

FACILITATION GUIDE

Small Groups

For The Path/La Senda/The Path for Families



The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

2019/2020

WHY SMALL GROUPS FOR THE PATH/LA SENDA?

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” - Mark 12:30-31

The purpose of a faith-based small group is to build relationships with God and one another.

When we meet each other in real conversation, we learn how to love. Small groups also create trusting spaces for support, accountability, and prayer as we seek to Live into God's story and find our story within it. Ideally, everyone who commits to The Path/La Senda should have a small group sharing the journey.

The goals for our reading of The Path/La Senda as a Diocese is that:

We will grow together in our unity, confidence in scripture, and understanding of the call of God to us in our time through scripture.

That we will grow in our trust in God, follow Jesus' leading and be transformed together!

How to Start a Small Group

1) Find a capable facilitator.

Great facilitators...

- Are familiar with the discussion material: "Let me rephrase the question a different way..."
- Invite others into the conversation: "Would anyone who hasn't yet shared like to share?"
- Are perceptive to nonverbal cues: "It looks like she's trying to say something."
- Get the conversation out of the head and into the heart: "What does ... have to do with your relationship with God?" or "How does it make you feel that...?"
- Open the conversation back up: "What do others think?"
- Engage introverts: "Just a reminder, if you always speak, count to three before speaking. If you never speak, don't stop to count!" or "We're going to take a minute of silence to think about the question, and then we'll share."
- Refocus the question: "I wonder if anyone had any thoughts about the topic at hand."
- Claim their authority as facilitator: "I'm sorry, but we don't interrupt one another. Not interrupting is part of our group's norms." or "Let's remember to speak one at a time and wait for others to finish before we speak."
- Watch the time: "This is a great discussion, but it's time to move on to our practices for the week."

The best training for small group facilitation is being a part of a well-functioning small group

in the past. You might think of people in your community who have taken part in Education for Ministry or other small groups. Remember, good facilitation isn't about knowing everything about the content, but rather having the ability to facilitate meaningful conversation.

Make sure your facilitators have access to the free The Path/La Senda/The Path for Families curriculum available from Forward Movement.

2) Gather a small group.

Jesus was onto something: Twelve is about the perfect number for a small group. You can get away with 8-14 people, though. Fewer than eight and, with a few absences, the group is too small. More than 14 and there are too many people to have an in-depth single conversation. Personal invitations go a long way toward forming a meaningful small group. Be upfront about expectations when inviting people so they know what to expect. Small groups function best with consistent participation, so be clear that you will be depending on the members to participate consistently.

The Path/La Senda Promotional Tool Kit on the Diocese of Long Island website has a variety of advertising and invitation resources. All of the resources can be customized for your church.

3) Plan logistics.

Thoughtfully consider the following questions:

Schedule your group. Make your own schedule or use the three eight week sessions in 2019/2010.

- September 15 – November 17
- January 12 – March 1
- March 22 – May 10

- Where will sessions be held? Is it safe and accessible for everyone in your group? If the group is using Zoom or Skype make sure everyone has the web address and session information.

- Collect email addresses/phone numbers for reminders.

- When should sessions be held? Will your group meet weekly, twice a month, or once a month? We recommend meeting weekly, if possible. Weekly gatherings are likely to result in

more consistent participation and greater group cohesion. Meeting less frequently, however, may be more appropriate in some settings and allows participants more time to process and process The Path in their own lives.

- Should your group eat together? If so, how will your group ensure that participants' food restrictions are met?
 - Should your group provide childcare?
 - How could your facilitator contact participants if the meeting's time or place has to change on short notice?
 - What kind of name tags does your group want to use? Even if you think everyone knows each other, providing name tags facilitates conversation and helps build community.
- * Make sure everyone has information on how to obtain a copy of The Path/La Senda in paper, digital or audio. Send this information out with your invitation.
- * Make sure your group has access to a copy of the New Revised Standard Bible for your group to look up any stories or passages referenced.

4) Set group norms.

The first time your group meets, the members should set group norms together. Group norms are simply expectations about how members of the group will treat each other, and they are an important part of healthy groups. Some groups prefer to post norms clearly in their meeting space, while others reread the norms at the beginning of each session. Still other groups are much more informal. Whatever the level of formality, it's important for everyone to have the same expectations about their time together.

Here are some issues that all groups should discuss as they begin their relational small group:

- Confidentiality – What is allowed to be shared outside the group? What may be shared on social media?
- Respect – How will group members respect each other during their conversations?
- Logistics – What are expectations about arriving on time? About providing or sharing food?

What is the group's position on alcohol? Do members of the group have food restrictions?

- Technology – What is the phone policy? Will they be turned off and placed in the middle of the table? Silenced? Or is casual use acceptable?
- Session preparation – Ask group members to commit to reading The Path/La Senda chapter for the week before each meeting.

Facilitators should feel empowered to reference the group's norms if a behavior is becoming a distraction. "I'm sorry, but the group decided that we would not be texting during the session. Is this an emergency?" or "Remember, it's our policy not to interrupt others while they are talking. Please wait for her to finish." If the group or one particular member consistently breaks the norms, the facilitator may find it helpful to revisit the norms with the group. The group may decide to affirm or change the norms.

5) Keep the agenda of the small group consistent.

Here is a tried-and-true structure for a small group gathering:

PRAYER (5 minutes)

Ask God to be with your group during your time together.

CHECK-IN (15 minutes)

Check-in is a chance for group members to get to know each other better, reconnect, and warm up for the discussion questions.

Some tips for check-in:

- The first few times your group meets, consider asking an "ice-breaker" type question.
- Your group may want to use the process of mutual invitation where the first speaker invites the next person to speak.
- Participants may "pass," but the facilitator should invite those who pass to speak at the end.
- Check-in may take longer than 15 minutes the first few times your group meets, but it's worth taking the time to get to know each other better.
- Check-in is not about responding to the last person who talked, but rather offering one's

own answer to the question.

- Try to link the check-in question to the focus content of The Path chapter, e.g Chapter 3: Did you ever experience a name change, being given a nick name or at marriage? How did it add to your understanding of yourself?

Feel free to meet the context of your group and make your own check in questions!

Mutual Invitation Check-in

A note on mutual invitation: The process of mutual invitation is a method of sharing that ensures that everyone who wants to speak has the opportunity to do so. Because members are asked to call on one another by name and may be required to call on members on whom they would not naturally call, it builds group cohesion. Mutual invitation also shifts power within the group, and because in some cultures group members will not speak up unless invited, it honors different cultural expectations about speaking.

The process is as follows: A designated person will share first. When that person has finished speaking, he/she invites another by name to share. The speaker does not need to invite the person next to him/her; it can be anyone in the group who hasn't spoken yet. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege of inviting another to share. If someone is not ready to share yet, that person may say, "I pass for now," and the leader will invite anyone who does so to speak later on. If someone don't want to say anything at all, that person simply says "pass" and proceeds to invite another to share. This continues until everyone has been invited to say something. (Process description adapted from *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*

by Eric H. F. Law)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (45 minutes)

The purpose of a small group is building a trusting relationship with others and with God. The foundation for these relationships is open, creative, and life-giving conversation. In addition to the questions provided at the end of each chapter in *The Path/La Senda* and its accompanying curriculums, you are encouraged to create your own questions about the chapter that encourage emotional connection, real sharing, and creative thinking. Good discussion

questions generate a space where people actually get to talk about what matters to them most.

A good discussion question...

- Is easily understood by participants
- Could be playful and imaginative (e.g., “I wonder...”) or quite serious (e.g., “What does it mean for your life that...?”)
- Isn’t answered by “yes” or “no”
- Links the participant’s life experience to the content
- Is open-ended (e.g., “What is intriguing about this idea?”) instead of closed (e.g., “Do you like this idea?”)
- Encourages storytelling
- Brings God and faith into the conversation
- Uses the content of Scripture to help participants think deeply about what matters

Be prepared with the chapter end discussion questions, but know that the group might go really

deep into just one and not get to the other questions. That’s OK! The point of this time is life-giving conversation. So if that’s being created, there’s no need to shut down conversation to get through all the questions.

Sometimes, the facilitator will have to ask some follow-up questions to keep the conversation going.

Helpful follow-up questions:

- How did that make you feel?
- Tell us more about that.
- What made you think of that?

This curriculum provides discussion questions, but you should feel empowered to ask your own questions. This is your small group!

Check-out (5 minutes)

This is an opportunity for the group to assess its group work. It’s a time to articulate what’s

been learned, or to name what could be better about the group's time together.

Any question that asks group members to assess their time together would do, but here are some sample check-out questions:

- When did the group have a lot of energy? When was the energy lacking?
- When did you feel close to God? When did you feel far away from God?
- When did you meet Jesus in your session today?
- When did you see light from the Holy Spirit?
- What did you notice about our time together?
- What will you take away from our conversation today?
- [If short on time] Describe our time together in one word.

WORSHIP (10 minutes)

Never skip worship! Taking time to worship and be present to God brings the group together unlike anything

else, and it is probably the single most important activity you'll do together. You may be tempted by fruitful discussion to neglect worship, but be good stewards of your time and be sure that worship isn't rushed or skipped altogether. As group members pray with each other each week, you'll begin to see their relationships transform.

Ideas for Worship:

- Pray Compline in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 127) or Night Prayer in A New Zealand Prayer Book (p. 167).
- Sing simple hymns or Taizé chants together.
- Pray your own Prayers of the People, as outlined on page 383 of the Book of Common Prayer.
- Offer prayers for the person sitting next to you.
- Be with each other and God in silence.

Whatever you do, be joyful! Worship doesn't need to be serious to be worship, but rather it needs only to open hearts and invite participation. Use your imagination and the

strengths of your group to make the worship experience your own. Some groups choose to invite different members of the small group to lead worship each week, or they designate a worship leader who is not the facilitator.

6) Pray for your small group.

Facilitators should pray for each person in their group by name and with regularity.

It will make a difference.

*The Guide for The Path/La Senda is based upon the Small Group Facilitation Guide & Curriculum Prepared by Becky Zartman, Edited by Jenifer Gamber
www.episcopalchurch.org/wayoflove*