

Fire & Formation

in the Episcopal Church in Delaware

Fire & Formation is an initiative to enable the laity to deepen their spirituality. The Baptismal Covenant is applied as a framework to inspire ongoing discernment in a fellowship environment, in a covenant group. Discernment is something one learns to do continuously as part of one's Christian journey. Discernment may result in a specific direction in life and this direction can also change.

Guidance for Conveners/Facilitators

There's no single form of a small group that works best, and so covenant groups are free to explore what works best for them. However, there are some best practices. These are offered to help you to form vibrant covenant groups. The basics include,

- gathering for prayer and fellowship;
- sharing briefly where and how God is showing up in your life;
- reflecting together on scripture to discern its meaning in our everyday lives;
- closing with prayer and thanksgiving; and,
- small groups function best with consistent participation.

Groups are expected to meet regularly for several months that allows for trusted sharing and mutual learning to take place. A series of example sessions have been prepared as a framework to help get started. They are a meditation of the Baptismal Covenant vows and supporting scripture. This should not be viewed as a program to complete, but rather a litany to be prayed. The intent is each cycle through the sessions leads to deeper, continuing discernment concerning one's baptismal vows.

Convener/Facilitator Tasks

- Pray for all members of the group
- Help the group to set norms at formation; and provide gentle reminders as needed
- Lead gatherings or maintain a list of which members will lead which gatherings
- Set meeting times and send reminders (especially meeting Zoom link)
- Keep track of time throughout the meeting
- Help the group to remain connected between gatherings, through social media groups, email, text threads, and other means

Addenda *Setting Norms Suggestions*

Guidelines for Holy Conversation:

1 James:19-21 Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger

Our goal is to learn rather than persuade

There can be value in simply "trying on" another person's understanding

Ephesians 4:15-16 Speak the truth in love

It's less about what we say, and more about how we say it

We care for each other by not assuming that others share our convictions

("Of course we all know" ... "We know that everyone here believes...")

Ecclesiastes 3:7 There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak

It's okay not to speak

Try not to interrupt, or dominate, the conversation

Proverbs 11:13 He who is of a faithful spirit keeps a confidence

Confidentiality builds trust

It's okay to share what was said here, but not who said it

Other Norms:

Logistics: What are the expectations about arriving on time?

Technology: What is the phone policy? Will phones be turned off? Placed in the middle of the table? Or is casual use acceptable?

Session preparation: What, if anything, are group members supposed to do to prepare before meeting each week?

Digital Distancing Suggestions

A word on digital gatherings: It is surprising how much spiritual intimacy groups report when gathering on a platform like Zoom, especially in the current period of physical distancing. Here are some suggestions on how to maximize the connection and break through the digital barrier:

1. Ensure all have the basic information, equipment, and understanding of the use of digital video technology (Zoom) to comfortably engage in conversation.
2. Invite group members to wear comfortable clothes, dressing more for going to a picnic rather than to a board meeting or even to church.
3. Add more time around the beginning and end of the meeting for checking in with each other. Host 'show and tell' moments to help members get to know each other's worlds better.
4. Tactile activity helps! Let members know they are free to bring along knitting or crochet projects, coloring books, or other art projects.