



Pastoring Small Community Leaders

Core Community Meeting

Aim

To offer a tool that the Parish Core Community can use to identify and respond to the needs of small community leaders. This tool is based on a vision of Jesus as the guiding shepherd for small communities. This session will include prayer, sharing, and the presentation of information.

Leader's Instructions:

If you want to use a song, choose a hymn about Jesus as shepherd that is familiar to your community.

In advance of the meeting, ask someone to be prepared to read the Scripture passage. After the Leader's Reflection, allow a few minutes of silence before moving on to the faith-sharing questions.

Opening Prayer

(Core Community Handout)

Let us begin with a reading from John's Gospel. John describes Jesus as a shepherd who is close to his sheep. They are sustained by listening to his voice and relying on his love for them. Following the reading, there will be time for reflection. Then you will be invited to share responses to the reading. Let us pause for a moment and in the quiet of our hearts remember that God is with us.

(Offer a brief pause and light the candle.)

Loving Father, through your Son, Jesus, you call us to gather as your people, holy and beloved. As we come into your presence, open our hearts to your love, open our minds to your truth. Help us to be present to each other and to you as we pray and share during this time. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

Reading John 10:1–15

Leader's Instructions:

- a) Proclaim the passage once. Then tell everyone that you are going to read the passage again and ask them to listen for a line that speaks to them in some way. (This is a method of prayer called *lectio divina*.)
- b) In the faith-sharing session, ask people to share with the person sitting next to them the one line as well as what that line means on a personal level. Then invite pairs of people to combine with another pair and share their responses to the faith-sharing questions. Groups will have four or five people. Allow 15 to 20 minutes for both sharings.

Leader's Reflection

As we reflect on our relationships with small community leaders, we can gain insights from the biblical image of shepherding. We can imitate Jesus in his attention to the apostles. Ours is a ministry of watching over, guiding, and pastoring those who serve small communities. We can offer encouragement, especially in the areas that leaders are hoping to nurture within their groups (prayer, learning, sharing, mutual support, and mission). Caring for leaders means regular contact based on prayer and faith sharing. It means listening to leaders and asking how things are going. It can also mean offering assistance with difficulties and situations in small communities, and encouraging greater spiritual growth in both the leaders and their small communities.

Faith Sharing

- What word or thought from the reading spoke to your partner? (This helps us practice listening.) Then share the meaning of your own choice.
- How or when have I experienced support and encouragement, from God or from others, in my ministry to small groups?
- What are the signs that small communities are growing and being cared for within the Body of Christ? What effect do I see these communities having on families, on my parish, on society, and on the universal Church?

Business Meeting Agenda

Leader's Instructions:

After reviewing the business from the Core's previous meeting, introduce discussion on "Pastoring Small Community Leaders" and the need for ongoing growth in small Christian communities.

1. Review the previous meeting's minutes and action.
2. Present the ways of providing pastoral care and formation, using the Initial Steps on page 3 of the **Core Community Handout**.

Leader's Instructions:

Ask a Core member to record the ideas and comments on large sheets of newsprint that are visible to all. This record of the collective thoughts and ideas will be helpful in future planning sessions that address the ongoing growth and development of small communities in the parish.

3. Proceed to making decisions about services on page 4 of the **Core Community Handout**, if time permits. If it is too much to cover in this meeting, some options might be (a) distribute the handouts to all participants and ask them to prepare to discuss them at the next meeting, or (b) divide the group into teams of two, and have each team choose a topic and report on it at the next meeting.

4. Other action items to be discussed as part of the normal business of the Parish Core Community.

Closing Prayer

(Core Community Handout)

Leader's Instructions:

Prior to beginning the prayer, designate Side 1 and Side 2.

Leader: As we come to the end of our time together, let us pause and reflect on all that we have shared and all that we hope to do in the coming months (*pause*). In gratitude for all that has been given to us and with hope for all that is ahead of us, we pray:

Side 1: For the gifts present among us, that we will use them wisely in continuing the mission of Jesus, we pray:

All: Come, Holy Spirit.

Side 2: For the gift of discernment, that we will recognize the diversity of gifts among God's people, we pray:

All: Come, Holy Spirit.

Side 1: For the gift of humility, that we will recognize our limitations and trust that God will provide for us in our need, we pray:

All: Come, Holy Spirit.

Side 2: For the small community leaders, as they care for their groups, may they be blessed with courage, peace, and generosity of heart as they share their gifts, we pray:

All: Come, Holy Spirit.

Side 1: For all the ministries, communities, and people of our parish, that they may know Jesus as the Good Shepherd, we pray:

All: Come, Holy Spirit.

Leader: I invite you to share your own intentions (*pause*):

All: (*After each intention*) Come, Holy Spirit.

Leader: Holding all of these prayers and intentions in our hearts, let us join our prayer with that of St. Paul:

All: "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20–21).



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Pastoring Small Community Leaders

Initial Steps

Imitate Jesus in his concern for the formation of his disciples.

- Pray with and for leaders as they face personal and ministerial concerns.
- Foster spiritual growth and the skills needed to lead a small community.

Be a supportive companion in ministry.

- Check with the small community leaders on a regular basis. Encourage her or him to call when the need arises.
- Listen to how things are going; what is going well; what is difficult; what help seems to be needed. Bring information back to the Parish Core Community.
- Encourage him or her to enlist an assistant to the leader for support and feedback in addressing the group's needs.

Affirm the spiritual life and faith of the small community and its leader.

- Initiate conversations about the group as a form of faith sharing.
- Help the leader become aware of God's presence in the group.

Help leaders identify needs that can be addressed through:

- Days or evenings of reflection
- Expressing appreciation (celebrations and giving thanks)
- Sharing resources
- Providing ongoing formation and training

Offer encouragement by attending ongoing formation sessions, days of reflection and special celebrations.

Reflection Questions:

Consider each of these pastoring strategies (see above) and the value of a particular kind of pastoral support. Underline one that you see as most important. Share your responses. Are additional services needed? Which ones?

What are some concrete ways in which these strategies could be implemented?

Pastoral Support for Small Community Leaders

1. List Parish Core Community members who will be contacts for specific small community leaders. Establish goals for keeping in touch and how often this contact will occur.
2. Divide up responsibilities that go beyond individual pastoring, and address the overall needs and concerns of small community leaders, such as:
 - A. Record keeping:
 - Compile and update a list of phone and e-mail addresses among Core Community members and small community leaders. List the best day and time for contacts.
 - Collate on a regular basis the input Core members hear (phone calls, e-mail, personal visits).
 - B. Establish priorities within topics for formation and training:
 - Knowledge and understanding of our Catholic faith, tradition, and sacraments.
 - Prayer (personal and communal) and Scripture.
 - Skills, such as group dynamics, listening, communication.
 - Ways to encourage deeper community growth and faith sharing.
 - Ways to encourage outreach, mission, and social action.
 - C. Plan formation opportunities and training workshops:
 - Choose varied approaches, such as days or evenings of reflection, workshops, speakers, videos, and chat rooms.
 - Assist in the selection of materials for small groups.
 - Compile evaluations of what has been offered.
 - D. Celebrate the ministry of small community leaders:
 - Present certificates at seasonal parties (Christmas, Mardi Gras, picnics).
 - Send thank-you letters at the end of the year or season.
 - Offer commissioning ceremonies, when appropriate.
 - E. Recruit new leaders, especially from among those who have functioned in groups as an assistant to the leader or a co-leader.