

What are the characteristics of good small group leaders?

As taken from *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope*

A Welcoming person—Welcome, or a spirit of hospitality, can sometimes be seen as a “one time event.” Yet, in a truly welcoming person, each person is valued, and there is special attention to welcoming the stranger—not only the stranger in the midst of the group, but the stranger who may need attention in the wider community.

Sensitive—A good leader should be sensitive to the needs of those in the community, and able to recognize and respond to the different situations that may arise: people in pain, absence from the group, particularly shy people, and situations that need to be referred to a professional.

Good listener—Leaders should be people who either are, or are open to developing, good listening skills. This often means setting aside one’s own thoughts or agendas in order to focus completely on the person speaking. It also means being aware of one’s own and others non verbal communication.

Challenging Community to Growth—No matter how long the group has been together, there is constant need to evaluate the group and challenge one another to growth. Has the community moved too far towards discussion and avoids real sharing? Is there a lack of ongoing spiritual development? If so, the leader may suggest that the group attend a talk or read a particular piece. The leader may also need to raise the question of action, application, and the integration of what is being shared within the lives of the members of the group.

Humility—Small community leaders are not the “answer people,” they are creating the space for students to encounter the sacred. Thus, they need to be people who should be open both to other’s experiences and true conversation—in which both parties are changed. A leader of humility expects to learn from others in the group, rather than to use the group as a forum to preach the “correct” way to respond to God.

Respect for Diversity—Along with humility, small group leaders should be those who are receptive to different personalities, genders, ethnicities, sexual orientations, ecclesiologies, expressions of spirituality, and points of view. All should feel welcomed in a small group—and the small group leader should be the instrument of inclusion, rather than exclusion.

Trustworthiness—Confidentiality is required in these communities. Small group leaders should have the ability to keep confidences. Yet they should also be people who are able to refer students to the proper avenues in cases of life (when either that person’s life or another’s life is threatened), health (if a group member shares something that is affecting his/her health and/or the health of another), safety (if that person’s or another’s safety is at risk) or criminal activity.