

Host a Small Social Group with Franciscan at Home

Perhaps the easiest thing you can do for parish enrichment is host a small social group using Franciscan at Home. While Bible Study and other “programs” often require weekly preparation from group leaders, who introduce and “teach” the content, these workshops have been designed to lead learners through each segment, with the instructor’s video presentation, assigned task and follow up (visible after a task response has been saved), and opportunities for mentorship and community. **Trust the instructor and don’t try to be a second teacher.** Other than watching the segment and completing the task themselves, a host requires no special expertise or preparation, only a commitment to listen and create a respectful space for all to participate.

Small social groups of learners will be unique to the parishes they spring from. As learners grow in understanding, belonging, and engagement in the communal life of their parish, there is no measuring stick or one “right way”. Meet people where they are! Enjoy the journey!

First Week

Table Fellowship (optional)
Opening Prayer
Icebreaker/Learner Introductions
General Workshop Information &
Small Group Guidelines
Introduction of First Segment

- Scripture/Quote
- Video
- Task Introduction

Intercessory & Closing Prayer

Following Weeks

Table Fellowship (optional)
Opening Prayer
Sharing Experience of Prior Week’s Task
Optional: for Parent Formation –
Introduction of Family Activity
Introduction of Next Segment

- Scripture/Quote
- Video
- Task Introduction

Intercessory & Closing Prayer

How to get started?

Seek the Support of your Pastor

Start here. Invested with the grace to lead your parish community, the support, prayers and, at least occasional, presence of your pastor is essential in animating any small faith community and nurturing a connection to the Church.

Forming Groups

Small groups thrive when learners can identify with common social, cultural, vocational, or contextual experiences. Try grouping people with a common bond – ex. parents, seniors, first-generation Canadians, charismatic Catholics, catechists, young single adults, business owners, newlyweds, men/women, pastoral leaders ...

Is your group blessed with more than 7 people? Consider coming together for prayer, but break out into smaller groups of 4-6 for discussions. Keep the groups consistent through a workshop, but mix these up for the next one.

Table Fellowship

Where possible, share snacks! Rotate the responsibility among learners, or enlist the help of an enthusiastic friend (remember to reimburse for supplies). A simple snack table on arrival encourages social interaction before any “business” begins, and can entice the pastor and others to drop by. Consider scheduling a group in an adjacent room right after Mass, where the smell of cinnamon rolls can reach people as they exit. (Shameless but effective!)

Weekly:

Opening Prayer

Begin well by inviting God to be present in your midst, ask Him to open hearts to hear his voice, and to make us all instruments of peace, insight, and encouragement for each other. If you intend to use communal prayer, ensure the comfort of everyone by distributing a printed copy (or projection) of common prayers.

Consider creating a small prayer space with candle, flowers, Bible, or other items at the centre of the room as a focal point.

If members of the group may be unknown to each other, consider providing name tags.

First Week

For the first week only, after opening prayer, ease learners into conversation using any of the suggested icebreakers, offer guidelines for *group dialogue, and set expectations about how the workshop will be conducted in your parish.

Ensure participants understand their written response is confidential. Only the account holder and their mentor (if they chose this option) can see the written response. If a group member must miss a session, they can easily

catch up on the group’s progress by visiting the segment online for the next video and task.

Offer advance notice of the intercessory prayer and describe how to pray together this way.

Even though the segments and tasks appear simple, encourage learners to take their time. Resist the urge to skip ahead, and only save a response when the task is completed. Each task is designed to help learners encounter the subject in a new way, put their learning into practice, and strengthen their connection to the local church and each other.

If the discussion moves off topic but seems to engage all the participants, try not to interfere. Connection over content!

Follow this with an introduction of the first workshop segment, shared intercessions, and a closing prayer.

Share Experiences & Encouragement

After the first week, each gathering will begin with an opening prayer followed by a group discussion of the prior week’s task. Begin the group discussion with a relevant open-ended question. Examples: Last week we were tasked with [...], what was your experience with this task? What was easy or difficult about it? Did anything surprise you as you were working on it? Did this change your perspective or offer a new understanding?

Rather than waiting for individuals to volunteer a response, try circling around the room, offering a “pass” to anyone who prefers not to speak.

Make room for contemplative learners by ending a round robin with, “Does anybody who hasn’t spoken yet have anything they’d like to add?”

If you are using breakout groups to manage larger numbers of learners, consider allowing time for a quick group share of highlights. Use your “talking clock” to manage transitions; state how long the breakout will be, and give groups a verbal 5- and 1-minute warning before it’s time to assemble again.

Ideally, your learners will have completed their task earlier in the week, and conversation will revolve around their experiences. Invite the Spirit to inhabit your gathering and animate the discovery and sharing!

Optional for Forming Faith at Home

For parishes who are focusing on the *Forming Faith at Home* track for parents rather than providing traditional children's catechism this year, use this time to introduce a simple family activity. As an example, give parents a *Grace Before Meals* tent card to place on their dining table and ask the family to bless the food and each other at every meal. Ideas can be found in your catechism teacher guides, gleaned from your lesson plans, or found on the Coordinator page of the diocesan website.

When a workshop like *Fostering Holiness in Children* already includes a family task, avoid adding an activity that week.

Introduction of the Next Segment

Keep it simple. A host listens carefully and fosters a fun and engaging conversation. Let the Franciscan instructor do the teaching.

Slowly read the opening Scripture or quote to set the tone, pause for reflection, then play the video.

Allow for discussion after the video, and then introduce the task. Answer any questions.

Hosts may decide the task can be completed at the gathering. Learners should still record their confidential answers online at home.

Note: when needed, online access to the Bible, Catechism and other resources are found in the right column of the workshop web page.

Intercessory & Closing Prayer

Successful small groups find a way to pray for each other.

Try concluding with a brief round robin where learners can voice intercessions - Learner: *For ..., let us pray* and All respond: *Lord hear our prayer* - or collect confidential written

intentions in a small box as learners arrive, with requests read aloud by one of the group..

The host, pastor, or learner can conclude the evening with a closing prayer and/or blessing.

Weekly Preparation

Other than completing workshop segments in advance, Franciscan at Home workshops require very little preparation or expertise of the host. If someone in the group is a good listener, consider sharing the leadership from week to week once a group has been well initiated.

Some workshop segments are very short. By completing these in advance, a host can decide if more than one segment can be completed in an evening, but do not combine segments if it will require skipping or altering a task.

Mentorship

Healthy mentorship accompanies learners with perspective and positive reinforcement, and helps a community build up members for vital roles in parish or mission. Diocesan support is available to encourage and help form both diocesan and local parish mentors.

Mentorship is accomplished via email, phone, or in person. If a learner requests and is assigned a mentor, the learner can email their response directly to their mentor from the FAH workshop either by segment or at the end of the workshop.

Mentors can expect to commit less than one hour per month per learner. Franciscan at Home includes workshops specifically for aspiring mentors.

Mentors are not the same as the critical friend referred to in some of the workshop tasks. A critical friend is an essential (not critical as in criticizing) someone in the learner's life who is willing to act as a sounding board.

If you are interested in becoming a mentor, please contact Yvonne at the Office of Faith Formation 250-448-2728 ext. 110 or faithformation@nelsondiocese.org.

If your parish is already registered as an institution, create your free personal account through the diocesan landing page at: www.franciscanathome.com/diocese-nelson-british-columbia.

If you would like more information about parish registration, general support for starting your own group, or workshop suggestions for small groups or parish missions, contact Yvonne at the Office of Faith Formation 250-448-2728 ext. 110 or faithformation@nelsondiocese.org.

FAQ's, video tutorials, and supporting resources for facilitators, mentors, coordinators and parish admins can also be found at www.FranciscanAtHome.com.

***For facilitators new to guiding adult learners**, guidelines for encouraging active, respectful group discussions could include:

- use icebreakers, open-ended questions, and taking turns around a room to get things started
- offer anyone who doesn't want to respond "pass" as an option, and then move along
- encourage members to recognize the difference between sharing with an intimate friend and a stranger, and understand the group discussions fall somewhere in between
- along the same lines, foster respect for the confidentiality of shared experiences
- there is no need to reveal the intimate details of your weekly response, which is confidential to you and your mentor only (mentor optional); be encouraged though, to share your experience with the task, and any insights you are comfortable sharing
- begin and end on time; if one thread of a conversation is going long, the facilitator may suggest taking a conversation "offline", leaving it for those who want to stay after the closing prayer
- for a great short video which can help set expectations around sharing in a group, see Michael Gormley in Radical Communities *Don't Walk Alone*, or for facilitators, check out the FAH video [here](#).
- finally, while some groups will fall naturally into active and engaging discussions, don't be discouraged if your group feels a little awkward in the first week or two. As anyone who has served on an RCIA team will tell you, once the conversations begin in earnest, these times together will easily become a highlight of your parish calendar.

A special thank you to the coordinators of Nelson diocese, and the faith community of Sacred Heart Parish in Grand Forks, for helping us create and improve this guide for you.