something in my life?
2. How is this scripture showing me something I could improve in my life?
3. How does it help me with a decision I need to make?
4. How does it show me how I should handle a circumstance facing me right now?
5. How does it encourage me to be in a stronger relationship with God and with others?
6. How does it encourage me to share something with God or with others?
7. Is it calling me to Christian service?

Matthew 1:21
 Ephesians 1:7
 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
 Psalm 25:14
 Luke 14:27
 Matthew 4:19
 Psalm 1:2-3
 Luke 6:46
 Luke 4:1-2
 1 Corinthians 10:13
 1 John 2:1
 John 16:24
 Psalm 66:18
 Psalm 50:23
 John 3:8
 Ephesians 5:18
 Psalm 25:4-5
 James 1:2-4
 Job 5:17
 Philemon 1:29
 Galatians 2:20
 1 Chronicles 29:14
 Isaiah 43:2
 John 13:34
 Proverbs 13:10
 2 Corinthians 4:2
 Jeremiah 17:9
 James 3:3-7
 Luke 23:34
 Titus 2:12-13
 Romans 5:8
 1 Peter 1:5

Matthew 2:37-38
 Psalm 33:18
 Luke 14:33
 Matthew 5:16
 Psalm 119:105
 Ecclesiastes 12:13
 Luke 22:31-32
 1 John 4:4
 Hebrews 4:15-16
 Matthew 7:7
 1 John 3:21-22
 Psalm 69:30-31
 1 Corinthians 3:16
 Acts 4:31
 Psalm 25:9
 Romans 5:3-4
 Psalm 94:12
 Philippians 3:10
 1 Peter 2:11
 Proverbs 3:9-10
 Isaiah 41:10
 Romans 12:9-10
 Proverbs 29:23
 Colossians 3:9
 Mark 7:20-22
 Proverbs 12:18-25
 Matthew 18:21-22
 Philippians 3:20
 Ephesians 2:8-9
 Romans 8:38-39
 Psalm 27:4-5
 Psalm 34:7-9

Topics for Christian Living

The following is a list of topics that can be used to dialogue about Christian Living during Spiritual Edification. They are related to the characteristics and duties of a Christian. Choose a topic and answer the following questions.

1. Where and how does this topic fit in my life?
2. What have I read in the Bible, learned in the catechesis or heard in the homilies that tell me something about this?
3. How can I practice what the Lord is teaching me?

Abnegation	Zeal of Christ	Commitment	Christ's miracles	Recompense
Abstinence	Cowardliness	Hope	Good deeds	proportional to the
Abundance	Combat	Wait in the Lord	Obstacles	service
Abundance of	Compassion	Eucharist (Mass)	Idleness	Rectitude
spiritual gifts	Companionship	Evangelization	To forget God	Reconciliation
Thanksgiving	Consciousness	Examination of	Opportunities	Recollect
Adaptation to the	Christian behavior	conscience	Spiritual ear	True religion
truth	Profession of	Lack of spiritual	Forgiveness of	Divine
True adoration	Christ	growth	offenses	requirements
Affects	Sincere confession	God's favor	Forgiveness of	Determination
Duties to the	Confidence	Faith	resentments	Respect
afflicted	Knowledge	Eternal happiness	Perfection	Revelation
Appreciation to	Knowledge of God	Fidelity	Perseverance	Spiritual richness
God	Constancy	God's fidelity	Spiritual plenitude	Worldly riches
Praise	Reconciliation	Firmness	God is powerful	Sanctity
Pleasantness	Conversation	Spiritual fruit	Prophecy	Sanctification
Friendship	Conversion	Generosity	Promises to the	The Saints
Preeminence of	Cooperation	Joy	afflicted	Religious sects
love	Transformed heart	Joy of the Christian	Promises to the	Thirsting for truth
Love for God	Spiritual growth	Level of faith	faithful	Security
Love for Jesus	Jesus the Shepherd	God's gratitude	Promises to the	Simpleness
Christ	God's care for his	Human gratitude	sick	Separation
Love for others	children	Pleasing to God	Promises to the	Sense of Church
Love for the parish	Duty (ours)	Divine guide	generous	Christian service
God's love	Devotion to Mary	Heirs of God	Promises to the	To serve God
Walk with God	Abiding in Christ	Inheritance of the	humble	Always willing
The armor of God	Rest (ours)	righteous	Promises to the	Silence
Repentance	Discontentment	New man	obedient	Sincerity
Divine help	Staying up late	Reputation (self	Promises to the	Sobriety
Baptism	Happiness of the	respect)	pastors	Missionary work
Struggle of faith	faithful	Hospitality	Promises to the	Fear of God
Spiritual struggle	Tithe	Humbleness	poor	Temptation
Material blessings	Without delay	Innocence	Promises to the	Testimony (duty to
Kindness	Diligence	Instruction	tempted	give)
Good vs. Evil	Spiritual	Instruments chosen	God's promises to	Time (correct use
Beatitudes	discernment	by God	the tempted	of)
God's goodness	Discipleship	Spiritual light	God's promises	Triumph in life
Seeking God	God's gifts	To get up early	Prosperity	The truth
Characteristics of	Example	Teachers	Protection	Verses that help
the true Christian	Examples of	Gentleness	Divine protection	Purpose of life
Charity	courage	Meditation	to the faithful	Eternal life
Chastity	God's choices	Spiritual mind	Prudence	To be vigilant
Zeal	Enemies	Miracles		

Spiritual Edification Tracking Chart

This chart is one complete cycle of all Spiritual Edification topics and question sets. This chart can be used to help your community keep track of Spiritual Edification topics as you cover them. By moving down this chart, your community will cover all topics providing a broad Spiritual Edification foundation for your community. The time that it will take to cover these topics will be unique to each community.

Topic	Question Set	Date Covered
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#1	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#1	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	Not Applicable (N/A)	
4. Review of Life (p. 10)	#1	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 12)	#1	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 14)	#1	
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#2	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#2	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	N/A	
4. Review of Life (p. 10)	#2	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 13)	#2	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 15)	#2	
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#3	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#3	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	N/A	
4. Review of Life (p. 10)	#3	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 13)	#3	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 14)	#1	

Topic	Questions	Date Covered
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#4	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#4	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	N/A	
4. Review of Life (p. 10)	#4	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 13)	#4	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 15)	#2	
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#1	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#1	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	N/A	
4. Review of Life (p. 11)	#5	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 13)	#1	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 14)	#1	
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#2	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#2	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	N/A	
4. Review of Life (p. 11)	#6	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 13)	#2	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 15)	#2	
1. Testimony (p. 8)	#3	
2. Exhortation (p. 9)	#3	
3. Scripture Application (p. 17)	N/A	
4. Review of Life (p. 11)	#7	
5. Christian Living (p. 18)	N/A	
6. Seeking God's Will (p. 13)	#3	
7. Social Solidarity (p. 14)	N/A	
8. Witnessing to Others (p. 14)	#1	

Samples of Small Faith Community Meetings

Monday, Oct. 1st

(7:30 pm at Dave & Linda's)

7:30 Gather and Greet

7:40 Praise: Songs, Scriptures, and Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving (*Donna*)
Praises of the Divine Mercy (by community 1st week of the month)

8:00 Study (*Jan*)

8:30 Spiritual Edification: Does anyone have a problem or need? (*Roger & Cindy*)

Spiritual Edification Topic 3: Scripture Application: Romans 12: 9-10

- Does the Scripture remind you of an event that you can give testimony about?
- Does the Scripture remind you of a means of personal growth that you should review?
- Does it enlighten you about a decision you need to make?
- Does it enlighten you about the way I should act in an event in my neighborhood?
- Does it encourage you to be in a stronger communion with God and with others?
- Does it encourage you to share something with God or with the others?
- Does it enlighten and motivate me to an apostolic service?

9:20 Closing Prayer - Petitions (*Susan*)

9:30 Fellowship and Announcements (*Raul*)

Monday, Oct 8th

(7:30pm at Dave & Linda's)

7:30 Gather and Greet

7:40 Opening Prayer - Praise (*Donna*)

8:00 Study (*Jan*)

8:30 Spiritual Edification: Does anyone have a problem or need? (*Roger & Cindy*)

Spiritual Edification Topic 4: Review of life (Questions #3).

- What am I doing to deepen my conversion and my encounter with Christ?
- How do I think my conversion and my encounter with Christ could have been better?
- What can I do to improve my conversion and my encounter with Christ?
- What am I doing to deepen my prayer life?
- How do I think I could improve my prayer?
- What am I going to do to improve my prayer life?

9:20 Closing Prayer - Petitions (*Susan*)

9:30 Fellowship and Announcements (*Raul*)

Monday, Oct. 15th

(7:30pm at Dave & Linda's)

7:30 Gather and Greet

7:40 Opening Prayer – Praise (*Donna*)

8:00 Study (*Jan*)

8:30 Spiritual Edification: Does anyone have a problem or need? (*Roger & Cindy*)

Spiritual Edification Topic 5: Christian Living: Sincere Confession

1. Where and how does this topic fit in my life?
2. What have I read in the Bible, learned in the catechesis or heard in the homilies that tell me something about this?
3. How can I practice what the Lord is teaching me?

9:20 Closing Prayer – Petitions (*Susan*)

9:30 Fellowship and Announcements (*Raul*)

Facilitating in a Small Faith Community

The Small Faith Community should share the responsibility of facilitating weekly meetings.

Sharing the responsibility of facilitating all or part of a meeting benefits the community because:

- Members will respond to questions more readily because they know what it is like to be in the leader's position
- Members become more aware when someone strays from the topic of discussion and will bring the group back on topic at hand.
- Everyone takes responsibility for the success of the community
- Leadership skills can be developed in all members of the community in a safe, loving and supportive environment. These leadership skills are valuable and need to be developed in everyone so that everyone becomes a stronger disciple and apostle of Christ.

In the beginning the Internal Coordinator may need to facilitate meetings but he/she should begin sharing this responsibility by assigning community members one of the following parts:

- Prayer- Opening and Closing
- Study
- Spiritual Edification.

When everyone has a grasp of each part, the members can move on to leading 2 parts of the meeting. Eventually the community members should feel comfortable leading an entire meeting. Once this is established the community may choose to have one member facilitate meetings for an entire month with a backup assigned in case of an unexpected absence.

No matter how the community decides to facilitate the meeting, it is beneficial for the community if the Internal Coordinator has Study and Spiritual Edification planned in advance and a schedule distributed to community members. This allows all community members the opportunity to be prepared for weekly meetings

IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER: There is no one right way to facilitate a part of a meeting, rather it is more important that the meetings reflect all members personalities and opinions and that we use this time to support one another on our individual faith journey as Christian brothers and sisters.

Facilitation Guidelines for Small Faith Communities

*Groups left on their own tend to gravitate to "safe subjects".
Groups are often dominated by a few.*

The role of the Facilitator

- Keep the group on the topic
- Encourage **all** to speak
- Encourage people to speak from personal experience not from other people's experiences.
- Keep the focus on experiencing Jesus in our lives.
- Be an example.

Discussion Moving Off Topic

(For example: "I heard the Bears are really going to move. Isn't that unbelievable?")

- Start immediately with the question. (Pre-emptive)
- Comment "I can't believe it either and let's talk about it on the break."
- Gently say, " I am sorry, but we don't have a lot of time so we need to get back to the question."
- After bringing people back to the topic, restate the question to focus the discussion.
- When people are sharing about other people: "My friend has had a tough life and a difficult marriage." Ask them, "What have you experienced in your own life?"

Questions of Theology

- We are not experts in theology, but I will try to find out an answer by next week.
- I don't know, I'll/let's ask Father about that.
- Discussion about intellectual ideas is a common way to avoid talking about feelings and experiences.
- How do you feel about...(the topic)?
- What does this mean to you personally?

The Talkative Person

- Thank the person for their contribution, and say that the group would like to hear some other people's thoughts and opinions.
- Actively ask another person, "What are your thoughts?"
- Talk to the person later by himself or herself. "You and I seem to do a lot of the talking in our group. Will you please help me to get the other group members involved, especially the quieter ones?"

The Quiet Person

- Quiet people often get the most out of experiences by observing and listening and this is comfortable and normal for them.
- When you sense that they are ready to share, ask them directly, "Frank, what do you think about this?" They often need a little help in opening a space in the conversation.
- Make eye contact with the person to encourage their sharing.

Tips for Effective Listening

Truly listening to someone is one of the *greatest gifts* that we can give a person. One of the main disciplines for members of the community to practice effective listening. Effective listening is a way that we can see the presence of the Holy Spirit within the group to bring about healing and new insights. People who really listen to each other are drawn together in trust, openness, and understanding. As people are listened to, they grow in their sense of self-worth. As they have an opportunity to look at different areas of their lives, they become more honest and sincere in their reflection on their own life experiences, which leads to greater self-understanding. As we listen to each other, God can reveal many new insights and broaden our perception and outlook from other people's experiences.

Bridges to Effective Listening

Listen by

- **using your whole body** (open body stance, direct eye contact, lean forward slightly).
- **acknowledging the speaker's feelings.** ("You sound very sad") Don't minimize, sermonize, or negate.
- **being truly present to the speaker and giving undivided attention** (not doing something else at the same time you are supposed to be listening).
- **observing.** The words the speaker says are only part of the story. Be mindful of the facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language in order to better interpret what you are hearing. Do the words match the body language? If not, some clarifying may be in order.
- **putting aside your own needs.** It's important to allow others to speak and not protect the group's comfort by changing the subject or making a joke to relieve tension.
- **keeping focused on the speaker and speaker's experience.** You shouldn't plan a response or anticipate what the speaker will say before it is said.
- **not problem solving, giving unasked for and unwanted advice.** Remember that the focus is to listen and not to "fix".
- **allowing the speaker's point of view.** Give up the need to be right by arguing your point of view.
- **paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions.** This allows the speaker to know that they've been heard and understood. Restating also allows the person to hear themselves.

Barriers to Effective Listening

Minimizing - "It could be worse" or "It will get better."

Sermonizing - "It's God's will." "You must have faith."

Selecting - choosing what is comfortable to listen to or what fits your experience

Negating - denying the other persons feelings. "You shouldn't feel that way...."

Planning - thinking of a response or solution instead of fully listening

Anticipating - determining what will be said before it happens

Topping - focusing on your own story: "My story's better than your story."

Arguing - debating to prove a point of view

Redirecting - changing the subject or "lightening up" an uncomfortable atmosphere

Dealing with Conflict in Community Life

Conflict is inevitable in groups, even groups centered on Christ (See Mt 21:20-28, Acts 15:1-12). When conflict is addressed lovingly and appropriately, it can lead to increased unity, strength, energy and commitment within a group. Otherwise conflict will result in distrust, tension and apathy. The following are helpful steps for addressing conflict.

Step 1. Pray.

- Pray to the Holy Spirit for His presence and guidance before addressing conflict.
- Listen to the promptings of the Spirit while addressing conflict.
- Pray for healing after addressing conflict.

Step 2. Identify the issues within the conflict.

- Seek to identify and understand the different underlying concerns that may be contributing to the conflict.
- Some conflicts relate to concrete, easily defined problems. Work to clarify the problem with all *helpful* details and bring all to agreement on what the conflict is about.
- Conflicts are fed by poor communication which blurs the true issues.

Step 3. Reduce the level of emotion and encourage listening.

- Understand that people feel that their self-esteem is on the line in a conflict.
- Remain calm and show caring and compassion to all involved.
- Remind the group of all they share in common.
- Encourage the group members to listen carefully to each other.
- Help to clarify the problem by restating, paraphrasing, and summarizing the issues.

Step 4. Compromise is necessary to resolve more complex conflict.

- Brainstorm possible solutions together. Do not evaluate or discuss solutions until all possible solutions are listed.
- Help members to understand all of the proposals-identify their similarities and differences.
- Discuss the pros and cons of each proposal. A combination of two proposals may be needed.
- Decide on the best proposal or solution and how it will be implemented.
- Some conflicts must be managed on an ongoing basis for the group members to relate in harmony.

True community does not require us to pretend that conflict does not exist, but allows us to move through conflict to resolution. When conflict is resolved in a healthy way, people are more comfortable with sharing their true thoughts and feelings, even the negative ones, and grow in their acceptance of others. Success in dealing with conflict teaches the group that they can work through things together. True community builds on sharing not only joys and laughter, but also pain and conflict.

In time, community members grow in their commitment, learning to place the needs of other members and the community as a whole above their own.

First Four Study Materials

The following materials were discerned for use by Small Faith Communities for study as they begin their journey together. These materials are “user friendly,” and provide a strong, well-rounded, orthodox Catholic foundation. As each of them can be completed in six to twelve weeks, the community will never feel bogged-down or overwhelmed.

1. Area 1: General Spirituality

Discovering My Experience of God – Awareness and Witness

By: Fr. Frank DeSiano CSP and Fr. Kenneth Boyack CSP

Published by Paulist Press

997 MacArthur Boulevard

Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

www.paulistpress.com

Discovering My Experience of God is designed to help Catholics know and affirm their stories of faith. This book allows readers to do a simple and thoughtful set of exercises by which they can discover the signs and patterns of God’s presence in their lives. This will help Catholics have greater insight into their own experience of God and assist them to speak to others about it. It is an excellent tool for small groups to come to know each other while they are preparing their story to tell others of God’s action in their life.

2. Area 2: Catholic Catechesis

Option A: *Why Catholic?*

Published by: Renew International

1-888-433-3221

www.renewintl.org

Four *Why Catholic?* faith sharing books explore the four *Catechism* themes, includes direct *Catechism* quotes, scriptural references, and reflection questions. Each book contains a twelve week study plan.

Light of the World recommends that communities cover one book and then move on to the next area of study –scripture. When the community covers Catholic Catechesis again they should select another book to study for twelve weeks and continue this cycle until all four faith-sharing books have been studied.

- ***The Profession of Faith: What We Believe***
- ***The Celebration of the Christian Mystery: Sacraments***
- ***Life in Christ: Walking with God***
- ***Christian Prayer: Deepening My Experience with God***

Option B: *This is Our Faith*

By: Michael Pennock
Ave Maria Press
P.O. Box 428
Notre Dame, IN 46556
1-800-282-1865
www.avemariapress.com

This popular faith primer and handy companion for all who wish to know more about the Catholic faith now corresponds with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is arranged along the four pillars of the Catechism: *The Profession of Faith, The Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Life in Christ, and Christian Prayer*. Questions for discussion are presented. Prayer exercises help the reader understand that knowledge of the faith draws one closer to the Lord. This catechism is specifically designed for Catholic adults, for those new to the church, and those journeying through the RCIA.

3. Area 3: Scripture Study

God's Library

Joe Paprocki
Loyola Press
3441 N. Ashland Ave.
Chicago, IL 60657
800-621-1008
www.loyolabooks.org

In *God's Library*, Joe Paprocki guides readers into a basic understanding of “God’s Library” – the collection of seventy-three books that Catholics regard as the definitive written revelation of God. In an easy to understand language, he explains the organization of the Bible, the different genres of biblical writing, key figures in biblical history, and the methods Catholics have developed to interpret the Bible properly. He shows beginning readers how to use commentaries, concordances, footnotes and cross-references, and other valuable tools of Bible Study.

4. Area 1: General Spirituality

Living in the Power of the Holy Spirit: A Catholic Bible Study

Rich Cleveland
The Word Among Us
9639 Doctor Perry Road
Ijamsville, MD 21574
www.wordamongus.org

Who is the Holy Spirit? What is his role in our salvation? How do we cooperate with him to experience the fullness of his presence? How do we receive his fruits and exercise his gifts? These are a few of the questions explored in this nine week Bible study, which is designed to help Catholics grow in their appreciation of the Holy Spirit and his power to transform their lives in Christ. The many relevant Scripture passages, combined with wisdom from the saints, the Catechism, and church tradition, make this a truly inspired Bible study.

Additional Suggested Readings

The following are orthodox books of the Catholic Church which are great for group study or individual spiritual enrichment. However, after the first four topics it is up to your pastor to determine appropriate material for Small Faith Communities.

General Spirituality

The Called and Gifted Workshop

By the Catherine of Siena Institute

The Seven Commandments of Discipleship

by Fr. Frank DeSiano

Life of the Beloved

by Henri Nouwen

To understand the Father's Love

Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ

Audiotape by Fr. Tom Forrest, C.Ss.R.

Available through Trinity Formation Resources

1-888-765-9269

Celebrating the Mass

by Alfred McBride, O. Praem.

A Guide for Understanding and Loving the Mass More Deeply

The Way of the Disciple

by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis

***What Does God Want?* A Practical Guide to Making Decisions**

by Michael Scanlan, T.O.R.

Audio Tapes of Tom Curran on Leadership (Trinity Formation Resources)

Scott Hahn Books and Tapes

Beginning Apologetics Series by Fr. Frank Chacon and Jim Burnham

Scripture Study

Jeff Cavins tapes and books on Scripture

Audio Tapes of Tom Curran on Scripture (Trinity Formation Resources)

Catholic Catechesis

Encyclicals (*Including, but not limited to Evangelii Nuntiandi, Mission of the Redeemer, Catechesis in our Times, Christe Fidelis Laici, Novo Millennio Ineunte*)

Theology of the Body by Christopher West

Suggested Readings for Personal Study

The Story of a Soul, St. Teresa of Liseux

Prayer Primer...Igniting a Fire Within, by Thomas Dubay, S.M.

Abandonment to Divine Providence, by Jean-Pierre De Caussade

Here and Now, Living in the Spirit, by Henri Nouwen

Listening At Prayer, by Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

God's World and Our Place in It, by Fulton J. Sheen

Heaven in Our Hands (Living the Beatitudes), by Benedict Groeschel

The Art of Praying (Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer),

by Romano Guardini

He Leadeth Me, by Fr. Walter J. Ciszek, S.J.

Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius:

Retreat with the Lord, A Guide to the Exercises, by Fr. Hardon

A 12 Step Approach to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius,

by Jim Harbaugh S.J.

Spiritual Combat by Jonathan Robinson of the Oratory

Seeking Spiritual Direction, Thomas Dubay, S.M.

Living the Catholic Faith (Rediscovering the Basics), Archbishop Charles J. Chaput

Facilitating for Growth, A Guide for Scripture Study Groups and Small Christian Communities, by Barbara J. Fleischer

Where Is That In The Bible?, by Patrick Madrid

Search and Rescue, by Patrick Madrid

As By a New Pentecost, Patti Gallagher Mansfield

Drink of the Stream (Prayers of Carmelites), compiled by Penny Hickey, O.C.D.S.

Heart of Joy, Mother Teresa

Jesus, The Word to Be Spoken, Mother Teresa

Developing a Personal Prayer Life

As members of a Small Faith Community it is important to develop a personal prayer life to enrich our walk with Christ.

Suggestions for Personal Daily Prayer

1. Scripture Prayer and Meditation
Serendipity Bible (New American Translation with questions for reflection)
2. One Bread, One Body (www.presentationministries.com)
3. Living Faith Devotional (www.livingfaith.com)
4. Rosary
5. Chaplet of Divine Mercy
6. Magnificat Devotional (1-800-317-6689, www.magnificat.net)
7. The Word Among Us (www.wordamongus.org or www.wau.org)
8. Liturgy of the Hours
9. Keep a personal journal
10. Consider choosing a personal spiritual director

Keeping a Prayer Journal

Taken from *The Essential Catholic Prayer Book* (A Redemptorist Pastoral Publication)

Some people find it a benefit to keep a journal of their moments in communion with God. Such a journal is not a diary but a way of expressing in your own words your love for the Lord. It becomes a record of what you feel that the Holy Spirit is saying to you and what you are saying to God. The key to this effort is to write spontaneously just as the words and thoughts come to you.

Some others also find it helpful to record short passages from Scripture or from other spiritual writers, thus creating a very personal prayer book. Still others use a prayer journal to write “letters to God.” Henri Nouwen’s book, *A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee*, is an example of such letter writing to God. In this book he also offers a “soul-teaching” on prayer.

To this journal, writers also add newspaper or magazine clippings, poetry of their own devising or by other authors, illustrations or other photos, and so on. But the most important warning here is not to become so self-absorbed in the technique that God is forgotten.

Some suggestions for writing in a prayer journal:

1. Come to a place of quiet, putting all outside distractions to rest.
2. Invite Jesus into your heart, always having faith that He knows what He wants to say to us and knows how to answer us back.
3. Use the prayer journal to keep in touch with your inner voices. Use this opportunity to get into honest touch with your feelings, good and bad, and bring them to Jesus.
4. Use the prayer journal to identify helps and hindrances to prayer, high and low points, and advancements and setbacks.

Giving God Twenty

How to Start a Real Prayer Life

by Bud Macfarlane

If you are serious about being a Catholic, keep reading. This is for mature audiences only. It is rated R for Realistic.

We all know that a Catholic adult who does not have a daily contemplative prayer life is a contradiction in terms. If there is one constant in the advice of the saints, it is that every Catholic should have a serious prayer life. My goal here is not to berate you if you do not have a prayer life. I have fallen short myself until recently, so I am the last one who can possibly criticize you.

So my purpose is to encourage you and to help you avoid the common mistakes which prevent most folks from establishing the habit of daily prayer. Let us begin.

SIMPLY SIMPLE

Thousands of books have been written on the subject of prayer, and I know you may have the impression that contemplative prayer is complicated, difficult, and only for nuns and monks hidden away in monasteries. Nothing could be further from the truth. Silent prayer is for everyone. Anyone can do it. You can get started right away--today, in fact--and within a few days or weeks, rise to a steady and high level of union with God.

THE KING OF SILENCE

For our purposes, let us define contemplative prayer as time spent listening to God in silence. The key is your silence. Stay quiet. Don't say a word. If you're from New Jersey, like me, just shut up. "Contemplative" prayer ceases to be intimidating if you regard it as sharing silence with God.

Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is silent in the most profound manifestation of His real presence on earth, the Eucharist. You are concretely setting out to imitate His silence. He is the King of Silence. You enter his Royal Court through prayer. The door to the court swings open with the touch of a warm, silent breeze. This breeze is the breath of God. Inhale Our Lord and He will exhale you right into your day.

GOD WILL SPEAK TO YOU

Jesus can speak to you by leaving messages on your soul in a similar way that we leave messages on telephone answering machines. Your soul is a supernatural email "in-box." Silent prayer is your way of downloading your messages (grace) from your King. You were designed by God to do this. The only words you need to tell God before you begin to pray are these: "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

GOD INSIDE YOU

If you are in a state of grace, the Holy Trinity dwells within your soul. Your body is a flesh and blood home for God. He is literally inside you. He is not far away. If you remember this truth--that God dwells inside your soul--you will know He is not "up there in heaven somewhere" when you seek silent union with Him.

In this sense, silent contemplative prayer is not only possible, it is impossible to mess up because God is right there with you. This is why it does not matter for the first few years if you pray badly. You don't have to be "well-spoken" with God precisely because you are not talking. You are hanging out with Him.

This is why it is so important to go to Confession frequently--once or twice a month. By absolving you of sin, Christ is keeping the "communication link" open with your soul. You are in range of His cell tower. Never let sin stop you from praying every day, do allow Confession help you pray every day.

EVERY DAY MEANS EVERY DAY

You must pray every single day. I strongly recommend that you commit to silent prayer as the very first thing you do in the morning. I try to pray after I shower and get dressed--before I start my "regular" day of work and responsibilities as father and husband. There are several advantages to the First Thing in the Morning Method.

GO FOR THE HABIT

You simply must keep in mind that the evil one's fear is that we will develop a daily habit. After a lifetime of holding you in the slavery of the bad habit of not praying every day, he will fight tooth and nail to get you to miss one day so he can then discourage you from starting up again the next day. Don't fall for this sucker punch. If you missed your prayer time yesterday, get back on board today.

Fortunately, a good habit works in your favor. String together seventeen days of any behavior and it starts becoming a habit. Knit together seventeen times seventeen days, and it will become difficult for you not to pray. Put on prayer like a pair of pants. The evil one will then concentrate on ruining your silence, but dealing with that minor challenge is for the Advanced Course a year or two down the road.

God will not give up. Only you can give up.

The key advantage to committing to First Thing Every Morning Prayer is that your commitment to silence with your Lord will start jumping into your head as soon as you wake up--just as your need to take a shower or your desire to have breakfast leaps to the forefront of your mind when

you wake up. You will know that the good habit is forming after you wake up every day for a week with "I will pray today unless I get run over by a truck" on your mind.

CRACK OF DAWN OR DUSK

If you experience a distraction or emergency that prevents you from praying Right Off the Bat, you have all day long to get your prayer time in. If you are having a truly off day, don't go to sleep before you pray. Have a cup of coffee. You want it to play out that if you do find yourself praying just before you go to bed, it will be your sixth or seventh "attempt" because you've had it on your mind since waking up. Use meal times as your measuring stick. If you miss prayer before breakfast, try before lunch. Or just after lunch, or just before or after dinner, etc. Associate prayer in your mind with having a spiritual meal.

So this is your simple Rule of Prayer:

"I will begin my day with prayer as the first important thing I do every day until the day I die. I will never go to bed again without spending time in silence with my God."

THE ANTI-FREAK-OUT

Another bonus of praying Right Off the Bat is that prayer gives you two benefits which you will soon begin to crave. First, it helps you begin your day in a settled, peaceful, and contented state. Let the house burn down! Let the kids go bonkers! Did the bank repossess your car--Cool! So what if your psycho boss screams in your ear? Inside your soul, you're as cool as a Catholic cucumber. You have spent your time with your Savior, and you know it, and you know He knows it. Silence is calming in and of itself. Silence with God is the best, safest, most natural anti-freak-out medicine you can take.

RIGHT OFF THE BAT

The second bonus is that Praying First Thing makes you like a baseball being struck by a Divine Slugger. "Pitch" yourself to God. Toss Him your soul like a softball first thing in the morning. Let your day become a big fat fastball right down the middle of the plate. God will lift his front leg, keep his shoulder in, extend his hands and belt you right into the spiritual upper deck--first pitch, first at bat, every time.

I have no way of proving this, but I believe this is why virtually every home run king in major league baseball history was or is a Catholic--including Babe Ruth, Henry Aaron, Bobby Bonds, Mark McGwire, Roger Maris, and Sammy Sosa. God loves the long ball.

If I've noticed one universal difference between so-called "good" Catholics who pray every day and those who don't, it is the uncanny way those who do pray have their entire day shaped and formed by God.

DROP AND GIVE GOD TWENTY

I recommend twenty minutes of daily silence with God as a minimum. I am annoyed when I hear Catholic "experts" recommend "starting small" to folks hoping to start a lifetime habit of prayer--five or ten minutes. It never works. Nothing seriously human happens in five minutes--not taking a shower, not having a meal, not having a decent phone call with a friend. Human beings are not wired that way. According to the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen, psychologists discovered long ago that the human attention span is seventeen to twenty minutes long.

There are practical reasons for giving God Twenty. It takes five minutes for most of us to just to settle into listening mode. It takes several minutes to quiet down your imagination and fend off the thoughts and worries about your daily tasks and challenges. If you pray for twenty minutes, the likelihood is you will spend five or ten minutes of that time for the first several months getting accustomed to shutting up your jabbering mind. To have five or ten minutes of silent prayer, in other words, pray for at least twenty minutes.

I know many Catholics who have a daily prayer life. None pray for only five minutes. Twenty minutes or bust. The best five minutes of prayer are almost always the five minutes that come after the first fifteen minutes!

THE HOLY "NOW"

Here is the progression you will likely follow. For the first several days the twenty minutes will feel like an eternity. Five minutes will seem like an hour. This is not God's fault. It is probably not really your fault, either. We live in a rushed, loud, and godless society where the devil's big lie is that there is a tomorrow. Ever notice how the world, the devil, and the flesh are always "pushing" your attention away from the current moment by pushing your thoughts toward tomorrow?

In fact, there is only the Now. By the time you make it to tomorrow, it will be today again. It will be Now. God lives in the Now--in what theologians call the Fullness of Time.

You are about to experience the Miracle of Time. The scales will fall from your eyes and you will realize, day in and day out, that time does not exist. Time is merely, as Aristotle defined it, a grade-school ruler. He defined time as "a measure of objects moving through space." Your soul is immortal--timeless. Your body "keeps" time as you "move" through your years on earth, but any union with God transcends time.

Gradually you will discover a wonderful truth: your twenty minutes of silence with your King will begin to go by quickly. Eventually, probably within a month or two, you will find yourself lingering beyond twenty minutes, even regretting that your time with God is so short. You might experience five or ten minutes of distraction on a particular day and find yourself desiring to add to your prayer time so you can have more peace with Him.

THROUGHPUT

When this starts to happen--when you start tapping into the reality of being with the *God Who Lives Beyond Time*, you will know that you are truly downloading His graces. You are now receiving His graces via T1 line.

Your desire for God is now becoming a craving--a longing as strong as any bride who pines to be with her groom on her wedding night. God is your lover, now. Today and every day is a wedding day. This is why the great mystics who wrote the book on contemplative prayer--Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila--described God as Lover. They describe union with God in terms of ecstasy.

You are in God's strike zone now.

You have become a Catholic with a contemplative prayer life. You will never, ever want to go back to limping through a day alone again. You are a Christian adult, and the graces of your Baptism, Confirmation, your Sacrament of Marriage (if you've taken the vows), Confession and the Holy Eucharist now work in unison like powerful horses pulling your chariot of fire (with your family and friends on board) through time into eternity. Bang zoom!

Here are some practical measures you can rely upon.

1. SILENCE INSIDE

You can pray with noise around you. I know this sounds crazy, but it is possible to shut the world out. Moms, you can pray with the kids buzzing around you if you have no other options. Close your eyes. The King of Silence is inside you. He is all-powerful. He can make the noise go away.

2. FIND A PLACE, BUT NOT YOUR CAR

It helps if you pray in the same spot every day. In front of the Eucharist is ideal, but barring that, pray in a room in your home. Moms might have to pray with the kids nearby. Do not attempt to pray silent prayer while you drive to work. You can't do two things at the same time. Have an informal "conversation" with God while you drive--or pray the Rosary with a tape-- but don't count that as your Silent Twenty Minutes.

3. STOP WATCHING TELEVISION

This is self-explanatory. If you have time for TV, but don't have twenty minutes for God....

4. SIT DOWN?

Most of my friends pray sitting down. Contemplative nuns and religious usually pray most while they are sitting down.

Some prefer to kneel, especially if you have the opportunity to pray in Church, ideally just after daily Mass and receiving Communion.

5. ON THE ROAD

My job requires a lot of travel. My "spot" is often the chair in the hotel room.

6. CLOSE YOUR EYES

Even though you will pray with your eyes closed, it is a good idea to pray before a holy picture or statue, so if you do open your eyes, you will see a reminder of Jesus or Mary. If you had a rough day and are forced to pray before bedtime, avoid praying in bed. You will probably fall asleep. Stand up to stay awake if you must.

7. TAKE NOTES

It is definitely an excellent idea to keep a notebook. If you "hear" God say something (which the saints call Promptings of the Holy Spirit), write it down, though it is usually best to wait until after your Twenty Minutes is completed rather than leave the silent zone.

8. THREE SOURCES

It is difficult for novices like us to know for sure if these promptings are from God or not. There are only three possible sources: God, the evil one, or your own self.

If you get "instructions" that are contrary to any moral law or Catholic teaching, discard them immediately. Very few of us will ever "hear" explicit words, but most of us will get peaceful promptings. It might be a name of a person you might meet or the image of a friend or situation. Something from your past or something (or someone) in your future. It might be something more mysterious--hard to put your finger on exactly. An intuition. Often the same prompting will return to you regularly or sporadically for days, months, or years. Often it will be that soft still voice of your own (until now, ignored) conscience telling you about a sin that you need to confess and jettison from your life.

9. SHORT CUT: FRIENDSHIP

My daily prayer life got a jump start when I asked two of my best friends to commit to Twenty Minutes a Day with me. Knowing that we're in this together has really helped. Don't be shy. Your friends want to pray every day too. Call your best Catholic friend. Commit together. Help each other. Encourage each other. Trade notes.

10. DURING THE DAY

Often, your silent time listening to God will prepare your soul with promptings that will become clear later in the day during a conversation or some daily activity. What you have done by praying Right Off the Bat is "tune in" to God's frequency. By no means should you "shut off" your communication with God. The saints speak of being in "in the presence" of God all day long. This is your destiny too if you have a daily silent prayer life.

11. NO TEETH PULLING

Jesus really will communicate with you. Remember, His favorite way is to leave messages on your soul in silence. When you hear Him asking you to do something, follow the Blessed Mother's advice: "Do whatever He tells you." The saints say that obedience is the greatest virtue. The next "step" to your sanctity beyond having a daily prayer life in conjunction with the Sacraments is learning to discern the real voice of God--and learning to ignore all other voices. This is more advanced stuff, but the other voices usually tell lies tricked up to look like truth.

This is why your only trustworthy source for Truth is the Catholic Church, founded by He Who is Truth.

And please, if God asks something of you, don't make Him pull teeth. Make your response, "Done."

12. OTHER PRAYERS

Most good Catholics I know start the first minute of the day when they open their eyes with morning prayers. Saint Escriva called this minute the most important minute of the day. I pray the following morning prayers but I do not "count" them as part of my silent prayer time:

Morning Offering

Consecration Prayer to Mary

Saint Michael Prayer

Guardian Angel Prayer

Act of Contrition

Memorare

At Noon, I often pray the Angelus, joining tens of millions of Catholics around the world.

13. SPILL OVER

You will find that your daily Rosary will be more fruitful and contemplative--less the repetition of words--if you have a silent prayer life. You are training yourself in the habit of union with God; this will definitely spill over into your other daily devotions, including the Divine Mercy Chaplet and even your Grace Before Meals.

14. BEFORE BED

Start with Jesus, end with Mary. Many Catholics find great comfort in having a private conversation with Our Lady before they fall off to sleep. I recommend it. She is a good listener.

