Guide to Preparation
for being a Small Group Leader

Prep film #1

1. Remember that we welcome everyone and anyone to be part of our small group process. As a leader, you can help make folks feel welcome by how you greet and seat them, by how you address them, and by how you invite them back for the next session.

2. Each participant will get a worksheet to use for each session. You should be thoroughly familiar with the content for each session before it begins. It will only take you a half hour to prepare.

3. You have a guide to help you move through each session with grace. We provide step-by-step suggestions, but you should follow your own heart and good sense as you lead. Don’t follow our suggestions verbatim.

4. Have on hand a Bible, the Catechism, and your set of 48 Growing Faith booklets. The Index to the Catechism and Growing Faith is available to click and open next to this prep film.

5. Pause and pray before your small group arrives. Just put down all your supplies and resources, push back a
bit from the table, or stand in the window, or simply find a quiet moment in the car... and invite the Holy Spirit to work through you. See yourself as an “earthen vessel” which contains a great treasure, and ask for the grace and insight to share that treasure with your group. Pray in your own words.

6. The space:
   ► Is it welcoming?
   ► Turn down the lights!
   ► Play a little quiet sacred music as people arrive – it helps people feel comfortable. You will want to turn this off as your conversations begin.
   ► Have some refreshments ready – nothing says “welcome” better than a cup of coffee, a glass of wine, or a light snack.
   ► Meet folks at the door. Don’t be busy with many tasks as people are arriving. Greet them warmly. If the group is new to each other, you might use a nametag for the first meeting.

7. Review

   Become familiar with all the material before the meeting begins.

   Pause and allow God to work through you.

   Prepare your space and welcome everyone warmly as they arrive.

   Let’s get started!
Guide to Preparation
for being a Small Group Leader
Prep film #2

1. Thank you for being a small group leader! You will touch hearts and lives in ways large and small.

2. Prepare a prayer for the group or use the one provided on the worksheets. Keep it short, and if possible, use *Breaking Open the Word*, which is described in your Leader Guide. You can click to open a set of faith sharing questions for each week of the year using the link we provide next to this film. These questions are all related to the Sunday readings.

3. We begin by inviting people to talk about their daily lives. Just ask folks a question something like this: What happened in your life since the last time we were together?

4. The word “facilitate” means literally “to make it easy for people.” And that is precisely your job as a small group leader.

5. Small group learning is not like attending a class! You aren’t the “teacher” and the participants aren’t “students.”

6. This is not a prayer group. Prayer is important, but the main purpose for being together is to have a conversation about faith.

7. This is not a support or therapy group. Be careful not to make it into one! Appropriate self-disclosure is important. Not every personal matter should be shared in this group.

What are your questions or concerns? Note them in this space.
Difficult situations that might arise in your small group & Opportunities to turn them into something GREAT!

Let’s face it, in any small group gathering, there will be moments of stress or confusion. As the leader, one of your tasks is to help steer the group through these. Here are some examples.

1. Questions arise that you cannot answer.
   **What to do:**
   a) Be honest about that. You probably aren’t a theologian.

   b) The response in such a moment might be, “I don’t know, but let’s find out and report back in with each other.” You can check together in *Growing Faith* using the index for it. Or in the *Catechism*, which is indexed along with *Growing Faith*.

   c) If you have people’s e-mail addresses, you might ask your pastor or someone else on the parish team about the matter, and write a response to everyone after the meeting. Don’t let such questions derail the group.

2. There may be **moments of awkward silence** where no one speaks in response to a conversation question. Introverts often need a bit of time to think before speaking. And if the conversation is quite personal, folks may hesitate to start.

   **What to do:**
   a) You can allow just a moment of silence for folks to collect their thoughts (silence is OK, provided it doesn’t turn into a morgue) and then you can share a short item yourself to get the ball rolling.

   b) Rephrase the question just a little, to help jog people’s willingness to speak.

   c) You can respond to the question, briefly, yourself or turn to someone you know in the group and ask them to begin.

3. Someone has **shared something very personal** and no one dares speak up next.
   **What to do:**
   a) Thank the person for sharing this item, possibly echo it very briefly back to them, and ask if anyone else in the group has had a similar experience.
b) You may need to acknowledge that not everyone will have such a profound experience, and then ask people to simply share from their own daily lives.

4. You have **loud, talkative people** who won’t shut up.  
**What to do:**  
a) You might say something to them outside of the group but when you do, affirm them and thank them for all they do contribute, and elicit their help in inviting others to also talk.

b) At a pause in their talk, thank them and ask if anyone else would like to add something.

5. You have **quiet, shy people** who won’t speak up.  
**What to do:**  
a) It’s certainly OK to be quiet and need time to collect one’s thoughts. Some people are introverts and find it difficult to speak up. Or they may be dealing with a personal matter which is too personal to share.

b) But if the person says nothing at all, you may want to speak to them outside the group to encourage them to speak up.

c) Within the group, be careful not to put them on the spot or make them feel cornered. Simply invite anyone to speak who hasn’t yet done so, and use your eyes to identify them along with others, scanning the circle with your eyes as you do.

6. There is a **know-it-all type who dominates** by spouting a lot of information, not all of it accurate.  
**What to do:**  
a) If this persists, you may need to say something to his person outside the group, telling him or her that the purpose of the group is to have a conversation in which everyone has a chance to speak. Begin by thanking them for their contribution but say you want to make sure everyone gets a chance to be heard.

b) Within the group, cut them off when they pause by thanking them, pull the group back to the topic, return to the conversation starters we provide. By taking control like this, the dominator will often begin checking with you before speaking.

c) If this dominator has an “agenda” such as inserting his or her special interest into every conversation, you will have to move to stop it. Your best strategy is to speak to the person outside the group. Call in your parish small group coordinator if you need back up.
7. You have someone who expresses doubts about his or her faith, or who expressed disagreement about church teaching.

**What to do:**

a) It’s OK to doubt one’s faith and in fact, people who do express such doubts are probably the most honest in the group. Thank them for sharing this but be careful not to let one person’s doubts take over the group. Simply move on by returning to the conversation questions and inviting others to enter the discussion.

b) If it seems that this person is really struggling, offer to speak to them outside the group or steer them to talk with a member of the pastoral staff.

8. Someone expresses strong disagreement with what’s on the worksheet or with what is being said.

**What to do:**

a) It’s OK to disagree. It’s just a fact of life that everyone has different opinions. If the group has differing thoughts on an issue, there’s no requirement that everyone agree. After a reasonable time of discussion, you could state that it’s time to leave this point unresolved and move on to another discussion question or activity. No one should have his or her feelings hurt if others don’t share all the same opinions.

b) Don’t accuse the person disagreeing of being a heretic. Above all, be charitable with everyone.

c) You can press gently for church teaching (represented in the participant worksheets) by saying, “Let’s allow our teachings to guide us as we go forward and be aware that each of us is on a unique journey of faith. For now, let’s leave this but be open to returning to it later.”

9. It’s almost the end of the agreed time and you’re only half way through the Participant Worksheet.

**What to do:**

a) The worksheets are designed to be sent home with participants, so folks will be able to see the rest of the material on their own.

b) If the group is willing, you could extend the time a little but be careful to honor those who might have babysitters or other things in their schedule.

c) You don’t want to cut off fruitful conversation, so you may want to return to this same worksheet for your next session, if the group agrees.

d) Be flexible and learn to figure out when to deviate from the plan.
e) Read through the remaining faith statements quickly and discuss the closing conversations just briefly, but if you sense people want to go more deeply into the matter at hand, don’t cut that off. That’s probably the Spirit speaking.

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<th>10. It’s <strong>time to close the meeting</strong>, but not everything seems to have been said.</th>
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<td><strong>What to do:</strong></td>
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<td>a) Whenever people are talking about faith, the conversation could go on forever! It’s OK to draw a line, though, and remind folks this can continue informally throughout the coming week, and that we’ll return to be with each other again (if another meeting is scheduled). Not everything can be handled in one short session.</td>
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<td>b) You should hang around afterward to check in with anyone whom you notice may need your attention.</td>
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<td>c) Before ending, pause to summarize very briefly the course of this session, inviting anyone then to respond to this question: What did you hear, see, say or feel here that will go home with you? This allows people to say one final word which may help them close the conversation more gracefully.</td>
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Here are a few basic ground rules:

Confidentiality. It’s not just for Las Vegas. What’s said at group stays at group. No one wants to find out he or she has been the subject of gossip or well-meaning "prayer discussions." This is probably the most important ground rule of all. You should mention this briefly at the beginning of each session.

Start on time—and end on time. It will be up to you as the leader to guide the group in sticking with this commitment. It’s especially helpful to those who have children at home with babysitters and those with work schedules that are affected by late nights or meetings that run over.

Discussion involves everyone. To make this work, everyone needs to participate as a listener and as a speaker. It should be understood that when one person is monopolizing the discussion, the leader could say, "Let's hear from someone else now." Then, when another person has listened for a long time, the leader might ask, "Jennie, do you have any input you’d like to share?"

Remember your manners. Avoid dismissing the thoughts of others, don’t laugh at others when they’ve shared (unless they’ve just told a joke), and no putdowns of any kind. These are the actions that make others "shut down" and feel uneasy about sharing. Opening up can be hard enough for some people as it is. Your group should be a welcoming place for all. Any humor used in the group should be respectful and should never be at the expense of any other person or group.

It’s OK to agree to disagree. It’s just a fact of life that everyone has different opinions. If the group has differing thoughts on an issue, there’s no requirement that everyone agree. After a reasonable time of discussion, the leader or another group member could state that it’s time to leave this point unresolved and move on to another discussion question or activity. No one should have his or her feelings hurt if others don’t share all the same opinions.

And perhaps one last suggestion...Turn off cell phones before group begins!
Tips for Creating a Group that Grows

► Be prepared. Read and complete the worksheet and leader guide beforehand.

► Keep simple attendance records for your small group so that you remember to check on absentees. Call or follow up with members who are absent. Folks like to know they are missed when they are unable to attend.

► Conduct the gathering in a prayerful way. Have quiet sacred music playing as folks arrive. (Turn it off when the discussions begin, though.) Begin with the Sign of the Cross and use the opening prayer which is provided. You may want to have a prayer table in the space: A Bible, candle, or other sign of our faith. Keep lighting reasonably low to encourage more intimacy.

► Lead the small group discussion, keeping group members focused on the topic in a lively and interesting way.

► Pray for each member of your group during the week.

► Report any problems or concerns to the pastoral leaders in your parish.

► Notify the Small Group Coordinator in your parish if you are unable to attend. If there is a possible replacement within your group, talk with the Coordinator about it so that he or she can decide who should lead.

► Let the Holy Spirit lead! Allow God to accomplish His work through you. See yourself as an earthen vessel through which God sends grace and empowerment to others.

► Be enthusiastic! Let the group know that you love them and God, but don’t press your own piety on anyone. Simply allow them to see the faith which you have.
About Small Groups

Do you ever think, "Why is it so hard to get to know people? Why is it so hard to make good friends?"

God never meant for us to live life alone!
God is all about relationships and community. He uses other people to help us grow, and that's why a flourishing network of small group communities throughout each parish is such a rich way for us Catholics (and those in our households) to grow. A small group is a place where folks gather to hold a conversation about faith with each other. Those conversations are rich with meaning and purpose. They fill a hunger that each of us has within, to connect with others and be part of a larger reality than our private lives.

Small groups are places where you can be real with people, dive into Scripture and Catholic teaching, and discuss issues that are relevant to your life. When you get involved in a small group, you will be on the road to experiencing spiritual growth like you've never known before!

What is a small group?
We realize that most parishes today are large and we want to help make the experience of Church be more personal and intimate. Small groups of 4-12 people (of all ages and interests) meet in homes and coffee shops in and around the area for 6 weeks in each season, and the seasons continue year after year. Some groups even meet at the church. Whenever and wherever they meet, they are full of people who long to "do life" with people who care about God and each other.

You can join a small group that's right for you: women, men, singles, couples, teens, special interests, and more!

Why should someone join a small group?
First, a small group gives you an opportunity to develop deep, caring relationships. Through life's highs and lows, your group will be there to celebrate with you and support you through the tough times.

Second, a small group is a place to get your questions answered. The group will help you unpack and understand Scripture and Catholic teaching. You will help each other apply God's Word to your lives and make it real.

Third, a small group is a place to serve and be served. Jesus came to be a servant of all, and the group will encourage one another to follow Jesus' example and serve not only each other, but also the church and the community.

Finally, a small group is not only a place to grow deeply in your faith, but also a place to learn how to share it. Holding conversations about faith leads us all to appreciate what we believe more fully and to understand it more completely.