

Group Facilitating guidelines:

As a Group Leader it is your role to facilitate group discussions. In this role your objective is to create an atmosphere of a positive and encouraging learning environment. The goal of the Newly Married Couples Ministry is to provide couples a place to grow spiritually, build their relationship with each other and connect with other couples in the church.

As a facilitator it is important to keep in mind that each group will form its own personality. Key attributes of the groups personality are commonly revealed within the first 2 meetings. A tool to help you disclose your group's attributes is the Participants Short Survey. This survey is to be handed out at the Kick off Dinner. The survey will give you your first impression of your group's personality. It will reveal who your audience is and what their needs and concerns are. This information will also guide you on any discussion substitutions you may need to use in your first year.

Creating a safe & effective environment:

Trust is a key element to making your group a place where genuine community can be formed. Group members need to be able to trust each other and know that what they share will stay within the group.

- Make sure to hand out copies of the privacy guidelines and covenant in your first meeting. Go over these guidelines every time a new couple attends.

Leading the discussions:

- Familiarize yourself with the discussion and Leaders Guide before the meeting. Being prepared for the meeting will give you confidence. It will also provide you with an opportunity to ask your priest any questions if any questions arise about the discussion content.
- Most groups will be run by lay volunteers, for that reason the NMCMM is designed to be "self sufficient". The Leaders Guide content actually provides the proficiency for the Leader.
- We suggest printing out the discussion topic with questions for each couple. This will help keep couples engaged and help them stimulate thoughts.
- Follow the format of the study: Opening Prayer, Building/Ice-breaker activity, Read the Introduction of the discussion, Ask the discussion question, allowing participants time to respond and end each discussion question by Reading aloud the answer summary, Closing Prayer.
- During the discussion, you may add your own thoughts if they are consistent with the content that has been provided to you. Wrap-up each discussion question by reading the answer summary provided.

- If participants are not contributing to a discussion question and the group is fairly quiet, feel free to go ahead and read the answer summary and then ask if anyone in the group has any comments before going on to the next question. However, be sure to provide sufficient time and space for participants to gather their thoughts and contribute to the conversation.
- Keep in mind that your goal is to keep the discussion on the topic at hand and be mindful of the time. The discussion should not last more than 45 minutes. If the discussion is going
- well but rather lengthy and you are not able to get through a whole study in the allotted time, you may ask the group if they would like to continue or complete the remaining material at the next group discussion meeting.
- If participants are wanting to take the discussion to another topic, and it is a general interest to the majority of the group, ensure them that you will write down their question/concern and contact the Priest to coordinate a time for him to meet with the group. Then move the focus of the group back to the discussion at hand.
- If a participant voices a concern to you that is personal to their particular situation, advise them to contact the Priest to arrange a time to speak with him. In leading the group, your job is to help the discussions run smoothly. You are not serving as a counselor. If any of the participants begin to view you in this way, simply remind them of your role as a facilitator and advise them to speak to the Priest if they are seeking advice.
- Be conscientious of any complaining or gossiping in the group. This is a common tendency a group of talking people can have. Encouraging an environment of open communication does not mean that the participants are free to engage in slander. It is not appropriate for a spouse to speak negatively about their spouse. It is also inappropriate for a member of the group to openly criticize any aspects of their church. The purpose of the group is “to encourage and edify one another” (I Thessalonians 5:11). If this occurs gently cut into the persons comment and pivot it into another question or idea. You can do this by finding a point of connection from what the person is saying and use it as a way to generate a more positive direction.
- Discussions will thrive as couples feel comfortable to give input to the conversation, but do be aware that some couples may be comfortable sharing very personal information that isn’t beneficial for everyone to hear. If this occurs gently cut into the persons comment and pivot it into another question or idea.
- There are many issues that couples face together and some of them are highly sensitive topics. If a couple shares some of the conclusions that they have come to regarding some of these tough choices, it does not mean that their personal decision is the right answer for everyone in the group. As the leader, thank the couple for their input but remind the group as a whole to be sensitive to the Lord’s leading in their own lives and that it is not wise to compare oneself with others (2 Corinthians 10:12, I Thessalonians 4:11-12). The focus of the group is growth of marital relationships and bonding with other married couples, it is not for everyone to get on the same page regarding a particular controversial issue.

Maintaining the discussion when dealing with different personality types:

The participant who talks to much- A way to deal with a dominant participant is to redirect the discussion to another person or move to another question. You can simply say, “thank you for your response, but due to our time restraints we need to move on to another question.”

The participant who will not talk- Just give them time. They may need time to adjust to sharing in a group setting. One way you can help them work through this is to take some time to speak with them one on one after the discussion, asking them what they thought about the topic. They are more likely to share their thoughts with you than the group. If they do, it is a good opportunity for you to validate their thoughts and encourage them to share their thoughts with the group at the next meeting.

Matthews 19:6 “So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate”

(adapted from Handelsman et al. 2006)