

Diocesan Focus Groups: Women's Spirituality in the Workplace

In order to respond to the needs of women who work outside the home, the Bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church seeks to learn more about these women and their spirituality. The **purpose** of the focus groups is to understand better how a cross-section of women see the relationship between their spirituality and their work outside the home.

Participants should be women who work outside the home but are not employed by the Church. Six to eight is ideal. If the group is larger, it can be divided. Diversity of age, culture, and occupation (working class and professional) is desirable.

Moderator: An employed woman is recommended. She should be an effective listener who respects the opinions of others.

Role of the bishop: It is suggested that the bishop not participate in the focus group discussion; however, participants should understand that the bishop is convening the group in order to help the Women's Committee learn more about this topic.

Logistics: Aim for a casual environment where people feel comfortable. The focus group should not be held over a meal. The group should run 1-1/2 to 2 hours.

Data collection: One person (not the moderator) should take extensive written notes. If the focus group is recorded, written permission should be obtained from participants. Forms for this purpose are available from the USCCB Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth (sgarcia@usccb.org).

Data analysis: A written report should be prepared by the recorder, with the assistance of the moderator. The report should include a description of participants (e.g., a nurse in her late thirties, married, with one school-aged child), a summary of responses to the questions, and suggestions/comments that might guide the Women's Committee's future work in this area. It would be helpful to include a few direct quotes from women, even phrases, to capture their own language. The report should be given to the diocesan bishop and a copy sent to the USCCB Committee on Women, 3211 4th St., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017. Reports can be emailed to Sheila Garcia at sgarcia@usccb.org.

Follow-up: The Women's Committee will compile all the reports it receives by *March 31, 2004* into a summary report, which will be sent to all participating dioceses. Dioceses may then wish to distribute the report to participants in the focus groups.

Questions? Contact Sheila Garcia, staff to the Committee on Women, at 202-541-3041, e-mail: sgarcia@usccb.org.

Focus Group Template - Part I
Evening Session

6:45 p.m. Welcome

Moderator greets participants and distribute name tags. Coffee, soda, cookies available.

7:00 Introductions

Moderator and recorder introduce themselves. Participants give brief introductions--name, married/single/children, type of employment, number of years at current job, involvement with the church, if any (e.g., lector, volunteer catechist). Moderator reviews the purpose of the focus group, which was described in the letter of invitation.

(NOTE: If possible, participants can be asked to respond to these brief biographical questions in writing before the meeting. This would facilitate the recorder's job and make sure that the information is accurate.)

7:15 Discussion

Moderator poses the following questions to the group. Note that the discussion begins with a general discussion about the type of work the women do, then moves to a more specific consideration of how work shapes her spirituality and vice versa.

1. In the introductions each of you told us what type of work you do. Can you now give us a few details, for example, what do you find satisfying? What is frustrating?

2. Many people find it hard to make time for their spiritual lives. How do you deal with this? What spiritual activities are important to you (e.g., Eucharist, personal prayer, prayer groups, spiritual reading)? How do you make time for them?

(NOTE: We want to open up the question of what is "spiritual" or what is a "spiritual activity," rather than defining these terms for

participants. Are work and family life spiritual in themselves or are they activities that must be fit in with the real spiritual activities of communal worship, prayer, etc.?)

3. Does your work influence your spiritual life? For example, does having to deal with a difficult co-worker help you to become more patient? Does your spiritual life/values influence your work? For example, has it helped you to deal with questionable ethical practices in the workplace? Do you find spiritual meaning in your work?

8:45 Wrap-up

Based on this discussion and other reflections participants might have, the moderator asks if they have suggestions or comments for the Women's Committee. How could the Committee support women in the workplace? How can it help to bridge work and spirituality? Is there a specific issue that the Committee should address?

(Since time will probably be running short at this point, invite participants to offer additional feedback as they reflect on the meeting. One way is to provide an e-mail address to which comments can be sent.)

9:00 Thank you/adjournment

Focus Group Template - Part I
Evening Session

Part 2 can be used as follow-up to Part 1 or it can stand alone. If the former, it is expected that many of the women who participated in Part 1 will participate in Part 2. It should be explained that the Part 1 focus groups elicited findings that were of great interest to the Bishops' Committee on Women (see "Women's Spirituality in the Workplace: A Compilation of Diocesan Focus Group Reports," at www.usccb.org/laity/women.shtml). The Part 2 focus groups attempt to explore in more depth some of the issues that were raised in Part 1.

6:45 p.m. Welcome Moderator greets participants and distribute name tags. Coffee,

soda, cookies available.

7:00 Introductions Moderator and recorder introduce themselves. Participants give brief introductions--name, married/single/children, type of employment, number of years at current job, involvement with the church, if any (e.g., lector, volunteer catechist). Moderator explains that the Bishops' Committee on Women has invited dioceses to conduct focus groups so that it could learn more about women's spirituality in the workplace. Results will be sent to dioceses and posted on the Committee's website.

7:15 Discussion Moderator poses the following questions to the group. **NOTE:** Since it may not be possible to discuss all these questions in the allotted time, the moderator may wish to prioritize them.

1. Experiences in the workplace

Women identify both positive and negative experiences in the workplace. Positives include the opportunity to learn, to serve others, and to meet people from different backgrounds. Negatives include difficult co-workers, gossip, office politics, and ethical issues.

--How is your personal identity affected by your experiences in the workplace?

--How do you respond to negative elements (perhaps cite a personal example)? How have these experiences affected your spirituality/faith?

2. Family/personal life

For married women: Does your work improve the quality of, or detract from, your marriage and family life? How?

For all women: What tensions, if any, exist between your work and your relationships with family members and others who

are important in your life?

3. Gender-specific

What experiences in the workplace do you think are specific to women?

Are there some unique ways in which women deal with the relationship between their faith and their work?

What spiritual perspectives, insights, and questions do you think arise out of women's specific experiences at work?

Have you found images, saints, or role models that help you in your spiritual life?

4. Support from the Church

What are the ways in which the church can better support you as you manage work, family, and other responsibilities?

Participants in the first focus groups spoke of witnessing to Catholic beliefs and values through their example and in conversations with co-workers. How can the Church help you to become a more effective witness in the workplace?

What would you like church leaders (bishops, priests, deacons, lay ministers) to know about women's experiences in the workplace in order to help them in their pastoral responsibilities?

8:55 Wrap-up

Since time will probably be running short at this point, invite participants to offer additional feedback as they reflect on the meeting. One way is to provide an e-mail address to which comments can be sent.

9:00 Thank you/adjournment

