



Common Challenges a Facilitator Might Face

If you believe in Me, you will do the same works I do.

Use the following questionnaire as an example of a hand-out for the training of Small Christian Community facilitators. This is meant to be a springboard for teaching how to guide the group meetings.

Group members might bring up the following touchy issues.

Give and ask others to give gentle but truthful responses.

What would you say in response to the following challenges?

What do you like and not like about the responses given?

USE THESE 4 KEYS:

1. Use the truth firmly but gently
2. Avoid "pat" cardboard answers
3. Admit your own struggles
4. Rely on God to speak through others

1. "All I ever hear about when I go to church is money, money, money."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. Yes, it does seem that way, but actually it's only mentioned about twice a year at our parish. I feel okay with that. Perhaps it seems like more because of the second collections, but there's really no pressure to contribute to those.

B. I know I need to grow in my own ability to be generous with the Church. Giving to the Church is an expression of our love for God. I've learned that it shows Who or what we place our trust in the most.

C.

2. "My life is so messed up, I doubt that God really cares about me."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. I used to think that, too, but I've discovered that God loves us just the way we are, no matter what we've done.

B. God cares so much about you, Jesus died on the cross for you. Remember how He socialized with the so-called "scum" of society? Mary Magdelene was a messed-up prostitute, and Jesus healed her. She was the first one He appeared to after His resurrection! I think about that when I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

C.

3. "Years ago, a priest was really cruel."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. (Listen with sympathy before responding.) I once was treated in a similar way. I didn't get over my hurt until I forgave him and asked Jesus to minister to me. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we're okaying what the person did, and we don't have to wait until the person wants forgiveness. Choosing to forgive sets us free from what's been done to us.

B. That person who hurt you does not represent the whole Church. We are the Church. This Small Christian Community exists so that we can care about each other.

C.

4. "I disagree with Church teachings."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. I, too, have struggled with some of the rules of the Church. I have found, though, that if I ask God to help me understand why the Church holds fast to a teaching I don't like, eventually I see it in a new light. For example....

B. Sometimes I find myself absorbing the world's way of looking at morality. The world says we can make up our own minds; if we decide a sin is no longer a sin, then it's not a sin. But I actually prefer knowing for sure what's right and what's wrong. The uncertainty of a changeable morality leaves me feeling insecure. God speaks through the Church, so I've come to rely on the Church to tell me what God's truths really are.

C.

5. "I'm divorced, so I can't receive Sacraments. I've been excommunicated."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. There's a lot of misinterpretation of the word "excommunication." I suggest talking to the pastor about this.

B. If you're not remarried, you probably can receive the Sacraments. Talk to the pastor about it. I have found him easy to talk to.

C. I know people who have gone through the annulment process. They found it very helpful and very healing for their lives today.

D.

6. "I don't like the changes that happened in the Church." OR: "I don't like the changes that are happening in our parish."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. Yes, change is difficult. But I've learned from my experiences that when things change, that is when I grow the most. I get out of my comfort zone and I'm open to new insights and spiritual strength. For example, when

B. I didn't like it when such-and-such got changed, but when I asked God to help me understand it, I was able to accept the change and even to appreciate it.

C.

7. "I believe that God not only works through the Church, but also through astrology (or some other New Age, occult or Eastern religious practice)."

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

A. I have tried that approach, and when I asked the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of Truth, to teach me more about these things, I discovered that scriptures very clearly say they are an "abomination" to God, because they counterfeit what God really offers. They did not bring me closer to God, but in fact brought fear (and what else?) into my life.

B. I read Terry Modica's book on this subject and found it very helpful. (Just a little commercial here -- this is NOT a required response!)

C.