NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
MINISTRY WITH
YOUNG ADULTS

TOOLS

Small Group Starter Kit

Everything a parish or a few friends need to start a young adult small group and keep it going for its first season

Launch

Five steps from first idea to first gathering

Gather

A gathering template and a six-week series on Emmaus

Sustain

Leader tips, a group covenant, and common questions

A free resource from the National Institute for Ministry with Young Adults · ministrywithyoungadults.org

WHY SMALL GROUPS

A place to belong

The first Christians “devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Small groups carry on that pattern. Many young adults find their way into faith through a few friends who meet regularly, pray together, and are honest about life.

A small group doesn’t need a big budget, a meeting room, or an expert. It needs a host, a regular rhythm, and a reason to gather. Research on ministry with young people keeps pointing to the same thing: trust-based relationships are where faith takes root.

AT A GLANCE

SIZE

6 to 12 people

Small enough that everyone can talk. When a group passes 12, start a second one.

RHYTHM

Weekly or every other week

For a season of six weeks. Then pause, celebrate, and decide what’s next.

PLACE

Home, café, or parish

Somewhere comfortable and easy to find. Food helps.

KINDS OF GROUPS

Scripture

Read and pray with the coming Sunday’s Gospel or a book of the Bible.

Faith and life

Talk about real questions through the lens of faith. The series in this kit fits here.

Book or video

Work through a Catholic book, podcast, or video series together.

Service

Serve together once a month and reflect on it at the next gathering.

Life stage

Young parents, newly married couples, graduate students, or young professionals.

Language or culture

Gather in the language and style where people feel most at home.

GETTING STARTED

Five steps to launch

1 Pray and find a partner

Groups do best with two co-leaders who share the work: one hosts, one facilitates. Ask God for the people who should be in the group, and write their names down.

2 Connect with your parish

Let your pastor or a staff member know. Ask about safe environment requirements, using parish space, and listing the group in the bulletin or on the website. A parish connection helps the group grow and helps the parish know its young adults.

3 Choose the basics

Decide on a day, time, place, and format. Evenings during the week often work well. Keep the same time and place for the whole season so it becomes part of people's routine.

4 Invite personally

Personal invitations work far better than announcements. Each co-leader invites five to eight people directly. Invite people who aren't already involved, and ask each person to bring a friend.

5 Plan the ending

Tell people up front that the group meets for six weeks. A clear end makes it easier to say yes. At the last gathering, celebrate and decide together whether to continue, change, or start new groups.

WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU INVITE

"A few of us are starting a small group on Tuesday nights for six weeks. We'll eat, talk about life and faith, and pray. No experience needed. I'd really love for you to come."

GATHERING

A 90-minute gathering

0:00	**Arrive and eat**	Keep it simple: pizza, a potluck, or snacks. Greet each person by name. Introduce newcomers.
0:20	**Opening prayer**	A short prayer, a song, or a moment of silence. Rotate who leads.
0:25	**Check in**	Everyone shares a high and a low from their week. Keep it to a minute each.
0:40	**Scripture or content**	Read the passage aloud twice, slowly, or watch a short video.
0:50	**Conversation**	Use the week's questions. Go deep on one or two rather than rushing through all of them.
1:15	**Pray for each other**	Share intentions and pray for them aloud or in silence. Assign each person someone to pray for this week.
1:25	**Close**	Share the week's practice, confirm next time, and end on time. People can stay to hang out.

THE LEADER'S ROLE

YOU ARE

- A host who makes people feel welcome
- A guide who keeps the conversation moving
- A fellow traveler who shares honestly
- Someone who prays for each person by name

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE

- A theologian with every answer
- A counselor who fixes problems
- The person who talks most
- Responsible for everyone's growth

When a question comes up that you can't answer, say, "I don't know. Let's find out together," and follow up the next week, perhaps with help from your pastor.

A SIX-WEEK SERIES

Stay with Us: The Road to Emmaus

Six gatherings on Luke 24:13–35, the story of two disciples who meet the risen Jesus on the road. Read the week's verses aloud twice, then use the questions.

WEEK 1 · LUKE 24:13–16

On the road

1. Where are you on your journey right now? Which direction are you walking?
2. The disciples didn't recognize Jesus. When has God been with you without your noticing?
3. Who are you walking alongside these days?

Practice: Take a 15-minute walk this week and talk honestly with God.

WEEK 2 · LUKE 24:17–24

What are you discussing?

1. "We were hoping …" What have you hoped for that didn't turn out the way you expected?
2. Jesus asks and listens before he speaks. Who listens to you like that?
3. What would you want to tell Jesus about your life right now?

Practice: Ask someone a real question and just listen.

WEEK 3 · LUKE 24:25–27, 32

Burning hearts

1. Has a passage of Scripture ever spoken directly to your life?
2. What makes the Bible hard to read? What helps?
3. When has your heart "burned" with a sense of God's presence?

Practice: Read the coming Sunday's Gospel before Mass.

WEEK 4 · LUKE 24:28–29

Stay with us

1. The disciples invited a stranger to stay. When has someone's hospitality changed your life?
2. Who in your life needs an invitation to stay?
3. What makes it hard to let people into your home or your life?

Practice: Share a meal with someone new.

A SIX-WEEK SERIES, CONTINUED

WEEK 5 · LUKE 24:30–31

The breaking of the bread

1. The disciples recognized Jesus when he broke the bread. What has your experience of the Mass been like?
2. Is there a time you recognized Jesus at the Eucharist?
3. What would help you enter into Mass more fully?

Practice: Go to Mass together as a group this week.

WEEK 6 · LUKE 24:33–35

Sent back to share

1. The disciples ran back to tell what had happened. What has happened to you in these six weeks?
2. Who in your life might need what this group has given you?
3. What should we do next as a group?

Practice: Celebrate together. Invite one friend to whatever comes next.

A GROUP COVENANT

Read this together at the first gathering and invite everyone to agree.

We show up. We make this group a priority for six weeks and let each other know if we can't come.

We keep confidences. What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk.

We welcome. New people are always welcome. We make room.

We listen. We give each other our full attention and don't interrupt or fix.

We share honestly. We speak from our own experience, and anyone may pass.

We pray. We pray for each other between gatherings.

A CLOSING PRAYER FOR EVERY GATHERING

Stay with us, Lord, for evening is coming and the day is almost over. Walk with us on the road, open the Scriptures to us, and make yourself known in the breaking of the bread. Send us out with burning hearts to share what we have seen. Amen.

Inspired by Luke 24:29–32

COMMON QUESTIONS

When things get tricky

One person talks too much

Thank them, then redirect: “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t shared yet.” If it continues, talk with them privately and ask for their help drawing others out.

Someone never speaks

Don’t force it. Go around the circle for the check-in so everyone has an easy way in. Some people share more one-on-one, so follow up over coffee.

Attendance is dropping

Text people personally, not only the group chat. Ask what would help. Midway through a season is normal, so finish well with the people who come.

Someone shares something serious

Thank them and stay calm. After the gathering, follow up privately. If someone is at risk, contact your pastor and help them find professional help. In the U.S., call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

We disagree about Church teaching

Stay curious and kind. Ask, “What leads you to see it that way?” You don’t need to settle it that night. Offer to look into it together or invite your pastor to a gathering.

The group is getting too big

Celebrate. Then raise up a new pair of co-leaders and start a second group. Multiplying is a sign of health.

PRINTABLE

Small group sign-in

GROUP _____ SEASON _____

CO-LEADERS _____

Name	Phone or email	Best way to reach me	OK to add to group chat?

Contact information is used only to stay in touch with this group and is not shared outside it without permission.

Keep going

When your first season ends, these can help you grow and multiply.

FROM NIMYA

Accompaniment Basics: A Crash Course

Four short sessions that strengthen the listening and question-asking skills every small group leader needs.

FROM NIMYA

Mentoring Young Adults

Pair each small group leader with a mentor who can support them through the season.

FROM NIMYA

Young Adult Listening Session Guide

Not sure what kind of group to start? Ask young adults first.

U.S. BISHOPS

Listen, Teach, Send

The national pastoral framework for ministries with youth and young adults, also built on the Emmaus story.

FUTURE OF FAITH

Sacred Listening Tools

Free group activities such as Question Wall and Snapshots of Belonging that work well in small groups. Future of Faith is a free resource designed to support all those working in ministry. No strings attached.

YOUR PARISH

Sunday readings

After the Emmaus series, many groups continue by reading the coming Sunday's Gospel together each week.

Free for your ministry

NIMYA resources are free for everyone who ministers with young adults. Copy them, adapt them for your community, and share them widely. No strings attached.

The National Institute for Ministry with Young Adults forms and accompanies pastoral leaders who minister with young adults in their late teens, twenties, and thirties, through pastoral formation, leader accompaniment, research, and advocacy. Learn more at ministrywithyoungadults.org.