



# Growing into Christian Community: Stages of Group Development

## ***What the Small Christian Communities Need to Know***

The dynamics that occur within small Christian communities are of great importance and either foster or hinder ongoing growth. Each person in a small group contributes in some way to the development of a healthy community. Here are some of the ways that participants can support one another and the growth of community.

### **1. LISTEN**

To listen includes total attentiveness as well as nonverbal body language. Steps you can take: look at the person who is speaking, let go of your own comments while a person speaks, turn toward that person with open body posture.

### **2. PARAPHRASE**

Check your understanding of another person's comments by repeating what was said in your own words. Ask if that is what the person really meant. Listen for feelings behind what is said and acknowledge these feelings in some way.

### **3. SUPPORT**

Thank someone for a new insight that was shared. State your agreement out loud. Encourage one another by expressing concern for needs. Ask a quieter individual to share during a one-to-one conversation. Ask if the group could stop and take a moment to pray for a person in need.

### **4. CLARIFY**

If what you are saying is not being understood, find other words to explain your meaning. Make "I" statements about your own experiences. After the session, ask someone who has shared a difficulty if he or she would like to say more in a one-to-one conversation. Repeat the sharing question if the discussion or sharing is wandering.

### **5. RESPECT**

Respect means to "look twice," so concentrate on each individual's positive attributes. You do not have to agree with everyone's opinion, but each person's ideas must be respected. Be willing to admit responsibility if you have offended someone in the group.

### **6. EXPRESS YOURSELF**

The freedom to share your feelings when a topic is presented is important to the health of a group. Have confidence in your own ideas. Share concrete experiences in a brief fashion. Avoid giving unsolicited advice or drawing lengthy conclusions about what you share.

### **7. RELAX**

Relax. God is present and loves each person. Trust in the goodness of the people around you. Smile more often. Christian community is meant to be a joyful sharing with one another.

[Adapted from *Resources for Small Christian Communities* by Thomas Kleissler, Margo LeBert, and Mary McGuinness (Plainfield, NJ: RENEW International, 1991) pages 17–18 and from *Facilitation for Growth* by Barbara J. Fleischer (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993).]