



Advice on leading a small group

Introduction

The visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the UK provides every member of the Catholic community with an opportunity to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the Catholic Faith.

Cor ad Cor Loquitur - Heart Speaks unto Heart
The theme for the visit is *cor ad cor loquitur* – ‘Heart speaks unto heart’. Cardinal John Henry Newman chose the words as the motto to go on his coat of arms. One of the reasons that Heart speaks unto heart is such a fitting choice for the visit is that on the final day of his Apostolic Journey, the Holy Father will beatify Cardinal Newman - the much-loved Victorian theologian.

Five small group sessions have been written to support the unpacking of this deeply meaningful phrase. The sessions are titled:

- Session One: The heart of God (pdf)
- Session Two: A heart that sees (pdf)
- Session Three: A heart that understands (pdf)
- Session Four: A heart that serves (pdf)
- Session Five: A heart that seeks justice (pdf)

Holy Hour

A Holy Hour themed ‘Heart speaks unto heart’ is also available for download from the Papal website. You may choose to begin your faith sharing season by inviting group members to come together to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Alternatively, it might serve as a way of ending the season of faith sharing groups in your parish.

Leading the Groups Sessions

To prepare yourself:

- Set aside a time each week before the session where you can be undisturbed to prepare.
- Take a moment during this time to relax, and to become aware of God’s presence.
- Read through the Scripture—slowly.
- Read though the reflection—slowly.
- Offer any thoughts or concerns to God as you prepare.

Practical arrangements

- Photocopy enough leaflets for each member of the group.
- Depending on how well you know the people who are likely to attend, give a copy of the scripture text to one or two in advance who will be willing to read it during the time of sharing and reflection.
- Prepare the room as a warm and welcoming space.
- Create a prayer focus in the room which might take the form of placing an open Bible, religious image or crucifix on a beautiful cloth
- Have some small candles ready (along with matches) to place them on the same table as the prayer focus.
- Consider using a CD player to play a suitable piece of music to help create a prayerful atmosphere at an appropriate time during the gathering.
- Allow one hour for the prayer and sharing time, with perhaps another 15 mins at the beginning and end for people to arrive and get settled or finish their conversations. The total time for the gathering should be about 1 hr 30 mins.
- Tea / coffee may be offered at the end for those who chose to stay.
- Invite members of the group to take it in turns to bring along refreshments.

During the group sessions:

Spend the first few moments of the session introducing yourselves.

When you gather you could use the following as ‘ground rules’ for your time together:

1. There should be respect, honesty and openness in the group.
2. Time should be given to silent reflection.
3. Everyone should have the opportunity to share - but only if they wish to do so.
4. There should be a balance in sharing - no person should dominate.
5. The confidentiality of the group should be respected.

- Ask for volunteers to read the Scripture and reflection
- You can always share the reading of the reflection amongst a few members of the group
- When the Scripture has been read, invite members of the group to share a word or phrase that has struck them
- You may like to conclude by singing a hymn

Timing

Feel free to adapt the sessions and format according to the needs of your group. Some suggested timings for each part of the gathering are:

Welcome and invitation to prayer	5 mins
Gathering Prayer	5 mins
Introduce the theme	1 mins
Questions to consider / sharing time	15-20 mins
Gospel reading (repeated twice)	5-10 mins
Silent reflection	2 mins
What is the Gospel passage saying to you?	15-20 mins
Living the Message (questions considered silently)	2-3 mins
Closing prayers	5 mins
Total:	1hr approx.

Concluding Thought

Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) addressed Catechists and Religion Teachers in Rome on 12th December 2000 as follows:

‘New evangelisation means: never being satisfied with the fact that from the grain of mustard seed, the great tree of the Universal Church grew... rather, it means to dare, once again and with the humility of the small grain, to leave up to God the when and how it will grow (Mark 4:26-29).’*

*http://www.ewtn.com/new_evangelization/Ratzinger.htm

In small faith sharing groups seeds of faith are planted and watered leading to growth. Whether there are two or twenty two in your group, the Lord will be present speaking to your hearts. What you learn and hear is not to be kept to yourselves but is to be shared with those that you meet in daily life. Please encourage the members of your group to share, as appropriate, what they receive with the people they ‘rub shoulders’ with each day. In this way they will be playing their part in scattering seeds, in contributing to the home mission of the Church in England and Wales.

Further Reading

Official website for the Papal Visit to the UK:
www.thepapalvisit.org.uk

Pope Benedict’s Encyclicals:
http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/index_en.htm

Scripture Credits

The Scripture passages used in the sessions have been sourced from:

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Some of the text above was sourced from ‘*Advice on Leading a Small Group*’ written by staff at The Agency for Evangelisation, Westminster Diocese.

The faith sharing group sessions have been written by diocesan representatives working in partnership with the Home Mission Desk of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. www.catholicchurch.org.uk