

SHARING FAITH IN A SMALL COMMUNITY

The Synodal Pathway has given many people a new experience of listening and being listened to, of sharing experiences and sharing faith, of understanding that we are pilgrims together on a journey. For some of you, these practical points will be well known, but for others, they will be new. To new members of the small community, we offer a big welcome, and to returning members, welcome back. Take time to read these few pages - they will be of great benefit.

GATHERING as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important part of parish life. This is a sacred time. It is important that you take the time to get to know one another, so always make room for the introductions of anyone new, and to ask one another how you are and what has happened since you last met.

HOSPITALITY and environment are very important. You should meet in a reflective atmosphere with as few distractions as possible. It would be helpful to have a central focus, such as an open Bible and a candle.

TIMING is important. The suggested time for each session is 60-90 minutes. Each session will have a balance of prayer, sharing experience, exploring scripture, reflection and talking about how we are living our faith.

PRAYER will take different forms, and we will make a suggestion for an opening and closing prayer. You can make other suggestions, too, as it is helpful to try varied ways of praying, such as playing some religious music. Silence is an important part of the process, so don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed, during the reflection time for some quiet.

EXPERIENCE is essential to our spiritual life. As you reflect, ensure each person who wants to talk is given an opportunity to share. No one needs to talk unless they want to, and no one person should dominate the conversation. 'Synodal dialogue' depends on courage both in speaking and listening – speaking from the heart, and listening from the heart.

RESPOND Each week we have the opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.

WHAT IS THE FACILITATOR OF

YOUR GROUP EXPECTED TO DO?

Each community will have its own leader, or facilitator. They are not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with particular responsibility for facilitating the community by:

- Preparing ahead of the session and developing a warm, accepting and open environment
- Guiding the group and keeping it on track through the faith sharing process
- Sharing the various tasks among the members of the group, like reading the text out loud or leading the prayers
- Listening and, if necessary, asking questions to keep the sharing moving
- Ensuring that each participant has the opportunity to speak
- Encouraging members to see the meeting not as a discussion group, but as a time of listening, sharing, and learning together

“Pope Francis is inviting us to listen again to each other, hearing experiences of faith with all its joys and disappointments, and to find new ways of strengthening each other.

It is an opportunity for us to show our care for the family of the Church.”

(Cardinal Vincent Nichols, introducing the Westminster Synodal Pathway)