



Gospel sharing *A Leader's Guide*



***This Leader's Guide offers
a simple but proven method
for Gospel sharing in small groups.***

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Message from Archbishop Gérald C. Lacroix

Gospel sharing is a very effective means to deepen our understanding of our faith and to discover the richness of the Word of God. Since the Second Vatican Council, fifty years ago already, many methods have been proposed for Gospel sharing.

Pope Benedict XVI, when meeting with the clergy of his Diocese in Rome in February 2009, stated, “We must not be a circle closed in on ourselves. We have our customs but still we must be open and endeavour to create ‘vestibules,’ that is, places which will draw others closer /.../. With the help of the Word, we must seek to create what the early Church created with catechumenates: spaces in which one begins to live the Word, to follow the Word, to make it understandable and realistic, corresponding to forms of actual experience.”

I am convinced that Gospel sharing groups are a privileged means to help people start out. We ourselves need to get back in touch with the Gospel. Sharing in small groups – among priests, deacons, consecrated persons, laypersons, young and older persons – remains an ideal tool to help our faith grow.

Allow me to present a way to hold a **Gospel sharing**. I experienced it for years and saw it bear wonderful fruit. Many groups in the Church already use this method with great success. In France, the Philippines, South Africa and here at home, various groups find these steps very useful to listen to the Word of God and share it.

Obviously, there are other ways of going about it. The method given below may not be the best, but I am proposing it in the hope that it may be useful to you and help you delve into the Good News which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The meetings are not meant to be discussions or Bible courses, exegesis or other study groups, but Gospel sharing. There are other places to have study sessions or follow courses.

For many years now, our Church has been inviting us to make more room in our personal and community lives for the Word of God. The 2008 Synod of Bishops on the Word of God and the 2010 Apostolic Exhortation published by Pope Benedict XVI encourage us to explore the Word of God more often. In fact, "the Word of God is at the basis of all authentic Christian spirituality" (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, no. 86, 2010).

This Leader's Guide offers a simple but proven method for Gospel sharing in small groups. It will help you understand the spirit and the steps to follow during your meetings.

As you undertake the way of Gospel sharing in teams, I hope this faith adventure will bear much fruit for you and those around you. May your gatherings identify you ever more to Christ and his Gospel, so that we may all be faithful and generous disciples in service to the mission.

On our way with Jesus the Word,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Gerald C. Lacroix". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

† Gérald C. Lacroix
Archbishop of Quebec

December 8, 2012
On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Some Preliminary Notes

- A group on Gospel sharing usually consists of 4 to 10 persons who meet ideally in the home of one of the group members. When possible, it would be good for each member to receive the others in turn, in his or her own home.
- It is recommended that each member have a personal Bible, or at least a New Testament. It is not advisable to do the sharing with monthly misselettes or handouts (for example, *Living with Christ*, *Magnificat*, photocopies, etc.). Such publications are disposable, whereas when we use our own Bibles, we can add notes and underline verses. This also enables us to see the passage in its context. Different translations or editions of the Bible may be used.
- In this method, meetings for Gospel sharing last about one hour. The team may prolong with coffee, tea or juice and a few cookies. It is best to do so very simply, so that everyone can be at ease and not feel forced to spend unnecessarily. This brief social after the meeting helps create friendly bonds in the group and share news.
- Each group determines the frequency of its meetings. Experience shows that a weekly meeting is ideal since it enables team members to get to know one another. Meeting regularly also shows the importance we give the Word of God by reserving a place of choice for it during our week. Some teams choose to meet every other week. However, setting meetings every three or four weeks makes it difficult to develop relationships and maintain interest.

- Gospel sharing can take place around the dining room table or in the living room. To indicate that the team has gathered around the living Word of God and that Christ is present in a special way in his Word, it is recommended to place a lit candle or vigil light on the table. A crucifix can be added, or some flowers with an open Bible.
- When a group begins this new adventure, it is advisable that the same person lead until the group gets used to the method and procedure of the meeting. But after three or four meetings, leadership can be assumed by another team member.

A group usually consists of many different persons. Some may know about the Bible, some may have professional training while others may not. Some may have done Bible studies whereas others may be opening the Word of God for the first time. None of this matters. Each and every person comes into the presence of the Lord to receive his Word, to share it and discover the Good News it reveals. The method suggested enables all to participate very simply, according to their best.

Guidelines for Group Leaders

The group leader must:

- See to the orderly procedure of the meeting. Recall the points to follow as you go, especially if some team members are not used to this method of Gospel sharing.
- Mention that all participating members are equal before the Word of God. Around the table, no one is knowledgeable, expert, or ignorant. All are baptized persons who come to listen to the Word of God and want to share it.
- Graciously invite individuals who talk too long to shorten their contributions.
- Remind the group that a Gospel sharing is not a place for discussions, comments or explanations.
- Encourage every member of the group to participate, but without forcing anyone to speak up. It sometimes happens that a team member doesn't talk because of a personal situation, yet this doesn't mean he or she does not benefit by the sharing. Persons need to feel welcomed but also respected.
- Plan the steps in the sharing so that the meeting occurs within an hour, or an hour and a quarter.
- Remind the group of the date and place of the next meeting, and the name of the leader.

Nine-Step Method to Gospel Sharing

1 *Prayer to the Holy Spirit*

Start the meeting by calling on the presence of the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit may be the One opening our hearts to receive the Word. This prayer to the Holy Spirit may be a spontaneous one by the leader of the meeting, or an appropriate prayer from a book. A hymn to the Holy Spirit can also be used.

2 *Proclamation du texte*

One person reads the text to be shared during the meeting. He or she gives the reference and allows time for others to find it in their own Bibles. If need be, help those unsure how to locate the passage in their Bibles. The text chosen is usually the Gospel for next Sunday's Mass. This ensures communion with all the Christian communities who will be listening to this Gospel at Sunday celebrations, and avoids choosing passages that seem easier or that please us more.

The person reading the text stands, if possible, and all other members close their Bibles to listen to the proclamation of the text. There are two reasons for this. First, closing their books frees participants to be more attentive to the proclamation. Secondly, since all members may not have the same Bible translation, differences in vocabulary or expressions may cause distractions. Instead of listening to the text, some might tend to compare differences and end up not being attentive to the Gospel proclaimed. The person chosen reads the Gospel text aloud and slowly. Everyone listens attentively.

3 *Silence*

Then, for three to five minutes of absolute silence, the members read the Gospel text in their own Bibles. The leader invites those present to ask themselves whether – during the proclamation or while rereading the text personally – a word, expression or Gospel verse drew their attention or struck them in a particular way.

4 *Sharing a word, a verse or an element that seems the most important*

This first time of sharing enables those who so wish to read a verse – or part of a verse, or even just a word that struck them – out loud and **without any comment**. The others listen to this sharing, and silently repeat the word or verse in their hearts while meditating it. Everyone waits a few moments before the next person shares aloud in the same way. This makes it possible for the Word of God to continue circulating in the group.

5 *Second proclamation of the Gospel text*

Another member stands to proclaim the Word of God. Again, all are invited to close their Bibles and listen attentively.

6 *Sharing on the text based on this question: "What Good News have I discovered in this text?"*

After the second proclamation of the Gospel text, the leader invites members to answer the question suggested. Some moments of personal reflection are allowed. Then members share in turn the Good News they discovered in the text and say how it challenges their own faith. In order that this sharing may remain truly personal, each member speaks in the first person: "I...", "For me...", "In this text, I see that...", "I discovered that..."

This is a sharing. It must not become a discussion. Gospel sharing is not the place to explain to another or others what the text means, but rather to share how it resounds in my heart, how I hear it, and what it says to me.

7 *Third proclamation of the Gospel text*

A third member proclaims the Gospel text, as the others did previously.

8 *Personal prayer or contemplation*

For five minutes, the members pray in silence from their own observations, their meditation, and also what they heard others say. Each one chooses a favourite form of prayer to ponder the Gospel passage just heard – trust, praise, thanksgiving, repentance, request, intercession – **while asking the Lord how to translate this Word of God in his or her own life**. This silent prayer time is a privileged moment with the Lord which enables one to enter into a deep relationship with God. Listening and welcoming the Word lead to such intimate dialogue.

9 *Sharing on the prayer*

Finally, members who want to can share a few points of their prayer. This is a fine way for the group to experience the fruits of personal dialogue with the Lord. The Word of God received, shared and prayed over can nurture the group's prayer, and help it conclude the meeting with a community dialogue with the Lord.



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