



# Small Groups Field Guide

**ST. JOAN OF ARC SMALL GROUP**

**GROW YOUR FAITH IN A CIRCLE**

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Dear Small Group Members and Leaders,

Thank you for your continued dedication to the ministry of Small Groups. A special thanks to all who are new and growing in leadership roles! Small Groups are a vital part of the St. Joan of Arc parish community because Small Groups are a pathway to intentional relationships that help us to grow our faith.

In our Small Groups we challenge each other to pray, be authentic and to be committed to grow in our faith. It is through our passion, energy and enthusiasm that generations upon generations will come to know, love and serve Jesus Christ.

Our program was launched in Spring of 2022 as a Pilot Program and in Summer 2022, we launched a parish wide campaign "90 Days of Purpose". Many people responded! We continue to grow and form new groups so that more lives can be transformed in Christ.

With great excitement, we have developed this Member Field Guide as a product of this outpouring and we know that it will be a great tool. Thank you for being part of, and if you are leading, shepherding your Small Group. May God continue to bless you and your efforts as you lead others to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Blessings in Christ,

Director, Adult Small Groups



# THE GOAL OF SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

## Introduction to Small Group Ministry at St. Joan of Arc

*And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus.*

*Acts 5:42*

The apostles and early church teachers and elders went from house to house, visiting small groups in homes as they taught and made disciples. People met together in their homes to break bread together to use the opportunity to encourage each other to live out their faith in ever greater obedience. There were home prayer meetings like the one held while Peter was in prison (Acts 12:12), and Paul's letter allude to "house churches" (Romans 16:5)a

Whether house churches were independent groups of believers or were part of larger churches that is uncertain. What is certain is that the church, needed the house church for survival. Because of the intense persecution in the early church, members were not allowed to purchase or meet in large buildings. The church relied on the protective environment of the home to nurture and protect the gospel in the lives of believers.

Today, small groups are as viable as it was back then. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul illustrated the process of disciple-making in the following way:

*"And what you have heard me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will have the ability to teach others as well:*

Small groups are designed to make intentional disciples. Discipleship will not occur without faithful Christians being intentional about meeting together. The word discipleship is a catch phrase in the church today, often without meaning. The process of disciple making is a dynamic relationship between fellow Christians and their Lord, which is marked by continued progress.

Small groups offers opportunities for the body of Christ to achieve a mature faith spoken in Ephesians, while engaging in the activities that build the church. In healthy small groups, a friendship deepens, members are able to challenge one another to take new steps in growth. Growing Christians find new reasons to worship and thank God together. Out of this kind of community comes a sense of joyful challenge that draws others to them as they seek opportunities for growth.

## **WHY SMALL GROUPS**

How can a church best minister to all of its people when all of their needs are so varied and unique? One exciting answer is small groups. This is where parishioners can learn more about God and grow in their faith. The most significant benefit of a small group is to provide the opportunity to get to know people, in a relationship-building community.

## **SMALL GROUPS REACHING INWARD, UPWARD, AND OUTWARD**

### **INWARD (GROUP CARE)**

Small groups provide love and care for their members in many ways. A loving community offers members a positive life experience by engaging people in the discovery of their spiritual gifts, developing the lay leadership of the church, and caring for its members. Small groups, with their grassroots relationships, can contribute to the health of the body by loving those in need.

### **UPWARD (NURTURE AND WORSHIP)**

Small groups are a great means of helping a congregation to care deeply for fellowship members. We are not, however, to be in the business of teaching people to be nice to one another. What makes a small group experience truly transforming is learning and applying biblical truth. This is why groups that meet regularly engage in nurture and worship. Spiritual renewal that begins in groups can begin to create revival in the larger body of Christ.

## **OUTWARD (SERVICE AND EVANGELISM)**

Small groups are called to service and evangelism. Small groups provide a rallying point for evangelism opportunities. Small groups attract and keep new church members and seekers. Small groups are called to multiply and form new groups growing in a mature faith process. Multiplication is a powerful way to influence the world for Christ.



# Getting Started Checklist

Role	Name
Leadership Coach	
Small Group Leader	
Host	
Apprentice Leader	

**Meeting Day** **Time**

**Group Members:**

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Coordinators Name	Role

# Why We're Here & What We're Doing at St. Joan of Arc

## St. Joan of Arc ~ Mission

We, the faith community of St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church in Streetsboro, Ohio are committed to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Graced by God in the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments, we are strengthened to go forth and to witness to Christ's teaching and example.

Strategy To accomplish this Mission:

1. Gospel message
2. Weekend experience
3. Focus on newcomers
4. Encourage everyone to take their next step

### **CIRCLE TIP**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...Love your neighbor as yourself.” **MATTHEW 22:37, 39**

“Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” **MATTHEW 28:19-20**

# Next Steps

The heart of our church is to become **growing** disciples, who are giving the whole of our lives to God, not merely checking off boxes or going through the motions. So we are always challenging and encouraging the members of our church to take the next step that is the next step for them.

**SERVE-** We have been given unique gifts and talents by God. Using our gifts to serve in **Ministry** and **Missions** creates environments for others to experience God's presence at our parish and brings God's love to other communities locally, nationally and internationally.

**TITHE-** We seek to honor God in all areas of life, and this includes our finances. As stewards, not owners, of the resources God has given us, we are called to **sacrificial giving**, which means percentage, progressive giving to the local church and the poor.

**ENGAGE-** We believe faith grows in a circle. In **Small Groups**, we grow in fellowship and relationship with one another, God, and in ways we cannot grow on our own. Small Groups are where our big church gets small.

**PRACTICE-** We know God wants us to live lives of integrity and virtue that stem from our personal relationship with Christ. We strive to practice **daily prayer**, **Scripture reading**, and full participation in the **Sacraments** to receive grace for our faith growth.

**SHARE-** We want others to experience the life-changing message of the Gospel. Our strategy is to "**Invest and Invite**". That simply means we invest in the relationships we have with people in our lives, and when the time comes, invite them to church with us.

# One More Reason Our Church is Amazing: Adult Small Groups!

*"And all who believed were together and had all things in common."* **ACTS 2:44**

## Vision

Generations upon generations will come to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ.

## Mission

Creating Small Group environments where disciples can grow.

## Strategy

To accomplish the Vision and Mission:

1. Leadership Development
2. Provide Resources
3. Encouragement
4. Events

**Life  
Is better  
connected**



### CIRCLE TIP

"For where two or three have gathered in my name,  
I am there among them." **MATTHEW 18:20**

"For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever,  
and his faithfulness to all generations." **PSALM 100:5**

# How Do I Do This?

## Becoming a Great Leader

### Lead As You Follow!

Christ is the true leader of each Small Group. He is the one around whom our circles are gathered. As we follow Christ and grow in our relationship with Him, as spiritual leaders we will lead others into encounters with God. Small Groups are one of the means we use to help each other draw closer into a personal relationship with Christ, learning to rely upon Him, turn to Him and integrate Him into each moment of our daily lives. As we grow in discipleship, we change – and our lives bear witness to that change.

### Leadership Matters!

As we lead others, we will be helping them find their purpose and identity in Christ. We serve as role models for our group members and call others to transformation and into leadership. Leaders change the atmosphere and cast vision and that encourages the group to go deeper in discipleship and to move outward in service. Small Group leadership is a ministry, approached with a servant's heart. Becoming an effective leader is a journey – one that constantly challenges us to grow and evolve!

### **CIRCLE TIP**

"For even the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many." **MARK 10:45**

### Small Group Training

Those wishing to become Small Group leaders will go through a four week training session on "How to Lead A Small Group" This program will cover all the basics of being a good leader within the context of a small group. Those who begin their journey to leadership through the Apprenticeship program will also be required to take this training as well. This training will take place in the fall and spring of each year.

# 3 Ways Successful Leaders Grow

## 1. Partnership

*"No Leader will ever lead alone!"*

- Director of Small Groups
- Co-Leader / Apprentice
- Leadership Coach – see pages 21-23

## 2. Encouragement and Information *We have many resources:*

- Our website – see Small Group Tools
- Weekly encouragement email
- Social media - Facebook
- Mobile Tools – see pages 15-16
- REVOLVE - events where leaders gather to learn and grow together

## 3. Growth and Development *The 5 L's of Leadership:*

- Listen - Leaders are great listeners
- Learn - Have the desire to learn more about your faith and inspire the group
- Love - Leaders love because it's all about relationships
- Lead - Lead with intention
- Laugh - Laugh and enjoy the process

### **CIRCLE TIP**

"Be Strong and Courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged.  
For the LORD your GOD will be with you wherever you go."

**JOSHUA 1:9**

# Who Does What?

## Roles and Responsibilities

No Leader will ever lead alone! As a leader, you will have a Leadership Coach, Apprentice, members, and resources. At St. Joan of Arc leadership is an intentional process, guided by five simple actions:

1. Listen
2. Learn
3. Love
4. Lead
5. Laugh



Relying on these principles, we revolve with Christ as our center, and we grow as we cycle through these principles.

### **CIRCLE TIP**

"But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."

**TITUS 3:**

# Role Call

## Who's who?

### **The Small Group Leader**

- Commit to leadership for one year (renewable)
- Is a member and a minister of St. Joan of Arc
- Administrate all aspects of a group's life
- Enable the group to build community
- Lead the small group according to its own covenant
- Lead the group toward outreach and evangelistic emphasis over time
- Recruit people for the small group
- Pray daily for yourself, your church and small group members
- Complete and turn in a monthly small group report
- Participate in small group leader meetings

### **Apprentice**

- Continue to grow in relation to God, self and others
- Listen with humility, receive feedback, learn, and grow
- Read the parish field guide on small groups and be able to share its vision
- Take the small group leader training course and make a commitment to follow-up meetings
- Pray daily for yourself, your church, and the small group members.

### **Members**

- Show up consistently, continue to grow in Faith, and follow the groups covenant

### **Coordinators**

- Coordinate group activities: timer, social, snacks, missions etc.

## Leadership Coach

- Help leaders recruit for their groups
- Instill a vision for small group ministry in the small group leaders
- Keep the pastor and parish council well informed
- Encourage the formation of various kinds of groups and outreach ministries
- Pray without ceasing
- Act as a support system for small group leaders
- Help small group leaders train apprentice leaders
- Develop long term goals
- Mentors 2-8 Small Group Leaders



# Leaders: Deep Breath.

## Let's Go!

### Getting Started

#### CIRCLE TIP

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." **MATTHEW 11: 28-30**

#### Before Each Group Meeting:

- Pray
- Preview materials and the discussion questions
- Leader / Apprentice communicates to confirm location and attendance

#### During Each 90 minute Group Meeting:

- Fellowship for approximately 10-15 minutes
- Open in prayer
- Introduce and/or watch the material
- Lead a discussion referring to weekly questions as a guide - questions are guide lines only
- Announcements and upcoming events
- Close in prayer

# Getting Started Continued

## First Meeting

- Pray before group arrives
- Have materials ready: Bible, DVD, questions, etc.
- Pray as a group. Have an open chair and pray for the person who will fill that chair.
- Have everyone introduce themselves - be creative
- Ask someone to collect everyone's contact information including birthdays
- Discuss a plan for upcoming meetings
- Distribute Small Group Covenant and discuss (download from website)
- Use the remaining time to have a ice breaker for community building
- Pray with group to conclude the meeting - be sure to add any intentions and prayers needed

### **CIRCLE TIP**

*Get to know your members!*

"You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world."

**MATTHEW 5: 13-14**

# Small Group Leader Covenant

## St. Joan of Arc

St. Joan of Arc Small Group Leaders are committed to creating environments where disciples can grow more disciples. Leadership of a St. Joan of Arc Small Group is viewed as an important ministry promoting discipleship and growing faith.

Small Group Leaders and Apprentices agree to the following minimum standards that are intended to foster growing discipleship in Leaders, Apprentices, and Small Group Members and the entire St. Joan of Arc Faith Community:

- Support a Growing Leader
- Pray regularly for the members
- Communicates weekly with the group
- Identify and develop an Apprentice
- Invest and Invite others into Small Group life when the time is right
- Commit to and create a growing vision for your Small Group
- Update Small Group contact information in Mobile Tools on at least a quarterly basis

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*St. Joan of Arc Group Leader*

*Date*



# Small Group Member Covenant

## St. Joan of Arc

As a member of a St. Joan of Arc Small Group it is important that we have a few ground rules to assist us in growing in our faith and keeping us on a good path.

### Group Guidelines:

1. Our group will meet for \_\_\_\_ minutes (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly on this day \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_).  
We will gather at \_\_\_\_\_
2. Everyone is important to this group. We will make sure that if someone is absent, we check in; if a person is to miss, that person is expected to call a group member before the meeting.
3. We welcome newcomers. We will place an empty chair at meetings, and discuss when and if new members may join.
4. We encourage sharing. Therefore, everyone is given the right to their own opinion, and “dumb questions” are encouraged and respected.
5. All information shared in the group is confidential. "What is said in Small Group stays in Small Group."
6. We are accountable. Therefore we promise to be honest and affirming, we will use group consensus to make decisions, and we will not talk about each other unless the person being spoken of is present. We will respect others and be authentic.
7. We understand that this group will eventually grow and multiply. (Become two groups)  
We will seek new members and develop leaders as God enables, and we will seek to give life to a new group in which others can experience the community we are enjoying.

### Group roles

Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Apprentice \_\_\_\_\_

Host \_\_\_\_\_

Prayer Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

We agree to abide by the covenant these next few weeks as we seek to become a positive community of Jesus Christ.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*St. Joan of Arc Small Group Member*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

# Members: You Matter!

Discover your purpose

**A**ttendance. Sometimes you need the group and other times the group needs you. In order to feel the difference, showing up is all you need to do. Transform your life and just show up weekly!

**B**ring your Bible and a Journal. Small Group is where the rubber hits the road. It's all about application of the Word of God. So bring your Bible and take notes so you remember what inspired or motivated you!

**C**ommitted Growing Disciple with a Purpose and a Plan! **Living in the Truth** in Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest. "Full of grace and truth", he came as the "light of the world", he is the Truth. "Whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness." The disciple of Jesus continues in his word so as to know "the truth [that] will make you free" and that sanctifies. To follow Jesus is to live in "the Spirit of truth", whom the Father sends in his name and who leads "into all the truth". To his disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of truth: "Let what you say be simply 'Yes or No.'" **CCC 2466**

**Attendance + God's Word = Commitment**

# 3 Healthy Small Group Habits

## 1. Prayer

- Pray together weekly
- Pray for your members
- Pray for each other

## 2. Authenticity

- Be honest
- Be non-judgmental
- Be willing to examine your relationship with God
- Be humble

## 3. Commitment

- Support the Mission of St. Joan of Arc
- Attend meetings regularly
- Share life's joys and challenges through our faith
- Conduct meetings with respect for our Catholic tradition while remaining open and welcoming to those of all faiths
- Accept the ongoing challenge to "invest and invite"
- Encourage each other to grow in our faith



### **CIRCLE TIP**

If we pray, we will believe; if we believe, we will love;  
if we love, we will serve.

**MOTHER TERESA**

# Appendix

## Small Group Leader Guide *How to Run a Small Group*

**Sample Meeting Structure** (*approximately 90 minutes; 2 hours if including a meal*)

**Pray with and Study the Material** (before the meeting)

**For Online Groups - Launch the Online Meeting** (10-15 minutes before Start Time)  
*Be there to greet people as they arrive.*

**Welcome** (10 minutes)

*Welcome and engage in fellowship. For groups meetings digitally, go over any reminders for online etiquette or user controls. If your group would like to share a meal together, consider adding 30 minutes to your socializing time at the beginning of your session.*

**Opening Prayer** (5 minutes)

*Lead the group in a simple opening prayer or have members take turns leading, inviting them to do so ahead of time.*

**Content and Discussion** (1 hour)

*Read through the selected Bible passage, the upcoming Sunday Gospel, or the faith study content. Using the questions you have prepared or selected from the study, facilitate a discussion around the content.*

**Closing Prayer** (10 minutes)

*Members share their prayer intentions. Lead the group in a closing prayer or have members take turns leading, inviting them to do so ahead of time.*

**Reminders/Other Business** (5-10 minutes)

*Confirm the next meeting time and any other practical things the group might need to discuss or be reminded of.*



# How to Be a Great Group Leader

There is a lot written on how to lead a small group and how not to lead one. Here is a compilation of some best practices that will assist you in making the small group a life-changing experience for all.

## 1. Pray

• *Pray for each member of your group, for your leadership, and before each meeting.*

## 2. Demonstrate Hospitality

### IN-PERSON:

- *Decide the best place for your group to meet (someone's home, a coffee shop, restaurant, park, parish, etc.), a place the group can comfortably sit, see and hear one another, and have enough privacy for the conversation.*
- *Set up the environment to be welcoming, organized, comfortable, and clean.*
- *Make sure your participants know where the bathrooms are located, and that they are clean.*
- *Consider a simple setting like a candle or centerpiece.*
- *Have snacks and water or other drinks available if not meeting in a venue where food is readily available—consider having group members rotate providing snacks if appropriate.*
- *Consider sharing a meal together each week, having members contribute to each meal or rotate meal preparation responsibilities.*  
*Be mindful of allergies (food, pets, etc.) and other health concerns.*
- *If you are meeting at the parish, be sure that you are on the parish calendar in a room reserved for you, and be sure that the doors will be unlocked for participants to easily find their way in.*

### ONLINE:

- *Decide the best online tool for your group to use (see list of some options below).*
- *Make sure what people will see behind you is clean and presentable. If possible, set the tone in the background with decorations, candles, images, etc.*
- *Set a welcoming tone, greeting each member as they enter the meeting.*
- *Remind members about online etiquette and provide any help with how to use their controls. (See Online Communication Etiquette & Suggestions below for details.)*
- *At the end, thank everyone for coming and say goodbye to each member as they leave. Be the last one to leave the online gathering.*

### How To Be A Great Group Leader

1. Pray
2. Demonstrate Hospitality
3. Know Your Role
4. Prepare the Participants
5. Use Communication Expectations & Etiquette
6. Prepare for Temptations & Challenges

### 3. Know Your Role

As a small group leader, you take on the following roles:

#### Facilitator

- *You are not the teacher, but you facilitate the discussion, and create an environment of encounter with Christ through the Word, discussion, and prayer.*
- *Listen carefully; do not interrupt.*
- *You do not need all the answers but are willing to help each other find answers.*
- *Your role is not to be used as a platform to encourage dissent from the Church. Turn to trusted sources for help in understanding Church teachings with which you struggle.*

#### Encourager

- *Give positive and genuine affirmation for everyone's contributions.*
- *Maintain a positive attitude.*

#### Director of Conversation

- *Avoid unhelpful tangents.*
- *Encourage participation from everyone.*
- *Ask open-ended questions.*
- *Do not dominate the conversation.*
- *Prevent others from dominating.*
- *Re-phrase comments for clarity. For example, "What I hear you saying is . . ."*
- *Allow for periods of silence as a normal part of small group discussion.*
- *Maintain healthy boundaries in group sharing.*
- *Pace the conversation, and keep it pleasing to the Holy Spirit (avoid gossip, excessive complaining, etc.).*
- *Start and end on time.*

#### Preparer

- *Review and pray with discussion material in advance.*
- *Prepare questions to encourage conversation in advance.*
  - *Launching Questions – What are your initial thoughts? What stands out to you?*
  - *Observation Questions – What does this content/passage reveal to you? What do you observe about the content/passage that was shared?*
  - *Understanding Questions – Why is this content/passage important? Do you understand what it means?*
  - *Application Questions – How does this content apply to you? What will you do now?*
- *Come with 2 or 3 key things you are ready to share with your group, when needed.*

## 4. Prepare the Participants

Before you begin your faith study, prepare the participants by clearly communicating the goals of the group and reviewing the way it will operate. For in person meetings, this could take place during your first meeting. For digital groups, you may consider doing this ahead of time in order to give the group the opportunity to test the technology. Here are some things to discuss as a group:

### Introductions

- *Ask each member to introduce themselves (name and one or two facts about themselves), going first as the leader, setting an example of a brief self-introduction.*

### Share the Vision and Format

- *Share why you are excited to lead the small group and why you chose to do this.*
- *Share the vision and specific goals of the small group (i.e. that it leads to greater growth in relationship with God and each other. The hope is that this experience also inspires members to share Christ by inviting others to the small group or by eventually forming an additional one to lead on their own.).*
- *Explain the basic format of how each meeting will be structured, and select the content you will be using, if it has not already been selected.*

### Time and Date

- *Agree on the group meeting time and dates.*
- *Get a commitment from group members that everyone will make this a priority as much as reasonably possible.*

### Group Communication Outside Meetings

- *Decide as a group on the best method of communication outside of meetings (texting, email, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, GroupMe, etc.).*

### Group Communication Within Meetings

- *Communicate and agree to the following expectations and etiquette for group communication within meetings.*



## 5. Use Communication Expectations and Etiquette

### *General Expectations*

- *Members are expected to be on time for meetings.*
- *All members have a responsibility to set a tone and group culture that is respectful, humble, open, honest, non-judgmental, and loving.*
- *Silence in group discussion is to be expected and an important part of the experience.*
- *Members are encouraged to share while maintaining a balance of participating without dominating.*
- *Members will listen respectfully and not interrupt one another.*
- **All members agree to keep confidential anything personal shared in the group, unless there is risk of someone harming themselves or someone else.**
- *Members are encouraged to pray for one another in between meetings.*

### *Online Communication Etiquette & Suggestions*

- *Make sure all members are comfortable with their controls (muting, video on/off, chat options, speaker vs. gallery view, etc.).*
- *Remind members that while their video is on, they can be seen by everyone, and while their microphone is on, they (and all household noises) can be heard by everyone.*
- *Encourage members to turn their video on during the meeting to help people connect by seeing each other.*
- *When members are not speaking, encourage them to mute themselves to avoid background noise and echoes.*
- *During group prayer or readings, have one person say the prayer or reading out loud while others are muted, or have members take turns with different parts of the prayer or reading. If everyone is speaking the prayer/reading out loud at the same time with their microphones on, it creates a delay in the sound, causing a significant distraction, and will prevent everyone from being able to pray/read in sync with each other.*
- *Consider using screen share options to share prayers, readings, videos, etc. with the group.*

#### Ten Commandments of Small Group Discussion

1. Be open, humble, non-judgmental, and loving.
2. Allow silence.
3. Do not dominate the conversation.
4. Listen respectfully.
5. Do not interrupt.
6. Be encouraging.
7. Ask clarifying questions.
8. Maintain confidentiality.
9. For online meetings, turn your video camera on.
10. For online meetings, mute your microphone when you are not talking.

## 6. Prepare for Temptations and Challenges

- *Expect to experience spiritual resistance through frustrations, temptations, and challenging situations when doing something for Jesus. Spiritual warfare is common when people are growing in their faith. Pray and rely on Jesus and His Spirit to lead, guide and steady you.*
- *If there are any pastoral situations that arise in your small group, contact a parish staff member for assistance and guidance.*
- *Remember Legal Obligations*
  - *If a small group consists of any members who are vulnerable adults or people under 18 years old, the group leader is required to undergo a background check, participate in the Protecting God's Children training program, and abide by the Archdiocese of Detroit's Safe Environments Policy and Volunteer Code of Conduct.*
  - *Small groups are sometimes the only safe and intimate environments where members of your community can disclose the more painful aspects of their lives. For this reason, it's not uncommon for a small group leader to become aware of activities that are illegal or harmful such as substance abuse, neglect or abuse of a child or adult, suicidal ideation or mental health problems, and domestic issues. Small group leaders should be aware of any legal or moral obligation to report these activities or connect their small group members to parish staff members who can provide helpful resources. Government agencies, such as the Ohio Department of Health & Human Services, and the Diocese of Youngstown are available to help parish staff members identify such resources when needed. These policies and procedures will ensure that your small groups remain a safe and accountable place where all group members can flourish!*

## Digital Tools for Online Groups

Many platforms exist to connect people digitally. Here are just a few to consider:

1. ZOOM – Meet for 40 minutes for free or upgrade to a paid plan for unlimited time video conferencing on a mobile device or a desktop computer. Find out more by visiting [zoom.us](https://zoom.us)
2. GOOGLE HANGOUTS - Each Hangout allows an unlimited amount of time via the web browser or Google Hangout app. Please note: all participants need to have a Google account. Visit [hangouts.google.com](https://hangouts.google.com) for more information.
3. FACEBOOK MESSENGER – Using the Messenger mobile app or a web browser, this free option from Facebook permits groups to video chat. More details can be found at [messenger.com](https://messenger.com)
4. SKYPE – Connect with others via the desktop app, mobile app, or the website using this free video chat option. Additional details can be found at [skype.com](https://skype.com)

# Difficult Situations and How to Handle Them 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.
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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.
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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.

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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.

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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.

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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. Some **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."

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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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10. It's **time to close the meeting**, but not everything seems to have been said.

**What to do:**

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.

b) You should hang around afterward to check in with anyone whom you notice may need your attention.

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.

## Additional Tips and Reminders

### 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.

# Information and Resources

## Resources

- Our website: [www.sjoa-church.org](http://www.sjoa-church.org)
- Mobile Tools
- Weekly Newsletter - emailed to all leaders every Sunday at 9 AM

## Keep Connected on Social Media

- [www.facebook.com/stjoanssmallgroups](http://www.facebook.com/stjoanssmallgroups)

## Contact for More Information

Director of Adult Small Groups



# Welcome to Mobile Tools

How do I use this new nifty tool?

1. Mobile Tools is an App, called Spaces by WIX that is connected to our website. It will permit groups to talk to other members of the group on their phones. Each member wishing to use the App will receive a special invite to use this tool.
2. Mobile Tools can be accessed using any device with an Internet connection.
3. If you already have an existing St.Joan of Arc account, your Username and Password will allow you to access to Mobile Tools.
4. Don't have an account? <https://my.mobiletools>

# Mobile Tools Continued

Use this great tool to help manage your group.

It allows you to:

- take attendance
- see your member's contact information
- submit prayer request
- obtain care for your members when needed



