

# Living as a Confident Daughter of God

A Faith-Sharing Guide for Catholic Women

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**Small Group Facilitator's Guide**

Thank you for choosing this faith-sharing guide for your small group. I hope this facilitator's guide will help leaders of small groups feel confident in their role.

The purpose of this guide is help small-group facilitators guide the discussion, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate, understand, and reflect on the issues presented.

For the first session, it's important to help the participants become comfortable with the format and dynamics of a faith-sharing group and to become better acquainted with one another. Be sure to go over the guidelines in the introduction of the book, which cover the basic "ground rules" for small faith-sharing groups.

For every session, the facilitator can ask for volunteers to read aloud the story, Scripture passage, and church document selection. This helps re-familiarize everyone to the content of the session.

Facilitators should make sure that they have gone over each session carefully beforehand and have responded to all the questions. This guide provides comments for many of the questions in each session, but in cases where the answer to the question is fairly obvious, there are no additional comments.

Remember to pray for your group in between sessions and to pray that the Holy Spirit will be the true leader of each session. So much can be gained from participating in a small faith-sharing group. May the Lord bless you for stepping out in faith as a facilitator, and may your gathering together bear much fruit, both in your own life and in the lives of those in your group.

## **Session 1: Confidence in God's Embrace**

### **Scripture: Luke 15:11-32**

The first two questions are designed to help participants dive deeper into the meaning of the parable. Both the younger and older son did not really know or understand their father. For different reasons, they didn't recognize that their father's love was available to them.

The third question is an opportunity for participants to share personally. The facilitator should be prepared to set the tone by volunteering to start the sharings. This does not have to be a dramatic conversion story. Even a story about a small and seemingly insignificant event in your life in which you recognized God loving you is appropriate. Keep your story brief enough to give others a chance to share. You may want to get the conversation going by alluding to the introductory story about Sherry and asking if anyone has had a similar experience. You may also want to focus on the word "accepting," as we often find it hard to accept God's love, even when we know that he does love us.

### **From the Church:**

The first question is again one that encourages personal testimony and sharing. Telling our stories makes our faith concrete and encourages everyone in their faith journey. As facilitator, be sure you are ready to share with a story. Again, it doesn't have to be earth-shattering. Sometimes the smallest thing can have the greatest impact on us. This question can lead some participants to grow in awareness of God's love as they learn to interpret events in their lives as experiences that God loves them—for example, a friend calls to encourage them just when they need it.

The second question can lead to a discussion about what leads to a heavy and hardened heart. Perhaps our hearts are heavy because of the burdens we carry and fail to surrender to God or because of unforgiveness or resentment.

For question 3, we may have feelings of ambivalence toward the cross because we are so sorry that Jesus had to suffer for our sins. This question is meant to raise our awareness of the reality of the cross—that it is first and foremost a sign of God's love for us.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: We all have trouble really believing the God's love is unconditional. This question helps us internalize that the good news is that God's love doesn't depend on us or what we do—it is unconditional. You may want to talk again here about the parable of the prodigal son, which Jesus told to bring this truth home to us.

Question 2: The knowledge and experience of God's love should change our lives in some way or another. The obvious answer would be that it helps us turn away from sin, but it can also free us up to love others unconditionally. However, the women in your group may be at different points on their spiritual journey, so be careful not to pressure anyone to answer this question.

Question 3: Our feelings of worthlessness are often an obstacle to receiving God's love. Many women struggle with such feelings. Stress here that none of us is worthy—only Christ makes us worthy.

Question 4: You may want to bring up the story of the woman who wipes Jesus feet with her tears (Luke 7:36-50) or the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:20-35). The point here is that we are much more able to give love and mercy when we receive it so abundantly from God.

## **Session 2: Confidence in God's Presence**

**Scripture: Psalm 23**

Most people are familiar with this psalm. The point here is to read it in a way so as to see how God is constantly attentive to us and our needs. Think of how a shepherd tends his sheep, even sleeping with them at night, and never letting them out of his sight.

The third question in this section is a great opportunity to suggest ways to draw closer to God. Again, as a facilitator, you will want to have ready to share concrete ways that you have used to stay in the Lord's presence.

### **From the Church:**

The point of these questions is to help participants internalize the truth that God dwells in their souls always and that they can turn to him at any moment. For the second question, you can encourage participants to go through their daily routine and pinpoint specific times in their day when they can turn to God with a short prayer or praise.

Question 3: When we invite God into our souls, we are actively disposed to receive him. Stress how such a disposition helps us to become more aware of God's presence in us.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1. This question can stimulate sharing of stories of how we experience God's presence at Mass, in confession, and in Scripture. Specific Scripture passages that are mentioned during the session often encourage participants to turn to these same passages later on their own.

Questions 2 and 3 look at both sides of the coin: times when we sense God's presence and times when we don't. Let participants share their experiences, especially how they reacted and the steps they took when they couldn't feel his presence.

Question 4: You might want to stress how we often experience God's presence through others. If possible, be prepared to offer a specific example from your own life.

## **Session 3: Confidence in God's Grace**

### **Scripture: Luke 1:26-38**

Question 1: Encourage participants to recall the challenging or mysterious events of Mary's life: the flight to Egypt, the visit of the Magi, the finding in the temple, at the foot of the cross.

Question 3: Brainstorm together. Some possible traits that could be mentioned include openness, flexibility, faith, and trust.

### **From the Church:**

These questions present an opportunity to grow in understanding of what grace is, especially question two. The point here is that we don't earn grace, and that it is there for the asking.

Question 3 can also illuminate the relationship between grace and the Holy Spirit. You may want to read the *Catechism*, paragraphs 1996 to 2005, and especially the entire paragraph of 2003, to enrich your discussion and understanding.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1 may bring up stories of trials or difficulties that participants have experienced. These types of sharings help to bring the group closer together. However, you may want to stress again at this point that whatever is shared is confidential and should stay in the group so participants feel safe revealing more about themselves and their lives.

Question 4: Spend some time going through the list of the various roles that women fulfill. You may want to end the session praying for specific graces that the women feel they need to fulfill God's call for their lives.

## **Session Four: Confidence in Our Freedom in Christ**

### **Scripture: John 8:31-36**

Like the Jews in this passage, we often have a mistaken notion of freedom. This Scripture passage crystallizes the meaning of Christian freedom. We are free because Christ set us free. As we stay close to him and obey his commandments, we grow in freedom.

Question 3 may bring up the participants' various experiences of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Not all of these experiences may have been positive. If negative experiences are shared, try to stress that this does not dilute the power of the sacrament, to free us from sin, nor the grace we receive by partaking of it.

### **From the Church:**

Question 1 may be a different way of looking at the cross than most people have ever viewed it previously. We know that Jesus' death on the cross opened the way to heaven, but we forget that we can put our faith in that victory to help us avoid sin now. This question is meant to reorient our thinking.

Question 2 could be an opportunity to share an example in your life that showed how the Holy Spirit helped you to avoid sin or a negative habit.

Question 3: Encourage the women to really think about what burdens them and why they often do not feel the freedom that Christ won for us.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1 will probably stimulate much discussion, as the world's view of freedom often means that we can do whatever we want. Even as Christians these attitudes subtly affect our thinking. We may even experience envy of women who seem to have no responsibilities or attachments. Emphasize that this is not true Christian freedom.

Question 2 is not meant to encourage women to abandon their responsibilities, but to see them instead as opportunities to work for Christ and his kingdom. The changes they might want to make may simply be shifts in attitude. On the other hand, some women may be trying to "do it all" and thus feel unnecessarily overwhelmed, so changes in their choices may also be important. However, as facilitator, avoid giving "advice," even if you see an obvious change that is needed.

Question 3 requires some soul searching. Again, avoid any statements that may seem judgmental.

Question 4 is another question that may require some soul searching on the part of the participants. It's important here to let them know that they can share about their close relationships without necessarily disclosing who they are speaking about.

## **Session Five: Confidence in the Power of Prayer**

### **Scripture: John 11:38-42**

Jesus' prayer provides a model for us. He goes to his Father in complete confidence, even thanking him for the answer before he receives it. The questions in this section help participants to explore how their own way of approaching God in prayer compares to how Jesus approaches his Father in heaven.

Questions 2 and 3 can help participants explore the type of relationship they have with their heavenly Father. Is there an intimacy that frees them to go to God with their requests? Do they trust him to hear their prayers? These questions can open up opportunities to encourage the women to draw closer to their Father, who loves them and wants them to come to him with their needs.

### **From the Church:**

These questions also encourage us to draw closer to our Father. Only then will we have the boldness to come to him with our requests, to ask what seems impossible, and to depend on him for all our needs.

Question 3: Encourage women to be honest. Assure them that doubt and faith can exist at the same time and that doubts are part of our faith journey. You may want to offer to pray with someone who is struggling with doubts.

**For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: As participants share their responses, they will no doubt be giving ideas to other members of the group of new and different spiritual disciplines they may not have tried before. This is beneficial for everyone. Encourage as many ideas as possible, as well as personal stories.

Question 2: You may want to propose that the women regularly share their prayer requests with one other member of the group.

Question 3: Brainstorm for ideas. There are many traits and dispositions that make us powerful intercessors, including persistence, faith, compassion, and other-centeredness. You may want to refer to the story of St. Monica, and discuss what qualities made her a powerful intercessor.

Question 4: Responses could include stories that participants have read about, as well as those they have personally experienced. These stories are meant to build one another's faith that God does answer our prayers.

## **Session 6: Confidence in God's Plan for Our Lives.**

**Scripture: Acts 16:11-15, 40**

Not everyone may be familiar with this story. The questions provide background information on what eventually happened. The goal of these questions is to help women realize that God does have a plan for his life, and it will unfold if we listen to him and remain open. Openness can be a challenge, especially if God wants us to do something that's outside our comfort zone.

Question 1: Brainstorm together for ways that we can better listen to the Holy Spirit, even in the midst of our busy lives. We may have to carve out special times to be with the Lord so we can really listen to him.

**From the Church:**

This section of the *Catechism* is somewhat dense and may require some time to unpack. It also requires some reorientation of our thinking. The world tells us our mission is to be successful. The church is telling us our mission is to complete the work of creation. Spend some time discussing what that might be.

Question 2: Stress that our prayers and sufferings can be part of the work to build the kingdom, in addition to our actions. Encourage them to think of a time in their lives when this was the case.

Question 3 may be challenging if the women do not view themselves as co-workers in God's kingdom. Encourage them to see that everything they do—going to Mass, taking care of their children at home, working—can be a way to build God's kingdom. Challenge them to come up with other ways they can participate in his work.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

These questions are interrelated. They encourage women to review their past lives to see how God was working out his plan for them, and then to look forward to examine what else he is calling them to do. Since it can be difficult to review our lives if we have experienced hardships or difficulties, be respectful of women who would rather not volunteer a response. However, you may want to encourage them to take these questions to prayer. Looking back on how God has worked in our lives can be a fruitful exercise and often produces gratitude in us as we see God's hand in retrospect.

If the participants have prayed through these questions before the session, they may already have something to share about what God may be calling them to do in the future and may be excited to share about it.

## **Session 7: Confidence in the Body of Christ**

### **Scripture: Acts 9:10-20**

This passage shows clearly how God works through the members of his body, the Church, to bring other people to himself. You might want to stress how we all help one another to the Lord, which is one of the purposes of getting together in small faith-sharing groups.

### **From the Church:**

These questions can help reorient our thinking from viewing church as an institution or as a building we go to pray to church as a gathering of our family. This can be a challenging shift to make, as it requires us to care for and love others as our brothers and sisters.

Question 3: Brainstorm together for ways to really live out our faith as a family of God. It can be something as simple as calling someone who is ill to cheer them up or letting them know you are praying for them. You may want to bring up specific instances in which you lived out your faith in this way with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: All of us struggle with the temptation to rely only on ourselves because we think that if we ask for help or support, we are weak. To get the discussion going, you may want to be ready with an example to share from your own life of a time when you struggled with this temptation.

Question 2: In responding to this question, it may help to contrast a relationship not centered on Christ with a relationship that is. Often our relationships in Christ are richer because we share the deepest part of ourselves with the other person. However, we can enrich relationships with those who aren't Christian by living out our call to be loving, compassionate, and forgiving.

Question 3: Brainstorm together to come up with obstacles that prevent us from viewing our fellow Christians as brothers and sisters. One obstacle may be that we look only at the differences between ourselves and other Christians and fail to see ourselves as united at a deeper level in Christ.

Question 4: The first part of this question could be difficult for some if they have never felt supported by other Christians, although being in a faith-sharing group together should naturally provide that support. Be sensitive to those who have never experienced such support or are not even aware that it is part of the Christian life. The second part of question four can best be answered in a brainstorming discussion.

## **Session 8: Confidence in Eternal Life**

### **Scripture: 2 Maccabees 7:1-2, 20-23**

Both the story and the Scripture passage can be challenging, especially for those who avoid the topic of death. In this Scripture story, the mother of Maccabees provides a cogent argument for her belief in eternal life. You can use her reasoning as a way to launch the discussion.

Question 3: Most of us cannot imagine being a martyr for the faith, but we can be witnesses to our faith by living our lives with an eternal perspective and a firm belief in God's desire to live with us eternally. Encourage the participants to see that they are witnesses by how they live and what they believe.

### **From the Church:**

The *Catechism* selections are just a small portion of the section on death and heaven (1002-1014). It may be helpful to read these sections prior to the session. The first two questions are meant to stimulate a general discussion about heaven and to acknowledge that we all have a longing for it deep within our hearts.

Question 3 will help participants realize that the Church teaches that someday we will all have glorified bodies in the new heaven and new earth, and that it will in some way resemble the glorified body of Jesus.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1 should generate a lively discussion on our “heavenly” experiences. These can be very upbuilding and help us to see that we can experience heaven on earth and that these experiences are only a glimpse of our actual destiny in Christ.

Question 2 can help participants think about how they can live their lives always prepared to die. Often our preparations for death are things we should be doing now, like reconciling with someone or communicating our feelings of love and affection.

Question 3 can help participants learn more about the beautiful Catholic teaching of the communion of saints and encourage them to pray to their loved ones. The *Catechism* selections mentioned above can help shed greater light on this teaching.

Question 4: If the participants have prayed through this last question, encourage them to share about their feelings.

## **Session 9: Confidence in Our Humanity**

### **Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:14-17**

The concept of “putting to death” our old selves can be a bit frightening because it means we have to honestly look at ourselves and then make choices that involve change and turning away from bad habits and sins. In the first question, you might want to stress that we cannot do this on our own, but only through Christ and the victory he won for us on the cross.

Question 2 can be enlightening for women when they realize that their opinions of themselves do not usually reflect what the Lord thinks of them. We might love ourselves more if we realized how much God loves us.

Question 3 may produce a wide variety of answers. Encourage the women to brainstorm to figure out what it really means, day to day, to live in Christ, not in a general “we should be more loving way” but very specifically, from the moment we get up in the morning until the moment we go to bed at night.

### **From the Church:**

This passage from Pope John Paul II can be a bit challenging, so after it is read aloud, ask if everyone understands it. One of the objectives of this session is to help women come to realize that their dignity and value come from Christ incarnate, not from what the

world thinks of them. This is the main point that can be taken from the both the passage and the questions.

Question 3: The facilitator can also emphasize that it is Jesus who is the “new creation,” the one we can look to when we want to see how to live and act. He gives us the model for our own humanity. What a great honor, as well, for us as men and women, that God would save us by becoming a man himself.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1 may bring up some interesting responses, both positive and negative. Encourage the women to move beyond whatever messages we received as children so that we can truly internalize the truth of who we are, daughters of a loving God.

Question 2 is an opportunity to discuss the importance of being aware of our thoughts and how they can influence us, both positively and negatively. We can renew our minds by not listening to false, negative messages about ourselves or others, and by continually affirming what is true about our faith. Brainstorm practical ways to keep a check on our thoughts—perhaps be memorizing pertinent Scripture passages.

Question 3 addresses the temptation to beat ourselves up for being human instead of superhuman. We often don’t want to accept our human emotions or limitations, for example, that we get angry or tired. Try to give the women in the group hope that they can accept and deal with their weaknesses without giving in to sin.

Question 4 is an opportunity to point out that God wants us to be grateful for making us who we are, despite our faults and limitations. It is only in accepting and loving ourselves that we can truly accept others.

## **Session 10: Confidence in Our Femininity**

### **Scripture: Proverbs 31:10-31**

Women who are unfamiliar with this passage may be surprised to find such an enterprising, active woman in the Old Testament. Stress how the woman is praised not for her beauty but for her personal holiness and resourcefulness

### **From the Church:**

Since there is still much confusion about men and women and their roles today, it may help to read additional sections of the *Catechism* for this session, aloud, from paragraphs 369 to 373. This will help to clarify question 1. You might want to emphasize that despite what is often said about Church teaching, especially in regard to the priesthood, the Church does not believe that women are inferior to men.

Questions 2 and 3: Encourage the women to recognize God's creative design for men and women, who are to be helpmates to one another and who are to complement one another. The tension that often exists between men and women and their roles could be diffused when we have an appreciation for God's plan for us.

**For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: It can be enlightening to look back on the messages we received as girls and see how they affected us later on. However, be careful not to let the discussion get stalled here. The point is to become aware of how we internalize ideas about ourselves that may not have a basis in truth.

Question 2: Help the women see how we unconsciously internalize false messages about our femininity from the media. This can make us insecure and overly concerned with looking younger or more glamorous.

Question 3 may generate some discussion as women may have different ideas about what constitutes femininity. Stress how traditional feminine qualities have contributed to building up family life, society, and the church, and that these qualities should be valued, not denied or denigrated.

Question 4 may produce some good ideas for how to encourage young women today.

## **Session 11: Confidence in Our Vocation**

**Scripture: Luke 2:22-24, 36-38**

In these Scripture passages, the vocations of both marriage and the single life are portrayed. In responding to these questions, stress how Mary, Joseph, and Anna embraced their God-given vocation and how their actions related to and flowed from the demands of their vocation.

**From the Church:**

The idea that everyone has a God-given vocation can be a new one for many Catholics, who often associate the term "vocation" only with being a priest, brother, or sister. Many have probably never viewed their vocation as a gift, or as the primary way to love as Christ loves. This is what gives our vocations meaning. Encourage the women to view their vocations with gratitude, even if at times it has been difficult to stay faithful to that vocation.

**For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: Set a tone of respect and a nonjudgmental spirit in responding to this question. There may or may not be single women in your faith-sharing group, but in any

case, we all need to be sensitive to the feelings of those who have not fully embraced their state in life (such as being single). There may be unresolved feelings that some women may not want to discuss or be able to share at this point.

Question 3: Be prepared with a story to share and encourage the other members of the group to share about a time when they sought and received God's help in fulfilling their vocation. These stories may help those who are currently struggling to be true to their vocations.

Question 4 is another opportunity to share deeply with one another about our lives and to give praise to God for his call and our response to that call.

## **Session 12: Confidence in Our Call to Holiness**

**Scripture: Matthew 5:14-16, 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13**

Questions 1 and 2: You might want to point out that the reason God calls us to be holy is so we may give witness to his grace and bring others to him through that witness. We are not seeking to become perfectionists or plaster saints, but real people whose love for God overflows into love for others.

Question 3: It's important to stress that we don't become holy on our own. First we must make the decision that we want to grow in holiness, and then we need to rely on God and his grace to help us do so.

### **From the Church:**

Question 1: We often, even subconsciously, think that priests, brothers, and sisters are the ones that are called to holiness, not us. It's important to emphasize that everyone is called to holiness, and that each of us can find many opportunities to grow in holiness in our day-to-day lives.

Questions 2 and 3: To enrich your discussion, you might suggest that participants refer to the *Catechism*, paragraphs 1691–1698. For question 3, emphasize that sometimes we do not realize that the Holy Spirit was working within us until we look back over a situation or incident. Also, encourage the participants to consider situations that are rather ordinary (maybe they said a kind word to someone or called at just the right time)—situations that are significant nonetheless because they heard the voice of the Holy Spirit and listened to it.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: You might want to refer back to the story of Rose. Encourage the participants to think of ordinary people they may know or be acquainted with.

Question 2: We often equate holiness with being free from sin, but it also involves reaching out to others in love and building the kingdom. Participants may be hesitant to definitively say exactly what God is calling them to do, but you may want to encourage them to pray about it and discuss it at your next meeting.

Question 3: Emphasize that no one is perfect, and that when we aren't able to move forward when we fail, we miss additional opportunities to grow in holiness. You may want to mention the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a wonderful way we can move forward.

Question 4: Here is an opportunity to share your favorite Scripture verses. Some of these passages may have to do with God's call to us to be holy, while others simply may be about God's love, mercy, etc. The important thing here is to share meaningful passages with one another. Often we are able to memorize and internalize Bible verses when we know they hold great meaning for our friends and relatives.

## **Session 13: Confidence in Our Talents**

**Scripture: Acts 18:1-4, 18-19, 24-28**

In this set of questions, you may want to stress that Aquila, Priscilla, and Apollos had no special training to become missionaries or preachers. They obeyed God's call and stepped out in faith and the Lord developed their talents in this area.

### **From the Church:**

Question 1: Focus on the consequences of not using our talents. Not only do we miss opportunities to develop ourselves and our gifts, we also fail to build the kingdom.

Question 2: We often succumb to envy when we see the gifts and talents of others. The point of the *Catechism* selection is that we are not all equally gifted, but that this is part of God's plan because we can then share our gifts with others.

Question 3: When we look at our gifts from God's viewpoint, we see them very differently. We do not have gifts and talents for our sake, but to serve and help others.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: Participants may be a bit hesitant to discuss their gifts, either because they don't really know what their talents are or they don't want to seem boastful. They may also have lacked opportunities growing up to develop their gifts. If this is the case, and you know one another well, you may be able to help one another identify specific talents and gifts. For example, you might say, "Mary, you are so organized. That must help you to get a lot done at home and at work."

Question 2: All of us have been in situations where we don't think we have the natural gifts to get a job done but have done it anyway. Ask the women to think of such situations.

Question 3: If participants have not prayed beforehand about this question, ask them to do so, and spend a few minutes discussing it at the next session. Encourage them to be open to whatever the Lord might say to them.

Question 4: Our culture tends to put a lot of pressure on young people to succeed, but we rarely ask them to consider their career decisions in light of building God's kingdom. Try to keep the focus by discussing *how* to talk to young people.

## **Session 14: Confidence in God's Call to Love One Another**

**Scripture: Luke 10:25-37**

Questions 1 and 2: These questions help participants realize that love is not necessarily just a feeling but a decision to be committed to another person, followed by a set of actions that demonstrates that commitment.

Question 3: You might want to point out here that we know that Jesus loves us because he died on the cross for us. This action demonstrated his love and commitment.

### **From the Church:**

Questions 1 and 2: Love comes with a cost. Often out of love for others, we have to give up our own way. We also have to forbear with those who annoy or irritate us. You might want to emphasize that we need to be "prayed up" to meet the demands of love, always going back to Christ, especially in the Eucharist, in order to be filled with his love so that we can better love others.

Question 3: We all harbor attitudes that can act as obstacles to love. Listing all of them can be discouraging, so you may want to ask the participants to focus on just one attitude that hinders them from loving others and come up with a plan to change that attitude.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: This is a good opportunity to brainstorm the many different ways we can express our love to others, whether that's through physical affection, gift-giving, service, or affirmation. Perhaps members of the group could decide to express their love to their family in way that's out of the ordinary over the next week.

Question 2: To ensure that participants don't criticize or speaking negatively about a person they find difficult to love, keep the focus in the discussion on asking Jesus to give us a heart of love.

Question 3: You may want to ask participants for real-life examples of how they went about "speaking the truth in love" as well as emphasizing the importance of how the message can be delivered compassionately and lovingly.

Question 4: Sometimes we are manipulative or controlling without even realizing it. Members of the group may want to talk about how to recognize when they are being controlling as well as ways to resist it.

## **Session 15: Confidence in Our Call to Work for Justice**

### **Scripture: Luke 16:19-31**

This parable can make us uncomfortable because we can so easily imagine ourselves as Lazarus, oblivious to the needs of others right outside our door. The point is not to feel guilty but to become more aware of the needs of others and take some concrete action to meet those needs. We can start within our own families, as question three suggests.

### **From the Church:**

Question 1: Both the selection from the Vatican II document and from Pope John Paul II clearly states the responsibility Christians have to participate in the world to make it a better place for everyone. This is especially true for the laity, as they are called to live and work in the world. You might suggest that the members brainstorm ways that women in particular, with their unique gifts (their special concern and relationship with children; their role in the family; their compassion and sensitivity), are called to work for justice.

Question 2: You might want to recall times in history when people who worked for social justice were also bearing witness to Christ, such as the civil rights movement or the fight against abortion.

Question 3: In our efforts to fight for justice, we may be tempted to act violently, even if that only means we resort to yelling at someone to argue our point. Discuss how we can avoid this temptation.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

The first two questions are related, and may result in participants sharing about their past experiences. It is always helpful for members of the group to share their lives, as it deepens our relationships with one another, but as the facilitator, try to keep the discussion focused and moving along. Also try to expand the members' ideas of what

constitutes “working for justice.” Even something as simple as contributing to a food drive or visiting the elderly in a nursing home is a way of helping others.

Question 3: There are many qualities of the heart that can be mentioned here. One important one is an openness to God in prayer so that we can discern what he may be calling us to do.

Question 4: this may be an opportunity to further explore the social teachings of the church. For starters, you could direct members to the *Catechism*, paragraphs 2419 to 2425.

## **Session 16: Confidence in Our Call to Share the Good News**

**Scripture: John 4:7-26, 28-30, 39, 42**

Although most people are familiar with this gospel story, they may never have read it in the context of evangelization. Encourage the participants to be aware of the details in this story. Why did Jesus start a conversation with the woman? How did he answer her doubts and concerns? What was her response? Note the Samaritan woman’s eagerness to tell others about Jesus.

### **From the Church:**

Most of us shrink from the duty to evangelize, but it is the responsibility of every Christian, especially the laity, who are in the world and have numerous opportunities to share the good news. However, it often helps to explain that evangelization can consist of simple actions, like mentioning how wonderful it was to be at Mass to a co-worker or sharing a blessing from the Lord. The discussion can generate these types of sharings to encourage the entire group to look for and take advantage of such opportunities.

Question 3: Probably many of us know someone with whom we could share our Christian witness. This would be a good opportunity to brainstorm ways they could introduce the topic. Remember to stress that all we do in this area must be done above all with a loving heart.

### **For Further Reflection and Discussion:**

Question 1: Many people who regularly evangelize are able to tell their story of how God changed their life in a brief but effective way. You might want to encourage the participants to write down their story so they are always ready to share it with someone.

Question 2: Many obstacles prevent us from sharing the good news, including busyness, fear, pride, and a lack of gratitude for what God has done for us. To be able to overcome these obstacles, we need to regularly encourage one another. Family members

can present a special challenge. In such cases, you might want to mention that it is important not to nag and that we may want to evangelize through our actions rather than by words.

Question 3: Encourage the woman to talk often to their children and young people in their lives about what the Lord has done, and is doing, for them. Conversations of this type often bear fruit years later in the lives of young people.

Question 4: If the women haven't spent time praying for an answer to this question beforehand, encourage them to schedule some time later in the week to think about someone they could reach out to with the good news.