

Developing a Personal Support Group

The starting point for participating in a personal support group is to accept that the ideas that other people have can be of benefit to me and my ideas can be of benefit to others. We are each stewards of the ideas we have and as stewards need to be open to exchanging these ideas with others. There are many ways to think about things, and we will gain from interacting with others to receive and give the possibilities.

- Being Catholic Christians 24/7 is about infusing every moment of our days with the core value of our faith, the essential teaching of Jesus.
 - Love God
 - Love your neighbor, that is, your fellow human beings.
- Easy to say, very complex in the doing.
- To live out these values, we need support. One form of support is a Personal Support Group.
- In a general way, any group engaged in church ministry that meets on a regular basis could provide support by way of reminding us of our faith and the way of life believers have promised to live.
- More specifically though, we can choose to be part of a small group whose purpose is to help, support, and provide accountability for each other in living out the “Love” commandments of Jesus. This can be one other person, two or three. We recommend keeping the number small both to reduce the difficulties in scheduling a non-conflicting meeting time and to increase the closeness of the members.
- In these support groups, each person, in turn, is the focus of attention by the others in the group. Each shares the successes and challenges they have recently encountered. The others listen *non-judgmentally*; reflect what they have heard; and *if asked*, offer ideas for consideration by the person who is the focus at the moment.
 - The frequency, duration, and location of support group meetings are totally up to the participants.

- The meetings can be weekly, biweekly, or monthly. We recommend not going more than a month between meetings.
- The meetings can be held any place that can be conducive to quiet conversation, a corner of the company lunch room, on a walk from the car to the place of work, a walk in a park, over breakfast or lunch at a restaurant, at or after a family meal (a family can be a support group), after Sunday Mass in the church proper or the vestibule.
- The meetings can be times of extended conversation or only as long as it takes to respond to two inquiries, “How have things gone since our last meeting?” and “What are your plans until our next meeting?”
- Guidelines or Ground rules for a Personal Support Group:
 - What is shared in the group is not shared outside the group.
 - The members of the support group are to treat the responses to the questions they ask in a totally non-judgmental way.
 - The member who is the focus of the questions will supply his/her own judgment.
 - The goal of the questions is to have the member verbalize and consider what and how they have done since the last meeting of the support group. This may call for the questioners to reflect back to the member what they understand using such phrases as, “What I hear you saying is....;” “If I understand you correctly, you mean....;” and “Do you mean to say....?”
- A good question that usually comes up around this point, is “What is to be the substance of our meetings?” or “Where do we begin?” The guidelines and support group questions could go in any direction without some target behavior or changes in behavior. For that reason, it is important for the participants to set a beginning point.
- After some private prayer and reflection, each participant should make a pledge or commitment. That pledge can be the subject of the self-reporting over the first several support group meetings until the group or the individuals choose other goals.
- A simple pledge form is included with these notes as one way to develop an initial pledge. We suggest that the participants complete 1, 2, or not more than 3 items on a pledge sheet.

- There is no one way to initiate the reflection questioning of a Personal Support Group. A set of potential reflection questions is included with these notes for your consideration. Try them and others you may think of. Keep using those that have the greatest impact on changing your behavior to accomplish your pledge(s).
- Final word: For those times when you cannot meet with your support group, you can use the list of questions to guide a conversation with Jesus. Set aside about 10 minutes in a quiet place. Bring yourself to focus on yourself and your relationship with Jesus. Imagine Jesus to be sitting next to you or across from you. Then converse with him, telling him your responses to the questions. Spend a few additional minutes in silence, focused on Jesus. Listen quietly.

MAKING A PLEDGE

As steward of the gifts given me by the Father, with Jesus' commandment to love my neighbor in mind, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, I commit myself to:

___ Begin:

___ Stop:

___ Let go of:

___ Recommit to:

___ Get better at:

___ Pray about:

___ Think through:

___ Learn more about:

___ Change my attitude about:

___ Talk about:

___ Talk with:

___ Write to:

___ Visit:

___ Share:

___ Help:

___ Other:

Potential Reflection Questions for Support Groups

Keep in mind that the members of the support group are to treat the responses to the questions they ask in a *totally non-judgmental* way. The member who is the focus of the questions will supply his/her own judgment. The goal of the questions is to have the member verbalize and consider what and how they have done since the last meeting of the support group. This may call for the questioners to reflect back to the member what they understand using such phrases as, “What I hear you saying is....;” “If I understand you correctly, you mean...;” and “Do you mean to say....?”

Looking back over the past week (or since we last met):

1. What do I/you appreciate or value from my/your experiences of the past week? Elaborate, please.
2. What challenges have I/you had over this time?
3. How did I/you meet challenges?
4. How did this make me/you feel?
5. What alternatives might have been better choices for meeting those challenges?
6. What should I/you rejoice in? Give thanks for?
7. What challenges do I/you see in the next week?
8. What choices are available to me/you toward successfully meeting those challenges?
9. Which choice would best reflect Christ’s love for me/you and for those with whom I live and work?
10. Which choice would give me/you the most reason to rejoice? To give thanks?
11. How would I/you feel if I/you choose and follow the path most in line with Christ’s love for me/you and His world?