THE **BE FORMED**

FACILITATOR HANDBOOK

A GUIDE TO LEADING YOUR BE FORMED SMALL GROUPS

SECTION 1

The Call to be a Facilitator

“If the spark of human love is so bright, what must be the flame?”

Venerable Fulton Sheen

WELCOME MESSAGE

Welcome to Be Formed! Whether this is your first time facilitating a Be Formed Small Group, or you have been with us for many seasons, we sincerely welcome you and are so honored to have you serving in this ministry.

You have an incredible calling to walk with a group of people who are on various levels of spiritual maturity. God has equipped you by giving you particular gifts, talents and skills to be used to walk with others.

Facilitating a small group is a wonderful opportunity to serve others for the building up of the Body of Christ. When it is understood that the Holy Spirit is the leader, facilitators are set on fire and sent on mission!

Please know of our prayers for you and your small groups as you embark on this journey!

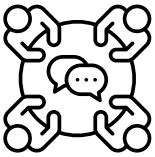
May God bless you!
The Be Formed Team

THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR

While it is important to understand what facilitators are, it is even more important to understand what they are not. A facilitator is NOT a theologian. While some may have a background in theology, it is best to direct theological questions outside of the group to parish priests, deacons, Catechism Vatican resources, etc. Further, a facilitator is NOT a counselor, and small groups are not an appropriate place to handle emotionally intense feelings. Please see page 18 for information on how to handle these situations.

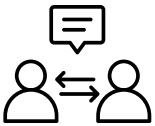
Facilitating is not about what you know or do not know, what you can do or cannot do. You lead by managing and maintaining communication.

Facilitating a Small Group is about encouraging people to participate and share with one another for the building up of the Body of Christ. Your role is to see and hear all those who are present in the group and keep conversation on track. You create an atmosphere of hospitality where people feel welcomed, safe, and trusting.



LEAD DISCUSSIONS

- Encourage prayer to begin and end each meeting
- Guide conversations about the weekly videos and Lectio Divina



ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION

- Encourage members of your small group to participate in respectful dialogue

FOSTER AN ATMOSPHERE OF HOSPITALITY

- Ask open-ended questions, make note of prayer requests and follow up on stories shared with the group
- Maintain ground rules and confidentiality

KEEP THE GROUP FOCUSED

- Hear all those who are present in the group and keep the conversation on track

CHARISMS OF A FACILITATOR

LEADERSHIP

Facilitators are individuals who are open and willing to grow spiritually and walk with others on the journey. This does not mean that you need to know everything, but you must be open to learning and always striving to be in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

A small group facilitator must be aware of the needs, spiritual conditions, and personalities of the people that they are facilitating. You don't focus just on the material. You get to know your small group members. Facilitators lead by example. You are to walk the walk and talk the talk.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Everyone in the group comes in at different places along their faith journey. Facilitators are patient and understanding of this and are also open about their own journey. Group members are willing to be guided by someone who encourages them. This is done simply by praying, sending text messages, or remembering to follow up with a question.

SERVICE

Your love for people is an essential characteristic of being a great small group facilitator. The best facilitators are actively participating in the lives of other people and approaching their groups with a positive attitude. Facilitators are confident in being a servant of God because of His promise to provide for His people – both spiritually and relationally. Jesus' life exemplified the role of a servant leader. Your role is to serve the group and understand that at times you will sacrifice your schedule to minister to your group and in doing this you are serving Christ.

SECTION 2

The Weekly Sessions

BEGINNING THE SEASON

MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE:

It is important as you begin the season to meet people where they are. Before your first session, welcome your small group members individually with a brief introduction of who you are, and ask them a few things about themselves. As they share details about themselves, take note of what they say so you can follow up with them the next time you speak. This will help create an atmosphere of hospitality.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

While many Be Formed small groups have an email or text chain with all the group members, it is important to remember that you should NOT share contact information without approval, as some people may not feel comfortable with this. If you would like to start an email or text chain, ask each participant individually if they would like to share their contact information with the rest of the group.

LOGISTICS:

Ensure that everyone is aware of the date, time, and location of your first meeting, and express enthusiasm for the journey they are about to take heading into the new season. There is a Welcome Letter template on the following page that you can use to customize your first email. Inform your group members of whether you would like everyone to view the weekly video individually (prior to the meeting) or if you will be viewing the video together during your meeting.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS:

At the start of the season, go over the Code of Conduct with your group members, which can be found on our website under the resources tab. Make sure everyone understands the standards for attendance, communication, listening, and respectful dialogue.

WELCOME LETTER TEMPLATE

The following is a sample email that you can copy and send to your small group members prior to the start of the season. Feel free to customize or write your own!

Hello and welcome to our Be Formed small group! We are very excited and honored to be on this journey with you.

Our first meeting is: (**date**)

We plan to meet every (S, M, T, W, TH, F, S) from (Time AM/PM) to (Time AM/PM) from (Month/Date) to (Month/Date). We will meet each week to share God moments (blessings of the week), discuss the weekly video content and pray Lectio Divina together. All of the video content will be emailed to you each week, so you can watch it at your convenience. If you have not received the first Welcome email from Be Formed, please let us know so we can get your email address to the Be Formed Team.

One important aspect of Be Formed is Prayer Partners. At (or prior to) our first meeting, you will be connected with your Prayer Partner from our small group. This person will help you stay on track with your personal commitment and hold you in prayer through the season, as you will do for them. Please discuss, together with your Prayer Partner, how often and the best time to connect with one another.

Workbooks:
This is a great resource to have to journal your thoughts and inspirations. If you did not purchase a workbook already you can download the free version online at: beformed.net

Please reach out to us if you have any questions. Our contact info is: _____

We look forward to seeing you soon! May God bless you!

PRAYER PARTNERS

Journeying Together

Prayer Partners are participants who commit to praying for each other daily and checking in with one another on a daily basis or every couple of days throughout the Be Formed season.

Ask each group member individually if they would like to be connected with a Prayer Partner for the season and explain how it works:

SCHEDULED CHECK-INS

Check in with one another daily or every couple of days

- Ask about daily God moments, big or small!
- Follow up on Commitment Card goals
- Ask "How may I pray for you today?"

PRAYER

Pray daily for each other and follow up on prayer intentions

ENCOURAGEMENT

Encourage each other in Commitment Card goals and faith resolutions

Prayer Partners support each other in Commitment Card goals and faith resolutions, and they pray for each other daily. In doing so, Prayer Partners are able to build each other up and encourage one another along their faith journeys. This simple practice not only helps foster faith-centered friendships, but it also helps one grow in their own personal prayer life with God.

A great way to connect with your Prayer Partner daily is to simply reach out and ask, "How may I pray for you today?" One may feel drawn to ask for prayers of thanksgiving or petition, or for personal intentions.

God moments are instances throughout the day when one encounters Christ. As Prayer Partners commit to praying for each other, it is also good to discuss daily God moments, whether big or small, to see where the Lord is at work. In recognizing these daily blessings, we are able to grow in our awareness of God throughout our day.

Once you have confirmed who would like to be a Prayer Partner, make a list of names and begin to connect them by praying for guidance from the Holy Spirit. Some participants may request a specific Prayer Partner, which is always allowed as long as both group members agree. Listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and connect names however you feel prayerfully called to do so.

You are to connect Prayer Partners with one another and ask if you can share their contact information with each other. More information about Prayer Partners can be found on the Code of Conduct on page 21.

LECTIO DIVINA

Praying with Scripture

Lectio Divina is an important part of the Be Formed weekly sessions. When we pray with Scripture, we are being fed by the Word of God and allowing Him to speak to us and transform us. It is a time when we make room to encounter Christ and listen to His voice. Once you open your heart to His Word, the Holy Spirit will begin to work in you and through you.

There are 5 steps to Lectio Divina:

1. Preparatio (Preparation)
2. Lectio (Reading)
3. Meditatio (Meditation)
4. Oratio (Prayer)
5. Contemplatio (Contemplation)

The assigned Scripture passages each week are from the upcoming Sunday Gospel readings. This is done intentionally so that after having already prayed with the Gospel reading as a group, participants will come to Mass with a heart that is prepared and open to receive God's Word. Given the time constraint of each weekly session, you may find it beneficial to do an abbreviated version of Lectio Divina. Allow for the promptings of the Holy Spirit and see where the Lord is calling you!

Steps for Lectio Divina

1

PREPARATIO
(Preparation)

Ask everyone to call upon the Holy Spirit, and prepare your minds and hearts for God to enter in. You may decide to offer a specific prayer such as the Prayer to the Holy Spirit.

2

LECTIO
(Reading)

Read the Scripture slowly. Ask everyone to listen prayerfully for the word, phrase or image that stands out to them and write it down.

3

MEDITATIO
(Meditation)

Read the Scripture again. Ask everyone to ponder upon what God is speaking to them. Is it challenging or comforting? Follow this prompt: This word, phrase or image reminds me of, or connects to...

4

ORATIO
(Prayer)

Read the scripture one more time. Ask "How do you respond to God's word? How is your heart moved to dialogue back to God? Maybe you are drawn to offer a prayer of praise or thanksgiving. Maybe you are moved to joy, sorrow, peace or contrition."

5

CONTEMPLATIO
(Contemplation)

Now ask everyone to simply rest in God's presence. Close your eyes and imagine God looking upon you with great love. Be still and allow yourself to be loved by God.

WEEKLY MEETING STRUCTURE

*The typical duration for a weekly small group meeting is about **1 hour, however, s**ome groups may prefer to go over. It all depends on your group's preference and availability. Below is a guide for the Weekly Meeting Structure:*

1

WELCOME

- Begin with an opening prayer
- Call upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit

2

BLESSINGS

- Where did you recognize God's presence in your life this week?
- How have you experienced God acting in your life this week?

3

MASS

- What touched your heart at Mass this weekend?
- How was the Holy Spirit present with you during Mass?

4

WEEKLY VIDEO

- What struck you from this week's video?
- Were there any teachings from the speaker that were new for you?

5

LECTIO DIVINA

- As a group, go through as many of the steps of Lectio Divina together as time allows

6

CLOSING

- Conclude with prayer
- Thank participants and express excitement for the next session

Don't feel like you need to stick to a rigid structure in order to have a successful small group session. Some weeks you may spend more time on blessings and Lectio Divina, other weeks you may spend more time on the Mass and the Video. Always allow the Holy Spirit to guide your discussions!

FIRST SMALL GROUP SESSION

INTRODUCTIONS

Ask group members to introduce themselves. Suggest giving their name, home parish and a fun fact about themselves such as their job, family or hobbies.

ICEBREAKER

At your first session, make time for some icebreaker questions to get people comfortable sharing, such as: What is your favorite ice cream flavor? What was the last concert you attended, etc...

HOSPITALITY

Create an atmosphere of hospitality and trust by establishing and maintaining ground rules. Go over portions of the Code of Conduct if necessary. Maintain logistics by offering reminders of dates and locations & session start and end times.

COMMITMENT CARD

Explain that the Commitment Card is a personal aspect of Be Formed and that group members can prayerfully decide to take on one or two commitments and evaluate themselves every 30 days. This is something to share with Prayer Partners.

TIPS FOR STAYING ON TRACK

BE MINDFUL OF THE CLOCK

It may help to have an agenda for how long you would like to spend discussing each point. For instance, perhaps you would like to spend 15 minutes discussing Blessings and Mass, 30 minutes on the Weekly video, and 15 minutes on Lectio Divina. Always allow for the promptings of the Holy Spirit during your weekly sessions.

STAY ON TOPIC

If someone strays from the topic be sure to bring the conversation back by asking a new question or a different person to share circling back to the initial topic.

AVOID LETTING SOMEONE DOMINATE THE CONVERSATION

Extend gratitude to those who have shared, but welcome others who may be hesitant to speak up by inviting them to share. If someone begins to dominate the conversation, you can charitably thank them for their input and open the floor so that others can get a chance to share.

HOW TO HANDLE VARIOUS ISSUES

If at any time you feel your group is in danger, call 911 immediately. If you are unsure of how to handle any given situation, please contact us at beformed@dioceseofjoliet.org or a member of your parish's pastoral staff.

What to do if someone displays intense feelings such as depression, anxiety, or extreme anger:

If someone starts to display intense feelings, calmly ask them if they would stay and talk to you about this after the meeting. If the issue persists, you may suggest that the group stop and pray together. Then after the meeting, refer them to speak to a member of the clergy.

What to do if you or someone in your group believes a child or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger or harm:

If a group member discloses information to you that causes you to believe a child is in immediate danger or harm, call 911. If you know or suspect a child has been abused or neglected, contact your state's child protective services: Help In Your Area - NAPSA (napsa-now.org).

What to do if you know or suspect a child or vulnerable adult has been abused or neglected:

If you know or suspect a vulnerable adult has been abused or neglected, contact your state's adult protective services: Help In Your Area - NAPSA (napsa-now.org).

What to do if someone discloses an intent to harm themselves and/or someone else:

If at any time you feel someone in your group is in danger, assess the situation and call 911.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

BE FORMED Code of Conduct

The Be Formed Code of Conduct is signed off by all participants at the time of registration. If you would like to share any portion of this with your small group members, please feel free to do so or refer back as needed.

The goal is for the group to be unified as each Small Group Participant is a member of the Body of Christ.

SHARING

Sharing with your Be Formed small group is encouraged but **NOT** required. Feel free to share your thoughts, ideas, and experiences, while always being respectful of others. If you are asked to share and do not feel comfortable, you may simply say "I'll pass." Sharing your experience could add meaningful insights for other group members and give others a perspective that differs from their own. You can also foster growth for yourself when you share your thoughts and experiences.

- Always use appropriate language for a Christian faith group
- Avoid comments that are unkind or discriminatory
- Keep conversations related to the topic and be concise as meeting time is limited
- Don't overpower the conversation. Everyone should have an opportunity to share

LISTENING

Listen while others are speaking. You never know when the Holy Spirit might be sharing something with you through the opinions and experiences of others.

- Let other participants share without interruption
- Avoid having side conversations during group sharing
- Avoid cross-talk, which is speaking to one participant in the group rather than sharing with the group as a whole
- Avoid dominating the conversation
- Avoid gossip and criticism

ATTENDANCE

Try to attend your Be Formed small group weekly meetings and be on time. Come prepared by watching the Weekly Content videos before the meeting so you can share your thoughts. Some groups may watch the video together during the meeting, but you will have the videos available to you beforehand.

Facilitators understand that things may come up that cause you to miss a meeting. Please be courteous of the group by notifying your facilitator that you are not attending so they are not waiting for you to begin.

VIRTUAL ATTENDANCE

Be visually present to your small groups when meeting virtually. Other group members need to know who you are in order to be comfortable sharing their faith and personal experiences. If you are not comfortable being on camera with your virtual group meeting, please check with your facilitator(s) ahead of time, as you may need to consider signing up for a different group.

THE ROLE OF FACILITATORS

Please remember to be respectful to your group facilitator(s), and allow them to guide the group activity. Facilitators are NOT instructors. They are there to guide the conversation and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute.

What is the role of a facilitator?

- Encourage prayer to begin and end the meeting
- Create an atmosphere of hospitality and trust by establishing and maintaining ground rules
- Encourage participation and sharing
- Keep the group on topic and circle back to the topic if the conversation strays from the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Logistics: Reminders of dates, locations, and meeting times

What is **NOT** the role of a facilitator:

- **THEOLOGIAN:** While some facilitators may have a background in theology, it is best to direct theological questions OUTSIDE of the group (e.g. parish priests or deacons, Catechism, Vatican resources, etc)
- **COUNSELOR:** Small groups are NOT an appropriate place to handle emotionally intense feelings such as depression, anxiety, or extreme anger. If a group member displays this during the meeting, the facilitator should bring the discussion back to faith-sharing. The facilitator should refer to the Facilitator Handbook for guidance on how to respond to this

CONFIDENTIALITY

There is no requirement to share any personal information, but remember that other participants may share some personal information about their faith and experiences. Do NOT share this with anyone outside the group.

- What is shared in the group stays in the group
- Do not discuss others' personal information or experiences outside the meeting

If a participant discloses an intent to harm themselves and/or someone else, the facilitator will refer to their handbook and a report will be made to the proper authorities.

Additionally, if a disclosure is made of the known or suspected abuse or neglect of a child (an individual under the age of 18) or a vulnerable adult, a report will be made to the authorities of the respective state.
Facilitators should refer to their Facilitator Handbook for guidance with questions regarding confidentiality and may inquire about instances with Be Formed leadership at beformed@dioceseofjoliet.org

PRAYER PARTNERS

Your facilitator(s) will ask if you would like a Prayer Partner. They are asked to invoke the guidance of the Holy Spirit when pairing you up with your Prayer Partner.

- Always be respectful of your Prayer Partner
- Keep confidential information to yourself

If your Prayer Partner discloses information to you that causes you to believe a child is in immediate danger or harm, call 911. If you know or suspect a child has been abused or neglected, contact your state's child protective services. If you know or suspect a vulnerable adult has been abused or neglected, contact your state's adult protective services: Help In Your Area - NAPSA (napsa-now.org).
There may be instances where your Prayer Partner shares deeply personal experiences. Remember that you may not know the full story. Offer compassion and support. If a participant becomes emotional, avoid trying to "do something" or "fix" the situation. Just being there for them and allowing them to be heard may begin their healing journey. If a participant shares something painful, you can offer compassion, understanding, and concern rather than a solution.
Above all, pray for your Prayer Partner and the members of your small group, and entrust them into the care of the Lord who is the Divine Healer.

SUSTAINING THE MISSION

KNOW SOMEONE INTERESTED IN FACILITATING?

If you know of someone who is interested in becoming a Be Formed Facilitator, please reach out to us at beformed@dioceseofjoliet.org. We would love to guide them through the first steps and provide them with the training and tools to make facilitating a simple, joyful and blessed process.

CO-FACILITATORS

Successful and sustainable Be Formed Small Groups are often led by a team of Co-Facilitators, whether it be a couple or pair of men or women who co-facilitate together. When facilitators have a partner to lean on, the mission is strengthened, supported and encouraged.

FOSTERING CONTINUED GROWTH

Having another participant along on the journey to be trained for facilitating the next season keeps future movement and growth in motion. It is recommended to seek out someone to co-facilitate with to guide and train to be a new Facilitator during the duration of the season for the start-up of a new group for the following season.

CONTACT THE BE FORMED TEAM

For more information about Be Formed, visit our website at **www.beformed.net.** Here you can find a Digital Toolkit and resources to help Be Formed grow and flourish! If you have any questions at all, or if you would like support in growing Be Formed at your parish, please contact us by email at: beformed@dioceseofjoliet.org