

Small Group Leader *Guide to Success*

Walking with Purpose
Small Group Leader *Guide to Success*

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Dear Walking with Purpose small group leaders,

With a heart full of gratitude, I want to thank you for the generous spirit with which you lead the women of your parish in the Walking with Purpose Bible study. Without your dedication, the Walking with Purpose program would not succeed.

When you meet women *where they are* with acceptance and kindness, they get a glimpse of the unconditional love of Christ. Your faithful leadership helps create a safe place for them to share their struggles, doubts, joys and hopes. Transforming community is created, and lives are changed as a result. The truths of Scripture intersect life experience, and women walk away with principles and tools that make life work.

It is our hope that this booklet will assist you in your role as a WWP small group leader by providing practical insights and tips for success. Be sure to take advantage of the training videos available online for additional guidance.

Blessings in Christ,
Lisa Brenninkmeyer
Founder, Walking with Purpose

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CHAPTER 1: WWP SMALL GROUP LEADER BASICS

What does a small group leader do?

The mission of Walking with Purpose is to enable women to know Christ through Scripture. Practically speaking, how does this happen? First, participants come to know Christ as they study the lessons at home. Secondly, the weekly small group discussion allows the truths they studied to become lodged more deeply into their hearts. Small group discussion brings to light the transforming power of Christ very naturally when those who participate share their faith. All groups need at least one person who is willing to facilitate and guide the conversation. In the simplest terms, there needs to be a woman willing to read the questions out loud from the lesson as the small group conversation progresses.

A small group leader for WWP is the dynamic and prayerful woman who oversees and facilitates discussion for her small group every week.

It may be easy to assume that because a small group leader oversees small group discussions, that she needs to be an expert teacher of the Bible. Right? Wrong! The most important quality of a small group leader is love. She will have, first of all, a sincere desire to love God and others.

Let's get a little more specific about this quality of love for God. First of all, if you have been asked by your WWP parish co-coordinators to lead a small group, then you have probably displayed to them, maybe even without realizing it, a genuine desire to love God. Are you willing to grow more through prayer? Are you willing to learn more deeply through study? If so, great! You are in the right place.

Your love for others takes on specific expression as a small group leader for WWP. You are asked to lead with cheerfulness and warmth. It is this disposition of joyful openness that sets the tone for women to feel listened to and encouraged each week. Do you derive joy from helping others grow? Are you unafraid to humbly listen, when you might feel like talking? If so, wonderful! God will use your willingness!

What are the core values of Walking with Purpose?

WWP as an organization embraces four core values while carrying out its mission to enable women to know Christ through Scripture:

1. Fearlessly Positive

- *courage & passion* for all that is *good & true*
- *perseverance & hope* in the face of obstacles
- *love* casts out fear & overcomes negativity & division

2. Graceful, Elegant, Feminine

- believe that *a woman* can be made *whole* when living in the awareness of being *God's beloved daughter*
- *lift barriers* between a woman & her understanding of God's passionate love for her
- *create environments* full of *grace* and *elegance* as small reflection of God's beauty & glory

3. Outpouring of Love for Women

- *approachable & relevant* program created *by women for women*
- grow *connections & relationships* where an *outpouring* of *warmth* causes a *fresh experience* of God's love
- *transformation* from the experience of being *welcomed, accepted, understood, heard* and *encouraged* by other women

4. High Standards and Attention to Detail

- Follow the *example of Christ*: He gave all He had for us so we *give Him our best* in return.
- *Attention to detail* brings *peace, simplicity* and *accessibility*
- *Dedication* to the *small necessary tasks* because of *belief in the big picture of God's work*

CHAPTER 2: GETTING STARTED

I'm excited to become a WWP small group leader! Where shall I begin?

The art of leading takes time to learn. For this reason, WWP is providing the most basic introduction to small group leading through elements labeled “Onboarding.” Onboarding for WWP small group leaders is very simple: it involves reading this *Guide to Success* and viewing four essential training videos. While training videos will be recommended throughout this *Guide to Success*, only four are necessary to complete the Onboarding stage. These videos will be labeled as such and are easily accessible through the WWP website under ["Leadership Resources."](#) Here is a helpful Onboarding checklist:

- _____ Read *Small Group Leader Guide to Success*
- _____ Watched *The Importance of Shepherding* video
- _____ Watched *The Two Pillars of Small Group Leading* video
- _____ Watched *The Power of Positive Leadership* video
- _____ Watched *Understanding Group Dynamics* video

How do I know if I am ready for this?

Leadership always requires risk and courage, so if you are feeling inadequate or slightly nervous, don't worry! Most women don't necessarily feel equipped right away. God does not call you because you are equipped. He equips the called! Jesus simply asks us to “remain in [Him]”.¹ As long as you are open and willing to grow closer to Him through prayer, study and growing as a leader using WWP leadership tools, you are going to be fine!

Perhaps you are so aware of your limitations and shortcomings that you can't see how God could possibly use you. If that's where you are today, perfect. You are in exactly the right position for God to use you. When He says, “whom shall I send,” His eyes don't roam the earth and then settle on the woman who has the highest academic degree. He doesn't look for the one who is the most eloquent, the most beautiful, or the one who has her act perfectly together. He looks for the one who loves. Who loves Him, however imperfectly. And the one who loves His daughters. He looks for the one who is willing to care for the broken...without judgement. The one who is authentic enough to admit that the Christian life, while worth it, isn't always easy. The one who is humble enough to see that any true good, anything that really makes a difference in eternity, is going to come from God's work through her.

¹ John 15:4.

What is the time commitment? How will my time as a leader be filled?

As a small group leader, you are asked to “give” of yourself by doing your homework thoroughly, and by leading your small group during weekly sessions. This means that you’ll need a place to receive as well as give.

At the beginning of the year, your co-coordinators will present you with a schedule of leadership team meetings. Come to these meetings prepared to receive; your co-coordinators will be leading. At these meetings, you’ll take off your leadership hat and receive from the discussions and trainings in a way that both nourishes and sharpens you. You will not have to lead the leadership team meetings because that is your co-coordinators’ job. As a result, you will be going into each small group session filled up and ready to “pour in” rather than arriving hungry to be “filled.”

During the general parish program meeting days, you will be asked to come ready to lead. The weekly group time you are leading is divided into two sections: one hour and thirty minutes for discussion of the lesson, and fifteen minutes for prayer intentions. This totals to one hour and forty-five minutes of active leading each week. During this time, it is your job as small group leader to start with the lesson introduction and then set the pace and lead the discussion by reading off each question as your group progresses in the conversation. It is your job to end the discussion after one hour and thirty minutes so that the last fifteen minutes can be used for sharing prayer intentions. During this time, you encourage your ladies and lead by example in taking note of each woman’s name and her intention so that you can pray for one another throughout the week. The time allotted for prayer intention sharing can only be protected by you! Time management is an important element of small group leading in WWP.

The total time commitment includes meetings on the general parish WWP schedule, plus leadership team meetings. On average, this equals about three hours and fifteen minutes per week (one hour, forty-five minutes for a group discussion, plus approximately one hour, thirty minutes for a leadership team meeting). Note that this estimate does not include the personal time you will devote to your lesson study at home. Most women find that the first-year 101 course, which involves five lessons per week, requires about fifteen to twenty minutes a day of homework. All other courses, which also involve five lessons per week, require a little more—perhaps twenty to thirty minutes per lesson of homework.

If I don’t have to be a Bible expert, then what should I know?

The WWP study guides are written in such a way that you will be gently led, encouraged and challenged in your prayer and study. If you are already a Bible study veteran, that is wonderful for you and for your small group; if this is your first Bible study experience and you are taking on the role of leadership for the first time, be assured that you will not be asked to come up with any new material.

Your first task is to do your homework. The answers provided in your study guide will provide some great insights. Bring any questions you might have to your leadership meeting, where you can talk them over with other small group leaders and the co-coordinators. If a question comes up during your weekly small group session that you are not ready for, don't worry! With no apology, offer to bring the answer the following week, or ask someone else to research the topic and bring the answer. What are your resources? The Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. You need not look any further! Your co-coordinators will help you understand how to search for answers in these resources.

Small group leaders are not expected to lead by providing their answers to all of the study questions. In fact, it's more important that you encourage the women in your group to answer questions as much as possible. Your goal is to lead with positive enthusiasm and be a witness to how Christ transforms us little by little, as we show interest and initiative.

A nice way to remember what your focus as a small group leader in WWP should be is to learn the following acronym:

- L:** Love women
- E:** Encourage sharing
- A:** Actively listen
- D:** Do your lesson

For further insights, view the *Onboarding* training video *Two Pillars of Team Leading*. Go to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

How is my small group selected?

Your co-coordinators, with grace from the Holy Spirit, assign women to be in your small group. If good friends of yours have registered, feel free to mention to your co-coordinators that you would like them in your small group.

If there is a woman who has registered with whom you are sure you will have a conflict, it's okay to mention this to your co-coordinators as well.

Pray for your co-coordinators as small groups are assembled and aim for an open spirit. Starting with a group of totally new women, while hard in the beginning, can be edifying and rewarding as your small group gels and new relationships form. God will honor your risk in being open to lead anyone. Allow Him to delight you with *His* selection of women!

How do I prepare for the first weekly session?

1: First of all, pray. Pray often for yourself and the potential women in your small group. Your WWP co-coordinator may be able to provide you with a contact list of participants in preparation for the first session. Don't feel obligated to create your own contact list—it can be daunting to manage. Your WWP co-coordinator has guidance on how to manage

and provide you these lists. If you have received a list and know which women are assigned to your small group, then go ahead and place a friendly phone call with each one prior to the first WWP session. WWP as an organization endeavors to imitate the personal love of Jesus, who reveals Himself as a Good Shepherd. Just as He calls each of us by name, we can in turn call one another by name. Making personal phone calls and encouraging the use of name-tags will help each small group leader reflect Christ's love.

2: Review “Suggestions for the First Weekly Session” in chapter three of this *Guide to Success*. For further insights on starting the study with fearless positivity, view the Onboarding training video *Power of Positive Leadership*, by going to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

3: If possible, offer to help the hospitality coordinator with set-up or clean-up in these first few weeks. The attention to aesthetic detail in the set-up of the room will speak to the hearts of the women coming. A beautifully prepared room says: “You are welcome here! This room has been prepared for you personally as you embark on this journey to know Christ more.”

4: Strive to embrace a spirit of excitement as you lavish love on the women attending. Display enthusiasm by being the first to welcome newcomers, by greeting everyone cheerfully, by introducing women to each other, and by assisting the rest of the leadership team with whatever they may need. For more suggestions, view the training video, *Setting the WWP Table* by going to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#). (Note that this video is not an essential small group leader Onboarding training video.)

Do I have to lead alone?

No. Ideally, you will share the leadership of a group with a co-leader. Your co-coordinators may partner you with someone and/or you may make suggestions.

Co-leaders support each other and help the small group to stay interconnected throughout the study. Some co-leaders share the responsibility of leading each week by taking turns pitching questions; more often than not, though, most co-leaders take turns being the main leader of discussion each week. You may divide the group up and share the important responsibility of making personal connections with the women between weekly meetings.

What happens if I need to take a week off?

You and your co-leader can work out scheduling issues and make a plan for absences. If both of you need to miss a week, be sure to give plenty of notice to your co-coordinators. One of them may want to fill in for you, or she may ask you if a woman in your small group can lead. Watch for leadership qualities among the women in your small group, and be prepared to make a recommendation as needed. Ultimately, it is your responsibility to find a good solution and work it out with your co-coordinators.

I've been leading and participating in Bible studies for years. What can I expect to do differently this time around?

WWP is specifically focused on conversion of heart rather than intellectual development. The personally applicable questions are designed to reveal to the participant how Scripture can be relevant to her life, here and now. In addition, relationship is at the heart of everything that we do at WWP. This means that as a small group leader, you truly care about each of the women in your group. As she experiences spiritual transformation, she does this in the context of real relationship, not in isolation. WWP small group leaders offer that personal accompaniment reflective of Jesus the Good Shepherd, gently guiding women to a deeper relationship with Christ. It is the combination of personal reflection and small group sharing that typically allows for a woman to experience God's love in a fresh way.

View the Onboarding training video *The Importance of Shepherding* via ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

What kinds of leadership tools does WWP provide for small group leaders?

Aside from all the training available directly from the WWP website under "Leadership Resources," your most important resource will be your leadership team meeting. There, your co-coordinators will provide WWP training, lesson review, and time to talk about parish-specific issues.

WWP leadership training videos are ideally viewed during leadership team meetings, in a group with other leaders. It's recommended that your group view a video selected by your co-coordinators once a month, and answer the on-screen questions together.

For each WWP course, there are *Small Group Leaders' Editions* in addition to the *Participant Edition*. The *Small Group Leaders' Editions* offer leadership tips throughout and lesson timing suggestions. New small group leaders often find these tips and timings helpful. Veterans may not need them and may feel more comfortable pacing the lesson by themselves.

CHAPTER 3: TIPS FOR RUNNING THE WEEKLY SESSIONS

Most of my time as a small group leader will be spent in the weekly small group meeting. What's the best way to run the first meeting?

In your *Small Group Leaders' Edition*, each study session is timed for one hour and thirty minutes, and it is assumed you will spend fifteen minutes sharing prayer intentions. The first time you meet with your group for small group discussion is slightly different, as detailed here.

Welcome Time

Introduce yourself. Warmly communicate to everyone that, as a small group leader, you are a supporter and friend, not a superior or teacher. It takes courage and honesty for small group members to share their answers and thought-provoking questions. WWP is a safe, trusting, friendly environment in which we grow closer to Christ.

Introductions

Feel free to exchange names, church affiliation, family, work or what you hope to gain from WWP. You go first. Explain how name-tags will help learn names without having to awkwardly ask one another. If you feel inspired on the first day, pitch an ice-breaker question. This often helps break down barriers right away, by building trust through lighthearted sharing. Some sample ice-breakers are found later in this chapter..

Your WWP co-coordinators may provide you with a contact list of participants before the first meeting. You can use some of the introduction time to ask your group members their preferred method of contact. The list you received from your WWP co-coordinators can be helpful if you want to take notes in order to show more personal attention to each woman, as well as keep track of potential changes (for example, “prefers cell number,” “doesn’t check email very often,” “may join morning session,” etc.)

Explanation of Small Group Guidelines

Try to explain these guidelines gently but firmly so that women know they can count on you to follow them.

- We begin on time, and end on time.
- All discussions are confidential.
- WWP small groups are a “No Stone Zone.” We will not throw stones of one of judgement at one another. You are welcome as you are.
- Emotions are welcome, so don’t skip the study because you’re feeling down.
- No one will be “called on” to answer questions.
- Every effort will be made to get through the entire lesson each week.
- Come every week, even if your homework is not finished!
- WWP emphasizes love and Christian unity. We endeavor for this together by embracing four principles:

1. We come from many backgrounds. This can enrich us or divide us. We choose to be enriched.
2. Respect. We can learn from one another.
3. While this is a Catholic Bible study and we will be teaching and clarifying Catholic doctrine, women of all faiths are welcome.
4. Jesus Christ is alive and well in the entire body of believers. We hope to enjoy and preserve fellowship with one another this year.

Discussion Time

After the initial time spent registering and receiving course materials, all the small groups will have gathered together to watch the first Connect Coffee video. Once you have finished introductions and have gone over the small group guidelines, take time to discuss the Connect Coffee Talk questions. Connect Coffee discussion questions are found in the course materials at the end of the outlines which accompanies each talk.

Use this first session as an opportunity to be flexible and gentle with the discussion time. As you progress through the questions, you may end up having to share your answers to the questions, but do this only after you have waited for someone else to speak up. If a participant does, thank her with a warm comment and smile; this will help your more hesitant small group members realize that sharing is enriching and does not have to be intimidating.

Prayer Intention Time

Be sure to end the discussion after one hour and thirty minutes so that you have the full remaining fifteen minutes to explain and share prayer intentions. The purpose of the prayer intention time is twofold:

1: Explain that part of the small group experience is praying specifically for one another. Each small group member is encouraged to write down each woman's name and intention as she is sharing. The whole small group is encouraged to offer the intentions to God throughout the week. Prayer Intentions are treated with respect and confidentiality. The time is not intended for delving into details that may lead to gossip. When sharing an intention about a struggle with another person, all efforts should be made to keep it general and anonymous.

2: Explain how part of experiencing Christ in a personal way is asking Him for help with our specific needs, and being open to seeing how He transforms, answers and blesses us throughout the year. While we often think first of the needs of the world and people we care about, WWP encourages the use of this time to specifically ask for prayers for ourselves. For example, you may ask for prayers for patience, for a relationship that needs mending, for the grace to forgive a family member, for family stability, for the grace to manage time better, for peace and freedom from crazy stress, etc. Lead by example and remind your women that God is so loving He wants us to ask Him for all of the desires of our heart. We don't need to be afraid to asking for the grace we need, personally. This would be a great time to read Matthew 7:7-11 where Jesus tells us:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.

Once everyone has shared prayer intentions on the first meeting day, close your time in prayer. An example of how to wrap up all of the intentions in your prayer can be found in chapter three of this *Guide to Success*.

How can I make the women in my small group more comfortable with each other as we begin the study?

You may choose to begin the first few WWP study sessions with an ice-breaker. This should be a fun, lighthearted activity and not stressful or awkward. It's an opportunity to get to know one another better and to establish a foundation for trust. Small group leaders should go first in this exercise to set the tone for the depth of sharing that will follow. Avoid ice-breakers that require lots of thinking or that could be potentially embarrassing (e.g. one woman says her favorite book is *The Bible* and another says *Hollywood Wives*, while another thinks, "I hate to read! How embarrassing!").

1. If you were a color, what color would you be, and why?
2. What is the best gift you have ever received?
3. Describe a perfect first date.
4. What relaxes you?
5. What energizes you?
6. Describe your perfect vacation.
7. What is your favorite restaurant?
8. What is your favorite hobby?
9. What is the weirdest thing you have ever eaten?
10. Name one thing you really like about yourself.
11. What is the hardest thing you have ever done?
12. If you could have one wish come true this year, what would it be?
13. If you had to spend \$10,000 on yourself, how would you spend it?
14. If you could learn any skill, what would it be?
15. If you had to make your own personal flag, name two things that would be on it?
16. If you could talk to any person living today, who would it be?

At the end of your ice-breaker be sure to thank all the women for sharing before you move into the lesson.

Do you have any advice for staying connected with the women in my small group?

1. Before the first meeting, call each participant in your small group to make an introduction. Your WWP co-coordinator will ideally be able to provide you with a contact list of the women in your group.
2. Start to pray for your group members before the first session.
3. Use your contact list to stay connected to your group members.
4. Strive to connect every week with each of your members using their preferred method of communication. Possibilities include:
 - Call or write a personal e-mail.
 - Look for opportunities to compliment them. Mention their comments from the session that week, especially any interesting remarks.
 - Recall their prayer requests, and ask questions related to their requests.
 - If they are really opening up at prayer request time, thank them for trusting the group.
 - Send a card occasionally, especially if they need a boost. Include an encouraging Bible verse.
5. Keep track of your communication in some manner. Write the date of an e-mail, phone call or mailed card on the back of an index card, for example. It is easy to lose track if you don't write it down, especially if your small group is large.
6. If a small group member misses a session, contact her right away and let her know she was missed. Ask for her prayer request.
7. If a small group member misses many sessions, contact her to discuss if something is preventing her from coming to WWP. Be supportive without being pushy.
8. Small group members will feel more secure if you arrive before they do. The relational aspect of WWP is vital so don't rush out afterwards. As often as you can, linger to chat.

What can I do on my own time to improve my leadership skills?

Most of us sometimes wonder how we're doing as a small group leader. It may be helpful to take some quiet time to ponder the following questions. Recall that your leadership of a Walking with Purpose small group is a ministry, and as such, God blesses it. It's His ministry! He simply asks you to respond to His call to the best of your ability. When pondering these questions, be open to asking Him, "How am I doing?"

Let's consider the essential aspects of WWP small group leading mentioned earlier:

L: Love Women

- pray for the women in my group
- reach out & stay connected
- be warm, open & welcoming

E: Encourage Sharing

- keep it real
- summarize main ideas
- stick to the lesson & keep it moving

A: Actively Listen

- wait for others to talk
- avoid giving a lecture
- seek to get everyone involved in the discussion

D: Do Your Lesson

- come prepared
- discuss lessons but avoid debates
- conversion of heart is priority one

Below is a sample leadership checklist for co-coordinators and small group leaders to practically measure how a small group discussion is being led. There are three main categories: pacing, program elements, and discussion.

- Pacing:
 - Did I start and end on time?
 - Did I focus on key questions and provide smooth transitions between questions?
 - Did my pacing hold the interest of the group?
 - Did I end in prayer or rush out? Did I summarize the requests in prayer as we closed our time together?
 - See the training video [Perfect Timing](#) for more information.
- Program elements:
 - Did I review the verse study?
 - Did I invite comment on last week's resolutions?
 - Are the women sharing prayer requests in an atmosphere of trust?
 - Did I cover each "day," asking essential questions in the lesson?
- Facilitating discussion:
 - Was I cheerful and positive?
 - How many open-ended questions did I ask?
 - How many questions did I personally answer?
 - How much did I talk? Should I invite more discussion?
 - How much explanation did I give, e.g. teaching? Was it too much, in that it stifled discussion?

Did all participants engage in discussion? Do I need to encourage more participation?

Was I able to summarize and move on? Did I move through difficult topics charitably?

As a small group leader, how can I best handle the most common sticky situations?

What if...

1: A participant expresses ideas contrary to Catholic Doctrine?

Do not say, “You are wrong.” Do clarify what the Catholic teaching is on the subject. Do not argue a point of doctrine once you have clarified Catholic teaching. Instead, let the Holy Spirit work out the issues in each woman’s heart. You may say:

- “That’s an interesting idea. It’s similar to what the Catholic Church teaches in this way...”
- “I’m not sure what the Church teaches about that, exactly. Let’s look that up in the Catechism.”

2: A participant shares experiences of consulting a spiritual medium, etc.?

You may say:

- “It can be very tempting to consult horoscopes, medical intuitives, and others who interact in the spiritual realms. We all want to know what the future holds! Yet when we seek guidance from the spirit world apart from God—even if we are just present while someone else does so—we are opening the door of our souls to whatever spiritual forces are at work through this person, game, article, etc. I know how hard it is to trust God with the unknown. I really want to grow in that area of my life. Let’s pray for each other to accept whatever the future holds, knowing that God is in control.”

3: The discussion turns into a counseling session for one person?

This could happen if a woman opens up with issues that are too intimate for the group setting, too heavy for the developmental stage of the group, totally inappropriate and requiring professional intervention, or simply because she is experiencing a family crisis.

You may say:

- “Would you mind if I prayed for you and this concern right now? We all would love to help, but because none of us are experienced marriage counselors, therapists, etc., I’m concerned that we may not offer you the best advice. Thankfully, the Lord knows exactly what you need. Let’s pray.” When you conclude the prayer, move back into the Bible study material. Pray for her again during prayer requests.
- “This is a very serious issue and I’m so glad you trusted us enough to share. It’s very important that you get sound, wise, professional counsel on this issue from someone who is truly qualified to help. I’m going to make a note right now so that we don’t forget to lift you up in prayer today, and throughout the weeks ahead.”

4: One participant disrespects or shuts down the sharing of another member?

Your job in this case is to stand by the disrespected woman, even if she is wrong, and to restore unity to the group. The disrespectful woman may also be embarrassed by her own harsh comments. Give everyone the benefit of the doubt about their motives, and clarify the guideline that every woman will be shown respect, no matter what. You may say:

- “It can be so hard to hear ideas that are different from our own, especially when we want others to share in the good things that we experience, but let’s give each other lots of grace as we seek the truth together. It is okay to disagree with one another; we don’t need to convince each other. Let’s just keep seeking the Lord together with humble hearts.”
- “You know, we all come from different faith backgrounds. We can all learn from one another. It’s okay to disagree. The important thing is that we all learn to express our ideas and hear the opinions of others with love. Jesus would rather we be loving than right! It’s not just difficult in this room; we will be facing this trial for the rest of our lives in our families, in our work places, and every place that people gather. We have a great opportunity here to work on this together. Keeping that in mind, let’s continue on.”

5: A group member asks a question you can’t answer?

We can’t know everything, so expect to be asked questions that you cannot answer. The important thing is to admit that you don’t know. Never try to bluff your way through an explanation. This is a great opportunity to learn something together. You may say:

- “Good question! I don’t know the answer. Let’s open the Catechism and see what guidance the Church gives us.”
- “Great question! Does anybody want to answer that one?”
- “Good question! Would anyone like to research that, and get back to us next week?”

6: You have no idea how to handle the situation?

Pray! Advice from one small group leader:

When I am in a situation where I have no idea how to proceed, I stop and pray a Hail Mary in my mind. I ask the Blessed Mother for guidance as to whether to speak, stay silent, etc. If I do not receive inspiration in any direction, I stay silent.

If the group heads off like a runaway train in the wrong direction, stop the discussion and lead everyone in the Our Father. Tell them that you all need the Lord’s help to stay on track today.

7: The group wants to chat instead of work through the study?

You may say:

- “This is so much fun. I would love to continue this conversation, but I must call us back to the lesson.”

- “We really need to schedule a time to get together outside of Bible study so we can just enjoy one another! For now, we have to get back to business. Can anyone answer question four?”
- “Wow, I’m really having trouble keeping us on track today. I need someone to be my alarm every time we get off topic.”

CHAPTER 4: BECOMING A GREAT SMALL GROUP LEADER

What is the single most important thing I can do to become a great small group leader?

By far, the most important thing you can do for your small group is to simply pray for each of the women every day. If you create a routine or schedule for these prayers, then it will come much more easily. Be aware that even a two-minute commitment to prayer will come with obstacles, so be ready to commit and re-commit. Persevere!

It may be helpful to carve out a few minutes each week, post-session, to pray about the concerns shared during small group session, and free your heart from the heaviness that sometimes comes with leadership. WWP leadership should not feel burdensome. Jesus promises that His “yoke is easy” and His “burden is light.”² If you are giving it your best but starting to feel burdened, please speak with one of your co-coordinators. She can offer you support, tips or relief from your role, if needed. It may be helpful to remember the simple but inspired words of St. Padre Pio who said, “Pray, hope and don’t worry.”

For basic advice on prayer, view the training video *Practicing Personal Prayer* by visiting ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website.](#)

I've been a teacher before and I know my faith. Why can't I just answer the questions when the thoughts come to mind? Isn't that a faster way for women to find the Truth?

At WWP, women learn through personal prayer, study *and* discussion. Small group leaders are given the grace to be patient, supportive and encouraging. Taking on a teaching role can be detrimental to the delicate process of group study and learning. If you are directly asked a question and you know the answer, then by all means offer it, but consider this: we live in an age of instant information; any woman can find information about the Bible with the click of a button.

The human heart was created for more than that. Knowledge and wisdom are two different gifts. Knowledge involves the gathering of information in order to see the big picture; wisdom takes knowledge and applies it in a practical way so that we can make wise decisions. We are pursuing wisdom in WWP. That is why the materials are focused on personally applicable questions such as “How does God’s truth apply to me, here, today?” This is the kind of wisdom we seek together while we gather in small groups. Further Scripture knowledge will surely help us in this pursuit, and we’ll grow in the area of knowledge as we study, but we want to always take the next step, and practically apply it to our daily situations.

What is our goal? Transformation. We want to experience the transformation of our hearts in our daily lives. By helping women engage in the WWP experience, you are helping them draw closer to Christ, and to know Him personally. As St. Francis of Assisi

² Matthew 11:30.

said: “Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” The primary method of WWP evangelization is loving women by making them feel welcomed, listened to and encouraged as they walk towards Christ.

For more information, view the Onboarding training video *Understanding Group Dynamics* by visiting ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#). Note that this is the last essential training video listed in this *Guide to Success* for the small group leader Onboarding stage.

Is it really that important to start and end on time?

Yes, your commitment to starting and ending on time shows respect for the women’s schedules. Perhaps this timeliness comes naturally to you, but if it does not, endeavor to discipline yourself in this area and draw support from other leaders. If you fall, simply apologize and get back up!

Timeliness also applies to the pace of the lesson and the task of getting through all of the questions. For tips on this topic, view the training video, *Perfect Timing*. Go to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

During our prayer intentions time, most women are focusing on general intentions. How can I help invite more personal sharing?

At the conclusion of the weekly discussion—which takes one hour and thirty minutes—each group concludes with fifteen minutes of sharing prayer intentions. Prayer pages at the back of the book are for use during this time. This is a beautiful moment for the small group to share their concerns, their worries, and their faith in God who knows their every need.

As a small group leader, encourage prayer intentions that relate to personal transformation. An explanation of how to introduce this can be found in the section detailing your first study session day in chapter five of this *Guide to Success*. You can set the example by going first. You may say, “I am struggling with patience with one of my children. I need patience. Please pray for me!” This is a prayer intention focused on personal transformation. It may help to quote Jesus’ words where He urges us: “Ask and you will receive.”³

Sometimes women will be aware of so many seemingly more important needs around them that they don’t feel comfortable asking for personal prayers. It can be awkward, for example, to ask for health for your little ones when you know that someone is battling cancer.

You may want to encourage each woman to share one personal intention and one relating to someone she is close with. By praying for another, she may be more comfortable focusing on her own needs for prayer as well.

³ Matthew 7:7.

Once everyone has shared her prayer intention, lead a closing prayer. It can be very touching for the group to hear all of the intentions verbally lifted up in prayer. For example, you could say:

We have just one minute left so I'll lead us in a prayer to close our time together today: 'Dear God, thank you for all the ways we learned and come to know You more through this group time today. Please bless us all this week. We specifically lift up our needs before you because we are confident that You love us so much You want us to bring all of our little and big needs before You. I pray for Mary to find peace with the issue she is facing at work, for Jane's husband, for Beth's family adjustment since their move, for me to grow in patience with my son, etc. [*list the rest of the intentions*] Thank You, Lord, for being with us today. Amen.'

Lastly, encourage confidentiality when sharing intentions and anonymity when applicable. Your small group should be a safe place where any private prayer intentions are respected and gossip is never an issue. If an intention involves specific people other participants may know, it's better to use anonymity. For example, Suzy may be dealing with a difficult boss at work. You can encourage Suzy to ask for prayers in "dealing with a work conflict" rather than discussing specific details about her boss and offering his or her name.

For more insights, view the training video *Faith Sharing Through WWP* by going to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

I have a real talker in my group. How do I charitably rein her in?

There is an entire training video, *Remedies for Ramblers*, that deals with this topic. To view this video, go to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

Last week a heavy issue came up and I am afraid that this week will turn into a therapy session. How do I handle it?

Difficult issues may cast a heaviness upon the small group as everyone realizes they aren't professionally equipped to effectively help someone in crisis. You, as the small group leader, might feel the weight of the situation most acutely. Be sure to share this with your co-coordinators so she can offer you tips and support.

Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- First of all, recognize that some crises are beyond the scope of WWP materials or leadership tools. It is okay to let go of the responsibility to solve these kinds of problems. A wise priest once speculated, "If the devil can't get you with sin, he'll get you by making you feel too responsible." In other words, even with the best and purest of intentions, we cannot resolve every issue, and should never bear a

burden that we are not called to carry. Be assured that you can pray for a woman in this kind of crisis, but you are not responsible for providing a remedy.

- So who *should* intervene in a crisis? Perhaps you can help the woman find someone who is equipped to step in. You can also consult a co-coordinator or ask a trusted priest to offer suggestions for professional counselors in the area.
- If the issue continues to come up during a group discussion, you can pause and lift up the hurting woman in prayer. After the prayer, resume the study, inviting comment on the next question to show the ladies it is okay to move on.

What should I do if no one is talking and there is silence?

Silence is welcome during WWP small group discussions. Women may be pausing to think over a question, or perhaps they are challenged by another participant's answer. It is okay to stop and appreciate an insight. Resist the urge to fill the silence. Win with waiting!

How do I lift the small group up if the conversation is turning negative?

While the healthy discussion of anything hard, tragic or negative is welcomed at a WWP study session, it can also be difficult to balance the conversation with the hope that Christ offers.

For example, you may have a woman in your group that continually brings up a thought about something in the world she finds really despicable. While you want to validate her input, you also want to steer the conversation towards beauty, truth and goodness in the context of the study questions.

Maybe this woman confuses seriousness with piety. If the heavy discussion of spiritual things cannot be accompanied by positivity and lightheartedness, then the conversation is quite simply too serious!

St. Teresa of Ávila was a strong, intellectual and holy woman; in fact, she was declared a "Doctor of the Church" and reformed her entire Carmelite order during the 16th century. She practiced a courageous lightheartedness. She said, "A sad nun is a bad nun," and, "I am more afraid of one unhappy sister than a crowd of evil spirits... What would happen if we hid what little sense of humor we had? Let each of us humbly use this to cheer others."⁴

Like St. Teresa's sisters, WWP leaders are challenged to be cheerful and positive. This means that we make every effort to avoid complaint and criticism. We attempt to smile and look for the silver lining, no matter how hard it may seem. We try not to take ourselves too seriously.

⁴ James Martin, S.J., March, 2012, "Fr. James Martin on the Humor of St Teresa of Avila," accessed March 27, 2013, <http://www.carmelites.net>.

When the ladies we are leading want to discuss negative influences to an extreme, we find positive segues for the conversation. For example, we could say, “Wow, it is so true that _____ is a tragic reality. Let’s thank God that we are blessed enough to know His truth in the midst of this broken world.” You can encourage your women with the words of St. Francis: “All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish a single candle.”

Remind yourself and your group that the purpose of your time each week is personal transformation. In other words, it may be tempting to give too much attention to the darkness around us. So the challenge is to ignite change in the only area we actually have control over...ourselves!

How can I understand the women in my small group if they are not talking?

Practice the art of noticing the nonverbal. This means that you try to be open to understanding body movement, posture, facial expressions and eye contact, or lack thereof. This can help a leader get a “read” on someone’s disposition. If a woman is typically quiet and decides now and then to speak, affirm her for it. If a woman is displaying nonverbal signs of tension, it may be helpful to observe if it is when a certain person is talking or when a certain topic comes up. The observation can help you guide your ladies with gentleness.

It’s that time of year when the weather and sickness seem to become real obstacles to regular attendance. Is there anything I can do to help the ladies persevere?

Remember a general rule for WWP leadership: expect obstacles! There are going to be seasons of low morale, sickness, frequent absences or cancellations due to weather.

Persevere with fearless positivity! When you can rise above a little slump as a leader, you will be setting an example for your ladies to follow. For further insights, view the module *Persevering in Prayer*. Go to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

How do I keep my group united if I am sensing some division among personalities?

As a small group leader, you are called to unite and pardon with calmness. You want to avoid words or actions that wound, divide or create animosity. If you are struggling with this, bring it up to your co-coordinators, or at the leadership team meeting.

I feel really strongly about certain topics. If I’m leading, why can’t I spend more time on those topics I love to discuss?

Small group leaders should practice the art of listening by talking or answering only when necessary. That takes humility! Much attention and training is given to help you

guide the small group through all of the questions in each lesson. God uses the material, combined with healthy small group leadership, to do the work of reaching hearts! Be confident and listen well to the others as they share their insights and thoughts from each lesson. A good small group leader does her best to know when it is time to speak and when it is best to keep quiet. She is natural and conversational while facilitating discussion.

What if a woman says something that is just plain wrong?

Avoid the natural temptation to shut her down and crush her spirit—again, this takes humility! Remember that the studies are meant to be discussions, not lectures. Instead of blatantly rejecting the woman, perhaps offer to find the answer to the issue in the Catechism. Redirect the conversation, or gently ask the others for their input. You might respond with a comment like, “I haven’t heard that perspective before. Does anyone else want to share on this subject?” If you feel inspired, invite someone else to research the topic at hand for next week’s discussion, or offer to do so yourself.

Are there any specific confidentiality rules that apply to me as a small group leader?

Yes. As a leader you will become aware of personal things going on in the lives of your women. You should act as a “black hole” for issues entrusted to you. This means if you have to bring up an example during a leadership team meeting or during conversations outside of WWP sessions, you use anonymity when referring to anyone.

I am struggling with balance in my life and am getting discouraged. What business do I have leading if I don’t have it all together?

This is a common mental obstacle for leaders! You are not asked to have it all together. Mother Teresa would always emphasize: “It’s about faithfulness, not success.” Pray about your struggle with balance, asking the Holy Spirit for help. Talk to your co-coordinators and your co-leader, and ask for their prayer support.

It may be helpful to remind all of your women that it’s about perseverance, not perfection. We will all experience days or phases when life feels like a mess. The WWP experience offers women one way out of the mess—not through perfection, but through honestly being open to the truths found in Scripture that are relevant to daily life. Women can better implement these solutions together with their small group than they can alone. This is another reason why your time at a leadership team meeting can be so edifying. It can be very comforting to know when another leader is also struggling with balance. When we come alongside each other, we can better persevere in the midst of difficulties.

CHAPTER 5: COMMON QUESTIONS FROM SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Why are certain themes repeated in Choosing the Better Part: WWP 101?

Saint Thomas Aquinas offered a valuable perspective when he said: “Repetition is the mother of learning.” How true this can be for the basics of our faith! WWP 101 teaches basic tenets of the faith, and as such, the course intentionally repeats key points. You may, for example, find that a Scripture quote clarifies a Catechism Clip, or that a Saint Story in one lesson reinforces the points made in another. There is always more depth to explore. The important elements of our faith can never be repeated enough.

Sometimes, a small group leader feels she is lacking some very basic knowledge about the Bible. She may be enriched by watching the training video *Bible Basics*. To access this video, go to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

What are some ways I can endeavor to be connected with the women in my small group in between our meetings?

Making friends and building community can begin at a WWP weekly meeting, but it grows best when tended to outside the structure of WWP. Here are some suggestions, but feel free to be creative. Let the Holy Spirit inspire you!

- Email a meeting reminder a few days before the session.
- Make a personal call once in a while to each woman in your small group.
- Did someone miss a meeting? Call to remind her you are praying for her prayer intention, and that her absence was felt.
- Send a group email with a sentence or two of encouragement, or a little story that might add to next week’s lesson discussion.
- For more advice, see the section on staying connected with your women in chapter five of this *Guide to Success*.

Should I be disappointed or worried if my friend decides WWP is not for her?

The WWP experience does not have to be for everyone. If a woman is not comfortable with the materials or with the small group, that is okay. “Love her” to the next thing: perhaps another Bible study with a different tone, or another group within the parish that may be more her cup of tea. Do not take her flight as a personal failure!

One of the women in my small group wants to invite a friend to a study session week instead of a Connect Coffee. Is it okay to have a guest at a normal study week?

The WWP program provides an opportunity each month that is conducive to guests: the monthly Connect Coffee. However, if a woman has a friend who is interested in visiting on another week she should just let you know. You should communicate this to the co-coordinators so that all of you can be prepared to welcome the guest with WWP hospitality.

We are now a few months into the program and a guest at the last Connect Coffee wants to register. Is that okay?

First, ask your co-coordinators if there is space available. Ideally, women are always welcome to register, even if it is late in the year. Often a woman is responding to a grace from the Holy Spirit when she is open to Bible study. We do not want to put up an obstacle to this open window in her heart; we trust that even if she missed some lessons, she will receive plenty of graces through her participation. However, it is up to your co-coordinators to make the final decision, since they are positioned to best determine if there is enough space and leadership to accommodate a late registrant.

What do I do if a woman is absent?

If a participant is absent from a WWP event or study session, it is a very kind gesture to give her a phone call. The purpose of a phone call is not to put pressure on her or make her feel guilty; rather, it's a way to communicate that her presence is important, and that she is missed when she is absent. In addition, it is nice for her to know that everyone wants to pray for her. So as the small group leader, you are gathering her prayer intention so that she is covered this week and doesn't miss out.

If you sense that a woman is absent because she has not done the necessary homework to participate in discussion, you want to assure her that she is still welcome. If it becomes a persistent problem, you may receive some insights by watching the training video *Handling Homework Hassles*. Go to ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#).

There is a woman in my group that would make a fantastic leader. Should I let my co-coordinators know?

Yes! WWP thrives in a parish when new leadership is being developed so that the program can grow and reach more women. If you think a woman would make a great leader, please mention this to your co-coordinators.

Your co-coordinators are the ones who selects small group leaders but they need your recommendations. Remember to practice discretion. You don't want to mention to this

woman that you nominated her for leadership unless the co-coordinators actually end up asking her.

How can I help the co-coordinators?

Remember that your co-coordinators are shouldering the responsibility of leading the whole parish program. Strive to be attentive to them. If you mention or commit to something, try not to forget. If a task is given to you, endeavor to fulfill it without making excuses. Go to them with your questions or concerns or to resolve any doubts. With their help, you can grow in your faith because they can hold you accountable as you grow as a leader.

If one of your co-coordinators wishes to sit in on your group, welcome her. Invite her to observe how you are doing, without her having to feel authoritarian. You can both take a look at the small group leader checklist ahead of time—in this *Guide to Success*, it can be found in chapter five. Rather than being a scorecard for performance, this is an effective way to acknowledge the important areas of leadership skills that you may either excel in or find difficult. If you know that timeliness is an issue, then warn the co-coordinators that you are aware of the problem, and are working on it. If you struggle to get through all the questions with the ladies on your small group, then acknowledge this as well. Try to be open to any tips your co-coordinators may offer for improvement, and refrain from a defensive spirit. A healthy, cohesive leadership team is based on trust when each leader is humble enough to acknowledge weakness. The result of giving and receiving feedback humbly is exciting growth for the whole program.

Just as your co-coordinators encourage and pray for you, try to reciprocate. Strive to be available by arriving early and lingering afterward. This communicates your willingness to be available to both your co-coordinators and the women in your group.

I have a woman who is really passionate about a cause and wants to make an announcement at our meeting next week. I told her to ask our co-coordinators, but I am wondering if there is a policy about this for a WWP session?

The WWP program at your parish is building a community. Women who appreciate their new community can feel called by their passion for a cause to want to involve their friends at WWP. This is a natural consequence of a successful program! Their desire is totally understandable but can put your co-coordinators in an awkward situation. Because of this, WWP National offers her the following guidelines:

- Your co-coordinator's main priority is to provide an excellent WWP experience to the women in your parish so that they can better know and love Christ through Scripture. The WWP materials are designed to take up a full session, lasting one hour and forty five minutes. Shaving time off any session for unrelated announcements can unfortunately be to the detriment of the WWP experience. We all want to avoid this and protect the integrity of the program. You also don't

want the co-coordinators to face the sticky situation of having to show favoritism towards any woman involved. For this reason, WWP National recommends that any for-profit or non-profit presentations, announcements or physical stands or booths be excluded from WWP meetings at your parish, with one exception...

- If there is anything that your pastor has communicated as a priority for the parish, and has asked your co-coordinators to pass on to the women in WWP, then this should be publicized in weekly e-mail announcements and/or meetings.

For a nice summary, please see the “Policy concerning Promotion of Outside Events” available under ["Leadership Resources" on the WWP website](#). WWP National suggests two ways in which participants can promote causes which are important to them. Upon the co-coordinator’s approval, a community bulletin board may be displayed at a welcome table. Any participant may post a flyer, a business card, etc. The board can be visible each week. The co-coordinators will be responsible for screening the contents. In addition, the co-coordinators should feel free to include content from the community bulletin board at the end of e-mail announcements, so that women must scroll down through the WWP-related message first.

If asked to explain this policy, here is a proposed response:

I understand how important _____ is to you. Thank you for sharing your passion. I want to offer you two opportunities to get the word out. First, you can post a flyer on our community bulletin board. Second, the co-coordinators can include the information in the community bulletin board section of our e-mail announcements. We would love to give everyone an opportunity to speak and make announcements; it’s just that we, as leaders, have made a commitment to stick to the WWP material and we are running on a tight schedule each week. We can also commit to praying for you and _____.

The co-coordinators are asked to *always* send out WWP e-mails Bcc only. This protects the privacy of all participants and prevents unnecessary e-mail traffic. Some programs use a Listserv or Google Group so that participants can communicate with each other in a safe and undisclosed manner. WWP National is striving with you to love women in such a way that barriers are lifted and participants are free to grow spiritually in a safe place. With these parameters in mind, WWP programs should endeavor to avoid unnecessary “background noise” from individual participants whose causes, no matter how good, are not an essential part of the WWP experience and could distract the community as a whole.

Should I make an exception if her cause is a spiritual one? Why should we say no to that?

It can be tempting for someone to want to add a beautiful devotion, a favorite prayer, or a religious tradition to the WWP experience. For example, a woman might be touched by the 101 lesson on Mary and want to share her new found devotion with the group at large. Maybe she wants to distribute chaplets, holy cards, etc. It’s all very beautiful!

What do you do? Well, you can start by acknowledging and affirming her passion for spiritual growth.

But you really must protect the integrity of the WWP experience by maintaining a confidence that the materials and methodology are enough in themselves. By allowing one woman to share with the whole group about a particular devotion or spiritual cause, you are affirming her but potentially intimidating others. Invisible barriers can easily arise when women are given a platform to draw attention to a spiritual practice that is perhaps more advanced or specialized than is the group at large. Is her devotion wrong? Absolutely not. It's just that the WWP experience is designed with care to reach a modern woman who is just beginning her spiritual walk. As a small group leader, pray for the grace to be spiritually sensitive to all of your participants, and for wisdom to shelter the group from unnecessary barriers while they are learning the basics of the Faith.