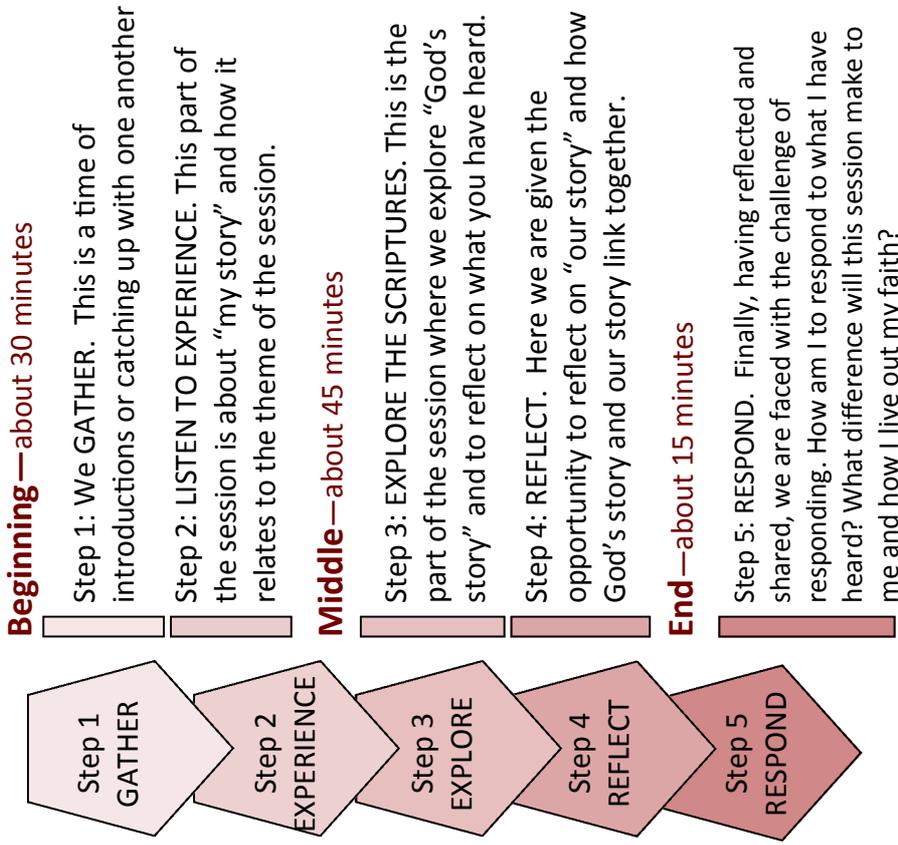


Structure of the Meeting

In planning your sessions, it is important to know that each session has a beginning, a middle and an end. Putting it into practice:



Diocese of Westminster

Agency for Evangelisation

<http://rcdow.org.uk/faith/small-groups/>

LENT 2017

Proclaim Westminster
building missionary parishes



Introduction to faith sharing materials

Meeting Mercy

Welcome to this season of faith-sharing material to accompany us on our journey through Lent. Our gathering each week will follow the Sunday Gospel Readings and the teaching of Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* and his Apostolic Letter to mark the end of the Holy Year of Mercy, *Misericordia et Misera*.

The Sunday Gospels for Year A of Lent – the Temptations, the Transfiguration, the Woman at the Well, the Man Born Blind, the Raising of Lazarus – will give us a brilliant lens through which to look at our own lives, the life of our parish communities and the lives of those around us. The Holy Father’s Letter, *Misericordia et Misera*, invites us to “*unleash the creativity of mercy*”, will spur us to reflect deeply and to dream daringly.

I hope and pray that everyone who embarks on this faith-sharing season will find it an experience of rich discovery and deepening discipleship.

Fr Chris Vipers
Director of the Agency for Evangelisation

The materials have been written by the members of the Agency for Evangelisation: Fr. Chris Vipers, Mary Crowley, Austra Cane, Adrian Cullen and edited by Diana Klein. The structure of the meetings has been taken from *At your word, Lord* and this introduction booklet is an edited version of their introduction materials.

Our journey through Lent

As we journey through Lent this year, we listen to God in the sacred scriptures seeking God's mercy so that our lives may be transformed and, through our service to others, share the joy of God's mercy. In his letter *Misericordia et Misera*, Pope Francis urges us to meditate on the words of St. Paul, who in referring to his own journey of faith, confesses that he was the greatest of sinners, "but for this reason I received mercy" (1 Tim 1:12-13, 16).

The dynamic of your community and reflections will be enabled by following these simple guidelines.

Leaders

Each community will have its own leader. A leader is not someone with all the answers who is there to put everybody else right. He or she is a fellow participant but with the particular responsibility of facilitating the community by:

- Preparing ahead of each session
- Developing a warm, accepting and open environment
- Guiding the group through the faith sharing process outlined on the following page
- Distributing the various tasks among members of the group
- Listening to what participants have to say
- Keeping the group on track
- When necessary, asking questions to keep the discussion moving
- Being flexible
- Gently including more hesitant members
- Ensuring that every participant has the opportunity to speak.

With the help of your group leader and other members of your faith

sharing community, we would encourage you to see the small community meeting not merely as a discussion group where you just talk about ideas but as a sharing group in which you might grow in faith. Indeed, as Jesus says, "where two or three gather in my name, there I am in the midst of them."

Gathering

Gathering as a small community to share prayer, life and faith is an important aspect of parish life. This is a sacred time. When you come together, it is important that you take the time to get to know one another. Therefore, in the first session, begin with introductions and, in subsequent sessions, take time to ask one another how you are, what has happened since you last met, and if someone is new to the group, take the time for introduction.

Hospitality and environment are very important to the small community process. Try to have a reflective environment with as few distractions as possible. You may want to have a candle where you gather in order to create a reflective atmosphere and you will want to have a Bible as a sign of the central role of the Word.

The suggested time for each session is 90 minutes. Prayer will probably take different forms in your group; people in the group should be invited to lead the prayer and we will make some suggestions. It is helpful to try varied ways of praying; some may be more comfortable with one style while others with another. Ordinarily, it is good to have about 15 minutes of prayer. Silence is an important part of the process. Don't be afraid to pause during your prayer time or, indeed during the reflection time for some quiet.

Each week, we have an opportunity to respond. It may be a good time to assess our priorities and see how we are living our faith in the totality of our lives: in our families, in our relationships, in our work environment. We may not need to do more; we may need to do less. This is the time to look at how we are living the values of Jesus and perhaps to identify new behaviours and attitudes.