



## **Make your Lenten Groups Year long and watch your Parishioners Grow**

Lent is the season of small groups in the Church, but small groups are so important that they should be a part of parish life all year round. It has been said that most people find their experience of God at a distance of no more than 3 metres, that is they find their experience of God in other people, and these are people they relate to on a one to one basis. This most often happens in small groups.

The understanding preached in an effective, evangelising parish is that everyone should belong to at least one small group, which will be the basis for much of their personal spiritual journey. In a very effective parish, that tends in reality to equate to 50% of your adult parishioners active in small groups at any time.

Most parish education, social activity and personal conversion can be generated from these groups. Use the energy these relational groups provide as a basis for service and faith sharing.

Small groups should be “relational”, made up of people with an interest in common, or who come from a similar stage of life such as young families or retired couples. Relational groups create energy, which can then be funnelled into mission. Small groups made up of people that are very different will often need years to build up the relationships which will then allow energy to be used for outreach.

The way to invite people into your parish might not only be through Mass but also through your small group, especially if those in the group are at the same stage of life as that person.

To keep your small groups going, you might try meeting fortnightly or I would suggest bursts of 3-5 weeks four times per year, one per term, similar to the five or six weeks of the Lenten program.

It is crucial to try to maximise participation in Lenten groups through active recruitment at the Sunday Masses leading up to Lent, this will give you a strong base from which to grow your small group ministry.

To involve your small group in other Adult Faith Education provided in the parish or diocese, groups can be encouraged say once per year to meet by attending a course together as a group.

Small group development should preferably be a key responsibility of a staff member in a larger parish, or a key volunteer in smaller parishes. Their role is to support the continued support and growth of small groups.

Small groups don't always need to simply meet as do Lenten groups; you can have your choir or caring group or catechist team as a small group, adding opportunities for learning and growth to your normal meetings or activities.

Once your Lenten groups have settled in, start thinking about what you can do in the next quarter of this year. One great option is to look at a study of this year's Gospel, Luke, or go to a Catholic or Christian Bookshop and choose the small group resource on a topic of keen interest to your group.

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