

## Training Small-Group Facilitators

One of the most important elements in the **via media** experience is the small-group experience. Spending time in the small groups allows participants to bring the video to life in honest, engaging dialogue with each other. Because **via media** encourages participants to ask questions, and to seek answers in community, the small group allows them to practice their skills in having theologically reflective conversation based in their experience.

Not everyone is born a small-group leader. While for some it comes naturally, others might be less comfortable standing in front of a group. *We encourage congregations to have training for your small-group facilitators before **via media** starts.* This will be an opportunity for them to experience a complete **via media** session, so they can better facilitate their small group. What follows is the agenda we will use today. Instructions follow each step so that you may recreate this training in your congregation.

### *Small-Group Facilitator Job Description*

- As facilitator, you don't have to have all the answers. It's ok to say "I don't know," or "What do you think?"
- Pray for each member of your group every day by name.
- Attend all **via media** sessions in their entirety.
- Come to each session having prepared your small-group questions. Know which questions you might ask. Be prepared to help your small group form or stay on track.
- Participate fully in all aspects of small-group sessions.
- Faithfully engage in the evaluation process.
- If your church is having a small-group facilitator training, make sure you make the time in your calendar to attend it.
- **via media** reinforces the truth that it is OK to ask questions. Ask questions and ask them again until you are comfortable with facilitating your small group. Draw on the support of your Coordinator, Clergy, or others who have been trained in **via media** by the Every Voice Network.
- Use the checklist provided to make sure you don't miss any steps.
- Participate in ongoing discussion about **via media** at [www.everyvoice.net/viamedia](http://www.everyvoice.net/viamedia).

### Agenda

- |                                    |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| • Icebreaker                       | 15 minutes |
| • Review of <i>Life of a Group</i> | 10 minutes |
| • Seven small-group nightmares     | 30 minutes |
| • Watch a session together         | 20 minutes |
| • Role-play small group            | 20 minutes |
| • Debrief                          | 15 minutes |

## Icebreaker

*from via media, Session Four: The Holy Spirit*

### *Introduction*

Paul writes to the Church at Corinth that we are the Body of Christ. “The body is not made up of one part but of many ... God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as God wanted them to be.” (1 Corinthians 12:14, 18) As a community of faithful, on a journey of faith together, we each have a unique, collaborative role in the operation of the Body of Christ. Our diversity is the gift that we bring to the collective body of friends and family in our communities.

### *Table Talk*

Break into small groups of 3 or 4. What are the unique gifts that you think you bring to your community? Don’t be shy. Take a few moments to write down your talents and gifts. Make a list, taking at least one gift from each person at your table, and celebrate yourselves as the Body of Christ.

### *Reporting back*

Go around the room and ask groups to report on their lists, writing down what they say. When finished, look at the list, reading aloud each gift – don’t these seem like the characteristics of a group that works well?

## **The Life of a Group**

As any community comes together, its relationships and group dynamics are affected by the composition of the group, the topics being addressed. Most groups encounter a few milestones, which can be summed up in the following:

### *Form*

- Goals and Objectives are discussed or stated
- Introductions
- First impressions / judgments are made
- Every time a new person joins a group, this step is revisited in some way

### *Norm*

- The group sets behaviors for itself. These can be written, or unwritten rules
- Natural leaders emerge

### *Storm*

- Conflict arises
- Someone, or some people are dominating discussions
- Some people might not be talking, might be withdrawn
- A group has become so comfortable with each other, that they have lost some of their 'manners'

### *Reform*

- Norms have to be revisited, or renegotiated
- Tasks or goals might have to be realigned
- Steps need to be taken to regroup, or to reincorporate participants who might feel alienated
- 'Authority' needs to be reasserted

### *Perform*

- A healthy group can accomplish much. People are heard.
- People feel good about their group experience, and feel invested in its content and in its conclusions

## Seven Small-Group Nightmares

*For small-group training, the leader should introduce each 'problem' and ask, "What do you do?" Allow the group to suggest answers from their experience, then direct them to the points which follow below.*

### *The Silent Group*

Discussion questions keep passing by – one person responds, and then the discussion falls flat. What do you do?

- ask the question again, rephrasing it
- ask the single respondent to say more / ask if anyone has anything to say back to the respondent
- see if maybe there is something that you're not asking – something they really want to talk about instead (that's still on topic)
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### *The Big Talker*

It's all about one person, and boy, howdy! he or she won't let anyone else get a word in edgewise. You're pleased that someone is responding so well to the material, but there might be other people who have some ideas. What do you do?

- ask the next question to a particular person – maybe someone who has looked like they had something to say
- revisit one of the earlier questions, asking for further feedback
- remind the group that everyone needs to be heard
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### *Forgive and Forget*

Something in the video or discussion has particularly resonated with one participant. Perhaps it triggers a memory from which they have not yet healed. Whatever the case, you can't move the group on. What do you do?

- ask a question that is related to the topic of the conversation, but far away from the point of energy
- gently suggest that the group moves onto another topic
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### *Wandering*

Everything is of interest to your group today ... except the topic at hand! What do you do?

- ask the group to spend 2 minutes identifying why they cannot focus on the topic, and then move them on
- relate an off-topic remark to something that was said in the video or in the curriculum summary
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### *The Criticizer*

Your discussion opens up with someone stating everything that they didn't like about the video, or stating all the things with which they disagree. What do you do?

- ask if anyone else would like to respond to that person
- ask specific questions, related to the video, that target the frustrations of the viewer
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### *The Interrupter*

The group is starting to get so comfortable with each other that they forget their manners. People interrupt each other – competing for air-time. What do you do?

- try a simple reminder to give everyone a chance to speak who wants to
- suggest that there be a silent count to 3 between each person speaking
- if these fail, stop the group for a moment, and ask that they revisit their norms
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### *The Bully*

In their zeal for a particular topic, someone has belittled, or offended someone else in the group. What do you do?

- depending on how well you know the people, you might ask the person who has been offended to respond to the person
- re-engage the offended person: "Is there something you'd like to say?" or "What do you think?"
- if appropriate, talk with one or both of them after the session, alone or together, depending on the situation
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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Role-Play Exercise for Small-Group Training

- Watch a video session together, and use the discussion questions that accompany that session. Discussion questions are found in the facilitator information for each session.
- Assign each person in the small groups to the following roles, giving them their 'identity' on a piece of paper.
- Depending on the number of people in each small group, you may or may not use all of the suggested roles. If you have more people than roles, you can repeat roles, or you may invite some people to honestly participate in the conversation.
- During the exercise, swap roles every ten minutes, each person passing their role onto the person on his or her left. The facilitator role should switch in this process, as well.
- Each group should have an observer who remains constant. His or her job it is to give feedback to the group and to the facilitator after the exercise. He or she will be asked to report to the large group, using the questions provided.
- Give the facilitator a copy of the discussion questions for the session that you watch. Those are the questions to start conversation in this exercise.

### *Facilitator*

You are trying to keep the conversation moving forward, being respectful of the group dynamics. You would like to get through as many questions as possible and get as many people involved as possible. Pay attention to the people who are quiet and to the people who are loud.

### *Big Talker*

You have a point to make, and you will not rest until it's made. Even when other people get a chance to speak, you are not quite certain that your point has been understood. You'd like to find ways to reintroduce your point of view into the conversation

### *Silent*

You are paying attention to the conversation, and have many things you could say, if only the facilitator would ask you. You don't know how to break into the conversation. You keep trying to make eye contact, or wait for a pause, but your opportunity doesn't seem to arise.

### *Wanderer*

You really liked the sermon last Sunday, and you have some opinions on the music program, and you've just been asked to join the flower guild. Since there are people in the group who belong to your parish, you'd like to talk with them about your other ideas today.

### *Criticizer*

Pick something said in the video and disagree with it. Your only comments in the discussion are critical or negative of the video content or disagreeing with what someone has said in your small group.

*Bully*

The Wanderer is really starting to bother you. *Really starting to bother you!*

*Observer*

As you listen to the small group, answer the following questions:

- 1) What were the points, if any, where the small-group process broke down, in your opinion?
- 2) Was there a particularly good 'save' by one of your facilitators?
- 3) What did you learn about the group process?
- 4) And the Best Actor/Actress award goes to.... ?

### **Debrief of Role-Play**

*Bring the entire group back together, and guide them into a short conversation about the exercise, using the questions that follow.*

- 1) Ask those who observed report on the quality of discussion in the small group, and commenting on what worked and didn't work in the facilitation.
- 2) Ask for some feedback from group members who were able to play the role of facilitator during the exercise what it felt like to facilitate such a group.
- 3) Any other comments?