

Welcome to your first Faith & Fellowship Meeting!

Welcome to your first Faith & Fellowship Meeting and congratulations on taking the next step on your spiritual journey. Because the format of this meeting might be different from other faith sharing groups you've experienced, we've created this handout to answer some of the "Whys" behind this particular format. With a better understanding of this format, we hope that you will feel more comfortable at meetings and more patient with parts that may seem awkward at first.

Why *this* format?

There is no *one* right format for a small faith group, but it's important to have a format and to stick with it. This format was designed to be a simple, but effective means of growing closer to God and to others. As you will see by reading further, there is a reason for each part of the meeting. Sticking to this format creates familiarity. Although we like to think we are "adventurers," most of us are creatures of habit. We like routines. Becoming comfortable with this format will allow you to focus on the heart and soul of the meeting which is praying with others and connecting to the Word of God.

Remember, too often we are tempted to question, criticize and over-think things, even when they are going well. This might be appropriate if we're trying to manufacture the perfect widget, but it isn't necessarily a good approach in a small faith group. It could even prove detrimental by creating conflict. This format is "good enough" and *that's* "perfect."

Why one hour?

Meetings are held for no more than one hour. There is no expectation of any more of a time commitment than this. If meetings run over, especially frequently, you should feel free to discuss this with the group. Optional activities may be offered after the meeting, but it's up to you to discern what's realistic for your schedule. Many of us can over extend ourselves and then have trouble sustaining our commitment. The goal is not to get you to devote the most time you possibly can now, but to feel comfortable devoting a reasonable amount of time for years to come. Remember, fellowship grows and develops over time and the journey closer to God is a marathon, not a sprint.

☺ *Please remember to show up on time in respect for everyone's time who is present.* ☺

Why an "Opening Statement"?

Many things in the world are pulling at your time and attention. Therefore, at the beginning of each meeting it is important for you and all in attendance to acknowledge the purpose and value of your time together and to reinforce your ongoing commitment to Christian fellowship.

Why a "Prayer of Lordship"?

Lordship is the key to unlocking our relationship with God. Because of our broken human nature, we tend to want to be our own "lord" rather than recognizing God as Lord of our life. This prayer helps to reinforce the right order of your relationship with God.

Why include "Thanksgiving"?

Gratitude is a form of prayer and by publicly proclaiming things for which you are grateful, you not only give God praise, but also help your mind to embrace the many wonderful things that God has done for you personally. By listening to others you become more aware of the blessings that God has bestowed on others as well.

Why this format for “Reflection on the Gospel Reading for the Upcoming Sunday”?

- Going around a circle gives everybody an opportunity to share their thoughts on the Gospel. It’s especially important for people that are more reserved.
- This is not a time of dialogue or discussion, but an opportunity for personal connection. This format may be somewhat awkward at first because most of your life is spent dialoguing with others. Sometimes, without consciously thinking about it, we formulate our responses based on how we think others will perceive us. As you grow accustomed to speaking your thoughts in a trusting environment, without being judged, you will find your reflections becoming more authentic. At times your responses might even surprise you, revealing what is really on your mind and in your heart. Also, when you’re not expected to respond to what someone else has shared, your mind is more at ease and you become a better listener.
- Reflecting on and connecting to the gospel reading a second time helps to reinforce the gospel message and gives you another opportunity to connect with it. You can then give voice to new insights you have gained after listening to the passage again and to others.
- Ending on the Word with out further discussion gives God the last word.

Why include “Sharing How God is acting in Your Life (Optional if time permits)”?

It is important as a Christian to reflect on and give witness to how God has been acting in your life and to be inspired by the witness of God’s action in other peoples’ lives.

Why “Prayers of Petition”?

Prayers of petition are included simply because our Lord told us to petition Him! Practically, this also promotes spiritual solidarity and concern for others.

Why have “Announcements”?

This is a time to share information regarding things occurring in the parish, as well as other opportunities for Christian formation, fellowship and service.

Why the “Closing Prayer”?

We close with the prayer taught to us by Jesus, the “Our Father”. This prayer helps you to reclaim your deepest identity as a beautiful, beloved child of a loving Father and reinforces that you are united to all those in attendance through Baptism. It also reminds you of the need to forgive others and look to the Father for forgiveness, protection, guidance, and assistance.

After the meeting.

You may be invited (but are in no way obligated) to stay for fun activities, refreshments etc.

Some words of encouragement.

We hope that participating in Faith and Fellowship Meetings deeply enriches your faith journey. They are designed to be a source of strength and support for you as you face a culture that does not always support Christian values. *Be patient!* Fellowship takes time but it *will* develop. Think about the time it has taken to build up the truly meaningful relationships in your life with family, friends, a spouse, co-workers etc. This meeting lasts only one hour and as the saying goes, “Rome wasn’t built in a day.” However, every meeting will bring you closer to God and others. May God bless you and keep you constant in your desire to grow closer to Him!