

Session Format

Gathering

The leader should see that details of hospitality are taken care of so that everyone feels welcome, knows one another and is comfortable being together. In ongoing groups this pattern will already be well established. New groups will need to be more deliberate in establishing this climate right from the beginning. An icebreaker in which all are invited to share why they are interested in being part of the group can help everyone become acquainted quickly.

Opening Prayer

Depending on the leader's preference, a spontaneous prayer may be used to open the session, or a prepared text might be used. If the group is comfortable singing together, an appropriate song should be chosen. The following prayer can serve to begin each session:

Let us pray: *(pause long enough to allow everyone to enter into a quiet state of awareness.)*

Loving God, we thank you for this opportunity to gather together in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. Help us to put aside whatever might keep us from being fully present in this moment. Help us to be mindful that you are with us as the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, the One who draws us together in love and peace. Open our hearts and our minds as we share our faith and seek your guidance. Give us courage to probe deeply how you call us to live as your disciples in a complex and confusing world. Show us how to be faithful citizens in a nation that proclaims "In God we trust." We ask this, through Christ our Lord. (Amen)

Scripture Reading & Faith Sharing (30 minutes)

The leader should introduce the focus of the gathering, explaining that the passage chosen from Scripture is meant to complement the theme of the session. The leader or another designated person then proclaims the reading.

A reading from...

After the reading is finished, a brief period of silence follows. Then the leader says,

What word or phrase from the reading strikes you, or is echoing in your heart at this time? Just repeat the word or phrase aloud.

When all have had a chance to respond, the leader invites everyone to listen one more time to the text. It is good to have a different person proclaim the reading this second time.

A reading from...

The leader then invites all to share what they are hearing in the text. If necessary to facilitate sharing, one of the suggested discussion questions that accompany each Scriptural passage may be used.

Faithful Citizenship Reading & Discussion (45 minutes)

The leader makes a transition from the faith sharing to the next segment of the meeting by reminding the group of the theme chosen for the session and invites all to listen to the reading selected in conjunction with that theme. One of the participants in the group should have been given the passage to prepare ahead of time, and the leader invites that person to read the passage.

A reading from...

After the reading, the leader invites reactions from the group and facilitates the ensuing discussion. If necessary to facilitate the discussion, one of the suggested questions that accompany the reading may be used. Without dominating, the leader should encourage participants to make connections between the Scripture reading/faith sharing and the discussion of faithful citizenship.

Closing Prayer

The leader closes the session by inviting all to prayer. An ideal way to do this is to ask participants to name aloud the needs that were stirred in their hearts by the sharing. After each petition is spoken, an agreed-upon common response (e.g., "Lord, hear our prayer") is said. The petitions may be concluded with all holding hands and reciting together the Our Father. If the group is comfortable singing, a suitable song may be chosen. Refreshments and social time should follow.