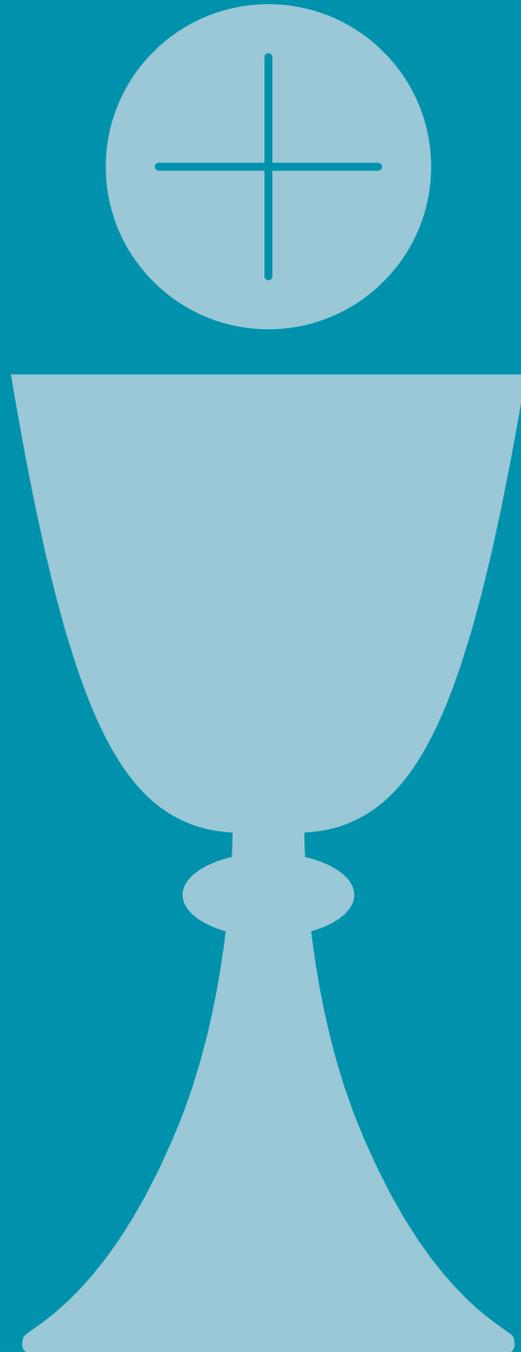


Small Group Leader Guide for Teens



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Welcome!



Welcome to *Living the Eucharist Small Group Leader Guide for Teens*. Thank you for your commitment and ministry to the teens of your parish. This booklet is designed to be a guide and resource for you as you facilitate the small group meetings for youth. You will also need your own copy of the *Participant Booklet for Teens*.

The small group component of *Living the Eucharist* is an integral part of the larger parish experience. The following pages will help prepare, equip, and guide you in your role as a facilitator. The small group format is designed to help foster Christian community, lively interaction among participants, spiritual growth, and a deeper celebration and experience of the Eucharist.

This guide is an important and practical resource for leading teen small groups. Yet it cannot stand on its own. Please commit to praying the Leader's Prayer to the Holy Spirit (page 3 of this guide) before each gathering. Rely on the Holy Spirit to give you wisdom, direction, courage, and proper discernment for each meeting.

Generally speaking, each gathering is divided into two main movements. The first part is topical and intended to help make Sunday Mass more meaningful in the lives of the teen participants. The second movement involves prayerfully reflecting on a selection from the upcoming Sunday Mass readings. With the focus on both Word and Eucharist, each gathering is intended to help

facilitate a deeper experience of Jesus Christ within the context of Christian community.

Looking at the gathering in more detail, the small group format is composed of a series of specific components. Each component has a role to play in the meeting, and the sequence of components is designed to achieve a purposeful end. Please carefully read the section "Meeting Format and Sequence," on pages 3 to 5 of this guide, for a better understanding of the meeting components and dynamics.

For support in leading your small group for teens, be sure to read the section titled "Leading Small Groups for Teens," on pages 5 to 7 of this guide. This section examines some of the practical steps needed to prepare and facilitate your small group meetings. Please read this section prior to your first gathering. It is important that you consider each suggestion in light of your parish and diocesan gathering and protection policies. If questions arise, please consult an appropriate representative from your parish or diocese.

LEADER'S PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

BREATHE ON ME, SPIRIT OF WISDOM,
THAT I MAY BE AN EFFECTIVE INSTRUMENT
OF YOUR DIVINE WILL.

GROW IN ME, SPIRIT OF UNDERSTANDING,
THAT I MAY KNOW HOW TO SPEAK
YOUR WORDS.

MOVE WITHIN OUR GROUP, SPIRIT OF RIGHT
JUDGMENT, THAT OUR DISCUSSIONS MAY
LEAD US TO KNOW AND DO THE WILL OF GOD.

INSPIRE OUR GROUP, SPIRIT OF COURAGE,
THAT WE MAY SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE.

FILL US WITH INSIGHT, SPIRIT OF KNOWLEDGE,
THAT WE CAN PUT ON THE MIND OF CHRIST.

STAY WITH US, SPIRIT OF REVERENCE,
THAT WE MAY GROW IN HOLINESS.

BE WITH US, SPIRIT OF WONDER AND AWE
IN GOD'S PRESENCE, THAT WE MAY WORSHIP
AND THANK GOD IN THE EUCHARIST.

GLORY TO THE FATHER, AND TO THE SON,
AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING, IS NOW,
AND WILL BE FOR EVER. AMEN.

MARY, MOTHER OF THE CHURCH, PRAY FOR US.

ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE, PRAY FOR US.

This Leader Guide provides helpful instructions on how best to prepare for and carry out each Lenten meeting. If you are unclear about how to use the materials, encounter difficult challenges with your group, or have other questions, please consult the parish leadership team small group coordinator or the person in charge of the youth component in your parish.

Once you complete your Lenten meetings, you are invited to take part in one final exercise. Please fill in the self-evaluation on page 30 of this guide. This tool will help you reflect on your experience over the past six weeks. It is for your eyes and your benefit.

While addressing the believers in Ephesus, the Apostle Paul, recalling the words of Jesus, said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Thank you for giving to the young people of your parish. Through your generosity, they will be richly blessed. But you cannot out-give the Giver. Expect that you will personally and spiritually grow as a result of your service. Expect to be blessed by the teens who participate in your small group. Expect to receive the strength, guidance, wisdom, and consolation of the Holy Spirit.

MEETING FORMAT AND SEQUENCE

The following section describes each meeting component in sequence. The times allotted to each component are approximations and may differ from week to week. Each small group meeting is ninety minutes. Try to make a habit of beginning and ending on time.



WARM-UP (5 TO 10 MINUTES)

Teens may arrive at a meeting like a cold lawnmower—sluggish to ignite and operate with an open throttle. The "Warm-Up" section serves as a social primer. The exercises ease young people into the gathering with low-risk, interactive activities. This section includes "getting to know you"

INTRODUCTION

activities, mixers, and games. The purpose is to help reduce arrival tensions, build trusting relationships, and foster community.

**LOOKING BACK (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

Meeting content can resemble gas vapors—uselessly evaporating into empty space instead of becoming an energizing force for life transformation. “Looking Back” revisits the previous week’s Action Challenge. Its purpose is to help foster the integration of the gospel message by asking people to share with one another the struggles and victories of the past week. This faith-sharing movement provides opportunities for group accountability, mutual support and encouragement, and practical approaches to living the Eucharist.

OPENING PRAYER (1 TO 2 MINUTES)

The prayer is taken from the opening prayer (the Collect) of the upcoming Sunday Mass. The purpose is to draw a connection between the small group sessions and the Sunday Eucharist. It is placed later in the meeting for two reasons. First, the previous activities help warm up the group and open the door for a more centered prayer. Secondly, the opening prayer signifies the transition into this week’s meeting content. Initially, you may lead this prayer. As the group members become more comfortable, consider asking a teen participant to lead. You can keep track of volunteers on page 32 of this guide. Be sure to begin with the sign of the cross.

**YOUR TAKE (5 TO 10 MINUTES)**

“Your Take” is an introduction to the meeting topic. The purpose is to begin with the participants’ current experience of the theme. Through the use of introductory questions, teens name their experience, beliefs, feelings, and understanding of the topic. This serves as an easy-to-access entry point for each meeting’s theme.

**DVD VIDEO PRESENTATION (2 TO 8 MINUTES)**

Each video segment explores the weekly topic through engaging vignettes, stories, reflections, or other relevant elements. The presentations are not designed to be an exhaustive theological teaching on the topic; rather, they focus on some key elements of the given theme. Be sure to read the short Video Commentary in the teen participant booklet for catechetical help in exploring the video topic.

THEME DISCUSSION AND INTERACTION (20 TO 30 MINUTES)

This section crafts questions to stimulate meaningful thought, group interaction, and life integration of the topic’s message. Questions generally begin with exploring the meaning of the message, move to how the message connects with young people’s lives, and conclude with personal and practical implications of that message for each person’s life. Be prepared to subtly catechize by infusing your own thoughts, experiences, and stories into the discussion. This section may also include interactive group activities, such as case studies, simulations, simple projects, etc. The final part is called “Action Challenge.” Teens will use this space to write down their plan of action for the topic.

**PRAYING THE SUNDAY READINGS THROUGH LECTIO DIVINA (20 TO 30 MINUTES)**

Through the practice of *lectio divina* (holy reading), participants become familiar with a selection from the upcoming Sunday Mass readings. In order to effectively lead teens in praying the Scriptures, please carefully read Fr. Thomas Ryan’s guide, “Leading the Practice of *Lectio Divina*,” on pages 8 to 10 of this guide. Become familiar with each step of the process. Each week’s session will use these movements as a foundation, but may include creative adaptations. Follow the specific steps outlined in each session of this guide.

CLOSING PRAYER (1 TO 2 MINUTES)

The meeting concludes by drawing another connection from the small group sessions to the Sunday Eucharist. The short final prayer is the Prayer after Communion from the upcoming Sunday Mass. Be sure to end with the sign of the cross.

ANNOUNCEMENTS (1 TO 3 MINUTES)

Use this time to share any relevant announcements for the coming week. These could be reminders for next week's *Living the Eucharist* gathering or other youth ministry or parish events and activities. Compose your announcements as you prepare for the meeting.

REFRESHMENTS

A time for refreshments is optional but important. Food gives teens an excuse to hang out a little longer. This informal gathering time often becomes a catalyst for deeper connections. Quiet members are often more willing to share their thoughts in casual conversations. A refreshments time provides an informal relational element to each gathering. Make sure both parents and teens are aware of any time changes as a result of adding a refreshments time to the schedule. Responsibilities for refreshments can be rotated among the participants.

LEADING SMALL GROUPS FOR TEENS

The following section provides some quick tips on how to prepare, facilitate, and follow up on your teen small group meetings.

BEFORE THE MEETING**1 ■ MEETING PREPARATION**

Prior to each gathering, familiarize yourself with the meeting content and process by carefully reading through the agenda in this Leader Guide. Preview the DVD video and read the "Video Commentary" in the

Participant Booklet for Teens. Reflect on the discussion questions in that booklet, and record your notes in the margins of this guide. Your reflections will add important catechetical content to each session. Finally, become familiar with the Sunday reading selection and the specific *lectio divina* process used for the week.

2 ■ UNDERSTANDING YOUR CONTEXT

Every small group has a context: history, spiritual make-up, personality, etc. Consider your group's context and make any necessary adaptations to the agenda. For example, if your group's members are already quite comfortable with one another, you may consider replacing an introductory mixer with additional time for faith sharing. Or, if they don't respond well to a particular kind of activity, consider making an appropriate adaptation.

3 ■ THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A WITNESS

Pope Paul VI reminded us that the most effective teachers are witnesses when he said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (*On Evangelization in the Modern World*, 41). As you review each week's material, consider sharing from your own experience and story. Draw on your experiences, past and present. Young people need concrete illustrations of an embodied faith in order to make it real in their own lives.

4 ■ PRAY FOR YOUR GROUP

Consider making an intercessory prayer list with the prayer needs of your participants. Pray for them individually throughout the week. As you get to know them—their struggles, their spiritual challenges, their dreams, and their gifts—intercede for them accordingly. As the saying goes, "Prayer is the slender nerve that moves the muscle of omnipotence."

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5 ■ RELATIONAL MINISTRY

Meetings or programs seldom change young people. If they do, it is a result of the relationships formed through those meetings or programs. The best teen ministry is relational. Consider the following practical ideas or activities.

- Greet students by name and refer back to your prior conversations with them. Remembering important details of their lives demonstrates your interest and care.
- Ask how you can pray for them. Pray for the issues that are important to them. Contact them and ask how they're doing in general, and then inquire about how things are progressing in the specific areas where they said you could pray for them.
- Read the local papers with a watchful eye for articles that might highlight the athletic, academic, artistic, or activity achievements of students you know. Write a note or make a call to congratulate them. Or ask them to autograph their picture for you.
- Record students' birthdays and send a card or call them to wish them a Happy Birthday. We tend to appreciate cards from people we don't normally expect to remember us. Be sure to write a short personal note as opposed to simply signing your name.
- Make a phone call in the middle of the week to speak with students who seemed down, or excited, or stressed the last time you saw them.
- Attend an activity in which a student is involved, such as a sporting event, play, concert, debate, art show, dance recital, etc. Talk to the student after the event in person, or phone/text or email.

Please keep in mind that relational youth ministry is always carried out in an appropriate manner, strictly following your diocesan guidelines and child protection policies. If you are unaware of your diocese's specific policies, ask an appropriate representative from your parish. Youth ministers always operate as adult mentors of teens, not "best friends."

6 ■ MEETING ENVIRONMENT

Meet in the same location each week if possible. Choose a room that is appropriate for the size of your group. Use comfortable seating that keeps participants at the same eye level and where the members are in full view of one another. Arrange the seating in a circle and make it close enough so people can easily hear anyone speaking. Avoid meeting rooms with distractions like phones or televisions, and rooms near loud gathering places. If possible, use warm, soft lighting that is adjustable for both meeting activities and prayer. Ensure that the room temperature is comfortable for participants. Be sure to follow your diocesan guidelines about appropriate gathering environments.

DURING THE MEETING**1 ■ BUILD A CULTURE OF RESPECT**

From the very first meeting, communicate clearly your expectations about how group members are to treat one another. Tell the group that an essential part of the *Living the Eucharist* experience is growing into a genuine Christian community. Ask your participants to treat one another with love and respect by:

- Maintaining warm eye contact with the person speaking.
- Attentively listening to that person.
- Utilizing attending skills, such as nodding in agreement while others are talking or using short acknowledgments such as "um hmm."
- Not interrupting or talking when others are speaking.
- Not making fun of another participant, and not criticizing or being disrespectful when disagreeing.
- Not minimizing or trivializing someone's feelings or experience.
- Establishing trust among members. Do not break confidences or gossip. What is said in the meeting stays in the meeting.

As the leader, be sure to model these skills yourself. Gently reinforce them during meetings, and kindly and privately talk to participants who may not be on the same page.

2 ■ FACILITATION TIPS

- Try to get everyone involved and participating from the very first meeting. The longer one waits to share, the harder it gets. Some individuals are more outgoing than others and will share with little prodding. Respect the different personalities. Breaking into smaller groups or pairs for some discussions will allow for greater participation of more introverted members. Additionally, quiet members may share more readily when the leader asks the group to write down their answers before sharing. Don't be afraid of silence. If the silence lingers on too long and creates an awkward dynamic, rephrase the question or move to the next item. Always be aware of the body language of the group.
- Monitor the time and stay on task. On the one hand, be conscious of the assigned times in order to address each element of the agenda. On the other hand, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Be careful not to quench the Spirit's movement by being so rigidly tied to the schedule that you miss what the Spirit is doing. Like flying a kite, keep a grip on the string, but allow useful currents to take the group to greater heights.
- Affirm members' contributions, both verbally and non-verbally. Be careful to be kind, genuine, and consistent. Be cautious not to rate members' contributions by your reactions. If some of them begin to sense that you feel their comments aren't as good as other people's, they may begin to withdraw from sharing.
- Facilitate the meetings. Do not dominate the group. Share appropriately, be careful not to pontificate, and always keep Jesus as the focus. Operate less as a "sage on the stage," and more as a "guide on the side." Do not allow any participant to take over meetings with excessive sharing. Ask for others' thoughts or move to another question. If needed, talk to the person privately.

Thank them for their willingness and enthusiasm, but ask them to help you get others involved by economizing their words or refraining from sharing so more quiet members can participate.

- If you do not know the answer to a question raised by the teens in your group, feel comfortable saying, "I don't know, but I will find out for you for next week." If you are unfamiliar with anything in a session, do not be afraid or ashamed to ask your parish leader.

AFTER THE MEETING

1 ■ EVALUATE THE MEETING

Shortly after each meeting, take a few moments to reflect on and evaluate it. Answer the questions in the "Reflect" section of each meeting.

2 ■ CONTACT ABSENT MEMBERS

Call members of the group who were unable to attend. Maintain a warm relational connection with absent members in order to prevent gradual participant attrition. It is easier to drop out when one feels disconnected from the group. Let them know they are missed and check on how they are doing. Briefly summarize the focus of the missed meeting and the "Action Challenge" item. Remind them of the next meeting date and time.

3 ■ WORK ON YOUR ACTION CHALLENGE

Be sure to be active in your faith by working on your own Action Challenge. Experience each day through the lens of faith, finding the movement and workings of the Spirit in everyday living. Young people need an example of daily discipleship in order to make it real in their own lives.

Leading the Practice of Lectio Divina



Before you read this section, be sure that you have read the section titled "*Lectio Divina: A Way to Pray with the Scriptures*" on pages 28 to 32 of the Small Group Participant Booklet for Teens. This material gives you, as well as the teens, a basic understanding of the spiritual practice of *lectio divina*. The paragraphs below

provide some "big picture" considerations that will help you to understand more about *lectio divina* before you lead the meeting.

The Reading of the Biblical Text. To prepare for your role as facilitator, take some time prior to the meeting to read carefully the passage that the group will be listening to and working with. You will be reading it out loud at the first stage (*lectio*). It even can be beneficial to read it out loud twice at this stage. Ask two other members of the group to look at the reading ahead of time as well, to help you with the later readings of the text. One person will read the text out loud during the second stage of the process, and the other during the third stage. This way, each time the text is read, the group is hearing it in a different voice. Choose a person of the opposite sex from you to read it for the *meditatio* stage. Voice tonality, patterns, rhythm, and expression all affect the way a listener hears the words read.

Participation. After each reading, and a time of silence, invite people to speak. It isn't necessary to go around the circle in order or require that everyone say something. Extroverted types may respond easily

and naturally, while introverted personalities may find it more difficult to put their inner thoughts and feelings "out there." Your role is to help create a forum for prayer in which everyone feels secure, comfortable, and respected. After the silent periods, members of the group are invited to share what they feel led to share out of the experience. What was heard? What insights developed? What response has been called forth? The sharing is voluntary.

Time. One of your primary challenges will be to keep things on track time-wise. Twenty-five minutes is not a lot of time for praying with the Word of God in a group setting. You will have to exercise judgment at different points along the way as to what is the greater good: allowing time for the people who seem ready to speak, or moving on in order to respect the overall time frame. You may want to encourage the participants to make the best use of the time available by keeping the time lapse brief between people's sharings.

Get in the Game!

BEFORE THE MEETING: PREPARE

- 1 ■ Prepare for Meeting 5 in the same manner that you prepared for the first four meetings.
- 2 ■ Read pages 20 to 22 of the Small Group Participant Booklet for Teens in order to get a sense of the agenda.
- 3 ■ Preview the DVD video segment titled “Get in the Game!” Read the “Video Commentary” section in the Participant Booklet on page 23. Highlight any sections that you may want to address specifically during the meeting. Then record any additional thoughts and reflections you have in that section. Based upon the past four weeks, consider how to best lead the discussion.
- 4 ■ Read the Scripture verses designated for *lectio divina* on page 22 of the Participant Booklet. Become familiar with the passage. Additionally, review the “Praying the Scriptures” section on pages 25 to 26 of this guide. Make any adaptations to the process based on what you have observed about the group.
- 5 ■ Check back on the names of those teens who agreed to read the *lectio divina* passage for this week’s meeting (two people) and the opening prayer (one person).
- 6 ■ In the meeting room, ensure the environment is prepared according to the subsection Meeting Environment in this booklet.

7 ■ Load the DVD in the DVD player. Test the volume and make sure people sitting in each seat can view the unit. Turn off the television or projection unit in order to avoid any distractions during the meeting.

8 ■ Check with the parish leadership team small group coordinator about getting the evaluation forms for the final meeting.

DURING THE MEETING: LEAD



WARM-UP (12 MINUTES)

As always, warmly welcome the group.

Lead the group through the directions for Participate Match, on page 20 of the Teen Participant Booklet. Instruct the group to fill in their answers. Once completed, ask people to shut their booklets and pass them to you. Shuffle the collected booklets. Read from one booklet at a time. Guide the group in guessing the author. Pass the booklet back after each round. Keep track of which member best fools the group.



LOOKING BACK (8 MINUTES)

Begin by asking the group members to give a short summary of last week’s meeting topic. Allow several people to contribute. Fill in anything necessary.

Afterwards, draw their attention to last week's Action Challenge, on page 18 of the Participant Booklet. Ask the group: "In what ways were you aware of the Spirit's presence during your week? How did you perceive the Spirit's movement? In what ways did you struggle or find it difficult?"

Address any common struggles by asking people to help problem-solve for one another. Encourage the group to build up one another. Be sure to share from your own experience.

OPENING PRAYER (1 MINUTE)

Ask the participant who volunteered after last week's meeting to prayerfully read the opening prayer.



YOUR TAKE... (10 MINUTES)

Lead the "Your Take" discussion by introducing the theme "Get in the Game!" Facilitate the discussion by

asking each of the questions.



VIDEO PRESENTATION: "GET IN THE GAME!" (2 MINUTES)

Turn the television or projection unit on. Choose the video "Get in the Game"

from the DVD menu and press "Play."

THEME DISCUSSION AND INTERACTION (20 MINUTES)

Lead the group through each of the discussion questions. Be sure to save enough time to adequately address the Action Challenge.



PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES

(25 MINUTES)

Allow the group to take a short transitional stretch break. Prepare your volunteer readers. This week's *lectio divina* variation will emphasize the *meditatio* movement. Give at least eight to ten minutes for quiet meditation. Alert the group to this. The group will reflect on this experience afterwards. Once again, remind the group that the passage is taken from the upcoming Sunday's Mass readings. Follow the process below.

LECTIO

Prepare the group by leading them through relaxation exercises. Remind members that the passage will once again be read twice. Ask participants to be sensitive to the Spirit's nudging and movement towards a certain word, phrase, or image. Begin with a short prayer to the Holy Spirit, then ask the first reader to read the passage. Pause for a minute.

MEDITATIO

Guide the group into meditation by saying, "Listen for the word or phrase that the Spirit draws you towards." Ask the second reader to read. Encourage participants to silently repeat, relish, and chew on the word or phrase, asking, "Where does this word touch my life today? Do I hear or see Christ speaking to me in this text?" Allow for eight to ten minutes of quiet reflection.

Afterwards, ask people to share briefly something of their interaction with the word that spoke to them. Ask participants to begin their sharing by restating the phrase or verse that they had been reflecting on.

ORATIO

Lead the group into prayer. Ask them to respond to the Spirit's call by voicing their prayer. Invite participants to make their prayer the group's prayer by praying out loud. Allow several minutes for shared group prayer.

CONTEMPLATIO

Lead the group into quiet contemplation by asking them to rest silently in God's loving embrace, remaining open to the nudging of the Spirit. Move directly into the closing prayer after several minutes.

CLOSING PRAYER (2 MINUTES)

Bring the *contemplatio* movement to an end by leading the group in the Prayer after Communion, on page 22 of the Participant Booklet.

REFLECTION ON THE PRAYER EXPERIENCE

Lead a brief reflection on the "Praying the Scriptures" section with the following questions.

- 1 ■ How did the extended period of meditation work for you? Describe your experience.
- 2 ■ What was difficult about it?
- 3 ■ In what ways might this prayer be used in your personal prayer time?
- 4 ■ How did you like this form of praying the Scriptures, as compared to the last four weeks? (Take note of their thoughts in order to choose one of the previous *lectio divina* variations for the final week.)

ANNOUNCEMENTS (2 MINUTES)

- 1 ■ Ask participants to prepare for next week's meeting by being ready to discuss their experiences with the Action Challenge, found on page 22 of their booklets.
- 2 ■ Ask all participants to prepare for next week's meeting by reading the *lectio divina* passage for Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord, found on page 26 of their booklets.
- 3 ■ Ask for one volunteer to read the opening prayer for next week.
- 4 ■ Ask for two volunteers, a male and a female, to read the Scripture selection for the *lectio divina* next week.

- 5 ■ Include any other youth ministry, religious education, or parish event announcements.

REFRESHMENTS**AFTER THE MEETING: REFLECT**

Take a few minutes after the meeting to reflect on your experience. Use the following questions to guide your thoughts.

- 1 ■ How did the group respond to the extended period of meditation? Does the group need further direction in this form of prayer? To which week's variation of the *lectio divina* process did the group respond best? Use that variation for the final gathering.
- 2 ■ After meeting now for five weeks, are there questions or issues that you think would be important to address during the last meeting? Are there issues you feel you should address privately with any members of the group? Have you noticed any gifts in members that you should acknowledge or encourage?
- 3 ■ Is there anyone in the group you feel needs special prayer? For instance, there may be members who are wrestling with difficult issues, family struggles, special calling, or other concerns. In what ways can you pray for them?
- 4 ■ In what ways can the experience of community be further nurtured among group members after Lent? Are there other parish, religious education, or youth ministry events, activities, groups, or programs that you might invite members to join or attend?
- 5 ■ Other thoughts: