

Leader's Guide: Snapshots of My Life

- Put out nametags and markers.
- Put out a list of members with their phone numbers and e-mail addresses.
- As people arrive, ask them to check that their phone number and e-mail are correct.

Chalice Lighting (5 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

We come together in an attitude of openness—not knowing quite what will happen, yet daring to receive a new idea, a new experience, sustenance for our minds and our hearts.

We come with an attitude of humility, knowing how much we need one another, how alone we can be in the world, how vulnerable if we face life solely by ourselves.

We come in the spirit of love, seeking human warmth and fellowship in the hands and faces of those around us.

—Adapted from Peter Lee Scott

Brief Introductions (10 min)

Go around the circle, each person telling one thing they hope for in this covenant group. (Go first to model.)

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence.

Group Business (5 min)

Tell everyone how glad you are that they are in the group and how much you're looking forward to getting to know them. Also tell them the following:

- “Usually any business is handled at the end of the meeting, and is quite brief. Today it is early in the meeting and will be longer since we're just beginning.”
- “Each meeting will last an hour and a half to two hours and will be centered on a particular topic. The topic for the next meeting will be given out at the end of the current meeting.”
- “The group will meet for approximately six to seven months.”
- Tell the group where the bathroom is.
- Have everyone look at the covenant on back of the bulletin, and then have the group read it. Ask one person to read the first covenant. Ask if there are any comments or problems. Can everyone agree to this? Continue through all the covenants.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read one sentence of the first reading. Continue around the circle, reading the following selections.

Introduce Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (5 min)

Tell the group that deep sharing and deep listening is the core of the covenant group. It is a unique way of sharing and listening, so the group will spend a few minutes getting acquainted with this process. Going around the circle, have each person read one paragraph at a time from the bulletin.

Round 1: The facilitator will pose a question related to the topic, and everyone has an opportunity to respond briefly.

Round 2: Everyone can speak about how you felt about this topic, something that touched you, a story you want to share.

Round 3: In the final round, the facilitator may introduce another question or the group may continue sharing as they have been.

During the sharing, one person speaks at a time into an appreciative silence. The only responses are non-verbal, although the leader may express thanks if that seems comfortable. A brief moment of silence between speakers lets the sharing “sink in.” Then, going in any order, the next person will share. This may seem awkward at first, but most groups find it very satisfying once they get used to it.

The one who is sharing has the job of speaking deeply from their heart about the topic. Listeners have the task of keeping an open heart to what is shared. The facilitator is responsible for helping speakers stay in their allotted time. It is assumed that everyone in the group will speak, but if someone does not want to speak, they may pass.

Ask for questions.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (45 min)

Round 1: Tell them: “There will only be one round of sharing at this first meeting since we’ve spent extra time going over the covenant and the deep sharing process. We’ll share our three snapshots with one another; we’ll each have about five to six minutes each. Since we want everyone to have a chance to share, I’ll wave at you when you have about a minute left. You may not have time to explain everything you had planned. Don’t worry; we have six months with one another, so there will be lots of time to share more fully. Tonight is just the start.”

(Go first to share as a model for the rest.)

Closing Words (2 min)

Each of us brings a separate truth here,
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.
We don’t come as empty vessels.
But rather we come as full people—people who have our own story and our own truth.
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience . . .
We gather together.
Together we have truths.
Together we have a story.
Together we are a community.

—Penny Hackett-Evans, adapted

Closing Song (2 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (2 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.