

A GUIDE FOR LEADERS OF FAITH SHARING GROUPS



A RESURRECTED
LIFE

A LENT REFLECTION RESOURCE

INTRODUCTION

One of the deepest needs we experience as Catholics is to find the opportunity to receive support and encouragement in our faith. While we are very good at providing sacramental experiences, opportunities to sit and talk with others about our faith and to raise our questions are very limited.

Most of us have lost the hunger for finding the time to do this because we fail to appreciate how rich and powerful faith sharing can be in our lives. And yet, when former Catholics are asked why they have left the Church (particularly those joining another faith community) one of the main factors they raise is: ‘during all my time as a Catholic I never felt encouraged to share my faith and receive the support of others who are trying to address the same questions’. This needs to change.

So, thank you for the important work you are doing in bringing together people to share their faith in a safe and welcoming environment. For those of you who are used to doing this sort of thing, you already know what to do. What follows might serve as a reminder to you, but this guide is especially designed to assist those who are a little unsure of how to proceed.

PREPARATIONS FOR LEADING A FAITH SHARING GROUP

Begin with an Invitation: If you really want this experience to engage people, they need to know about it – ideally well in advance. A notice in the parish bulletin won't be enough. Ask the parish priest's permission to speak at Mass, and as briefly as you can, invite people to pray about coming along. Talk about the need for us to support one another as brothers and sisters in faith. Most parishioners are happy enough to know these things are on, but they don't instinctively see how something like this is relevant to them. Share something of your own faith journey and why this is important to you. Then, after Mass, hand out invitations. The one-to-one invitation is so much more effective than a general notice. Invite them to register beforehand so that you have some idea of how many people might be attending. Preparation makes all the difference!

Do not be worried if the response is limited. We are in this for the long haul. If the handful of people who end up coming along have a good experience, word will spread for next time.

Find a suitable date and time: One of the advantages of asking people to register beforehand is that you can contact them to establish a time for each gathering that is going to work for the majority. Once the times and dates have been decided, apologise to those whose preference

couldn't be accommodated. Encourage them to work through the resource on their own and, if appropriate, stay in touch with them periodically to see how they are going. Remember, as brothers and sisters in faith we need to support one another.

Choose a suitable venue: Choose a place to meet that's easy for people to access and easy to find. Depending on the numbers attending, you might choose: a home, a parish meeting space or a central venue that works best for those attending.

What to Bring: Ask the participants to bring their copy of 'A Resurrected Life', a pen and something to write on, whether it be a prayer journal or a notepad that will be useful for them in jotting down any thoughts during the reflection times. Have some spare copies of 'A Resurrected Life' for those who leave them behind.

Structure of your Faith Sharing Gathering: 'A Resurrected Life' has been written for personal, daily use. Most groups will be meeting weekly. Give some thought as to how you might like to manage this.

OPTION 1: you might focus entirely on the scripture and reflection for the Sunday. In this case, it would be a good idea to use the whole reading referenced in the resource for that Sunday. While the discussion would focus around that reading and the reflection provided, you might encourage participants to pick up on some of the other things they have been reading and praying about during the week.

OPTION 2: you might choose two or three scripture readings and reflections from throughout the week. Just work your way through them as a group while feeling no need to cover everything for the week. After all, it is never about ‘getting everything done’. Rather, it is about allowing participants to pray together and to share their faith. The resource is there to help you, not as a chore to be worked through.

Creating the Environment: Think about the environment where you will gather. Think of the lighting and the seating. Give some thought to how you might make it a comfortable, prayerful and relaxed space. You can create a ‘sacred space’ with a bible, candle, flowers and a cross on a coffee table in the centre of the room. First and foremost, it should be welcoming.

Hospitality: Decide what is most appropriate in regard to providing food and drink for those gathering. You might finish a morning gathering with morning tea or an evening gathering with supper. Keep it simple and leave ‘the cuppa’ optional so those who need to leave and can do so without feeling embarrassed.

LEADING THE FAITH SHARING

BE WELCOMING

Greet people as they arrive. Make an intentional effort to learn people's names. For a start, name tags might be handy. Ensure everyone knows where the necessities of food, drink, exits, and bathrooms are located.

STRUCTURE OF GATHERING

Being organised puts people at ease. Having a plan for what the gathering will cover, and what to do if the faith sharing is limited or if it goes off-topic, is essential. This is part of being organised.

It is a good idea to be clear on how you would like the faith sharing to be structured. One suggested structure might be:

1. **A Brief Welcome** (5 mins) Ensure people know one another and feel welcomed. Introduce yourself and invite each person to do likewise. Don't presume we all know each other.
2. **Opening Prayer** (30 secs) Use one of your own or adapt one from the 'A Resurrected Life'. Some appear at the end of this guide.
3. **Set the Scene** (2 mins) Listening to some music might help people to ease into the experience (this is optional but can help people leave behind the various things they have just been doing)

4. **Read the Scripture passage** (3 mins) Find someone who can do this well – slowly and prayerfully. Approach someone before the gathering to invite them to be the reader.
5. **A Period of Silent Reflection** (5 mins) Don't be afraid of the silence. Our lives are so busy and 'noisy' – learning to sit in silence aware of God and one another is a beautiful thing to learn. We need time to do this. Perhaps begin with 2-3 mins and build up to 5 mins.
6. **Faith Sharing** (20-30 mins depending on the size of the group) This should take up most of the session. Perhaps begin by asking people to offer their response to what they have just heard. However, before doing that establish some 'ground rules'.
 - i. Ask people to focus on the nominated Scripture text, and after reflection, share what it means for them on their faith journey
 - ii. Be succinct
 - iii. Respect one another by not interrupting one another. It is helpful if there is a brief time of silence after each person shares to allow time to receive the gift of their reflection
 - iv. Ensure that everyone has the chance to say something if they would like to (remember – if someone would like to sit in silence that is perfectly fine. Part of making this a 'safe'

experience is that no one feels the need to do something they would not like to do).

7. **Further Sharing:** (10-15 mins) Once you have had the first round of sharings you can turn to the questions for reflection to be found at the end of each reflection in 'A Resurrected Life'. Use what you think will be useful to the group. Think about those questions as part of your preparation. Perhaps you have one or two questions for faith sharing of your own? That would be great!
8. **Bring the Gathering to a Conclusion.** (5 mins) Keep a close eye on the time, for few things put participants off more than gatherings that don't finish on the agreed meeting time. Don't be worried if the gathering finishes earlier than anticipated. It can take people a while to get used to these things and to feel comfortable. Much better to finish early than to finish late. Give notices about the next meeting or other helpful resources and invite people to give feedback to the leader after the meeting finishes or in the coming week.
9. **Conclude with a Time of Silence and Prayer.** (2 mins) Either invite people to make their own prayers, use one of the prayers in 'A Resurrected Life' or simply say an 'Our Father' or a 'Glory Be'. It needn't be hard.
10. **Share Hospitality.** Invite participants to share a cuppa, if they have the time. Keep it simple!

SOME POINTS TO CONSIDER

FACILITATION

Your role is to facilitate an encounter between these people and Christ. Be sure to listen and allow space for the group members to share their thoughts at the appropriate times. It can be easy to fill up the silence with more talking.

Remember to allow space for the group members to reflect and allow room for the Holy Spirit to work. Just do this the best that you can and, after the gathering, think about how you would like to do it next time. We all have to learn how to do this. If you would like some advice, feel free to email the Evangelisation Brisbane Adult Formation team at formation@bne.catholic.net.au and we will do what we can to assist.

ENGAGING GROUP MEMBERS

It's important to build the relationships early on to build a rapport between group members and yourself. This makes for easier conversations and more openness. Make sure that all group members are given the space to speak, gently encourage those who are quieter to share if they feel comfortable and lovingly remind those who tend to dominate the conversation that others may want to share their thoughts.

Conversations that are going well can also go off-track so don't be afraid to draw the conversation back to the topic when you feel it is necessary so that you make the most use of the time you have with your group.

PREPARING FOR NEXT TIME

Once finished, thank everyone for attending, and remember to remind the group about the next time you meet, including details and any changes made. If you want to advertise any other events or resources, now is the time for this as well.

You may want to invite the group to stay for some tea and coffee to give yourself and the group members the time to continue building relationships with one another as you go through this journey together.

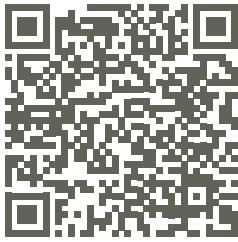
MUSIC

If you decide you would like to use music to help set the scene, there are various options out there online. Unless you're dealing with a large enough group that likes to sing, don't choose music that relies on participant singing. Few things are less inspiring than half-hearted attempts at flat singing that everyone is wishing was over!

However, well-chosen instrumental music or a hymn relevant to the season for participants to listen to could be helpful. Some possibilities follow – but it would be best to go with the music that you think would be most helpful.

1. *Encounter Catholic Music The Psalms Project Album - Psalm 23 - Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face* - [Listen Here](#)
2. *At The Cross by Chris Tomlin on YouTube at:*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zev5tHjCB_s

3. Lent Hymn: 'Unless A Grain of Wheat' by Bernadette Farrell: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19RINpG56Qs>



**SCAN THIS QR CODE TO
PURCHASE THE ENCOUNTER
CATHOLIC MUSIC *THE
PSALMS PROJECT* ALBUM
OR SHEET MUSIC.**

SUGGESTED OPENING PRAYERS

Gracious God, we give thanks for this opportunity to gather here today, to walk in fellowship with each other and to draw closer to you. We pray that you guide and strengthen us on our faith journey and surround us with your blessing and love.

Amen

OR

Lord, we thank you for bringing us here today to come to a deeper understanding of your love and mercy in our lives, guide us as we reflect on your teachings and bless this time of reflection.

Amen

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time and effort to gather members of the Catholic family to share their encounters with the living God through their prayerful reflection on the Scriptures. As we listen to one another, we will experience God's wisdom, mercy and healing for our lives and be encouraged by the witness of others seeking to know and follow Christ more deeply.

'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.'
(Colossians 3:16)



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