



When Problems and Losses Occur in SCCs

When asked how to respond to common problems within an SCC, the St. Monica Pastoral Facilitators in attendance made many wise suggestions based on a pastoral attitude toward all its members. The following is a compilation of their anecdotal commentary.

Common Issues with SCC Suggested Responses

New Members:

Though not a problem, a frequently asked question is how to engage new people into an existing group. Groups have had great success by following the scripture-based agenda and just allow new people to join in the regular format. They can immediately participate by sharing their responses to scripture, feeling included completely from the start. As we share our lives within the context of faith, we get to know each other little by little. Sharing prayer intentions often helps us know more about the life of a new member. By not stopping regular meetings to do biographical sharing the new person(s) just joins in naturally and doesn't feel like "the new person". Groups can add new people at any time without disrupting the flow. If a group feels the need for "getting to know" you time, they can get creative by gathering a little earlier to have dinner together before meetings or by adding relaxed social evenings to the calendar.

Tardiness

When persistent, group would start on time and allow the person to join when they arrived. This can lessen possible resentment of the fuller SCC.

Poor Attendance:

Keep eyes/ears to ground to see if they have unavoidable life obstacles or are drifting away.

PF or designated other can contact outside of meeting to communicate they are missed, *trying not to impose guilt*. It helps to show an interest in their situation and to see if they are having a problem with the SCC. Once these things are known, some help toward their conflict may be offered. In every case a caring attitude toward absent member is the key to increasing their commitment to remove obstacles to engage more fully.

If the whole group is having trouble making time for meetings, try meeting **more often**, rather than less often. Meet every week with whoever can make it. Start adding new people to spark life in the group.

When Members Leave:

People do come and go. Try not to be afraid if things change.

Sometimes people leave reluctantly because of moving or other unavoidable situations that call them away. To express the love and affection of the group a "Goodbye" ceremony can impart blessings and make the transition easier for all.

Sometimes people leave willingly. Often they just stop coming. They may or may not tell us why. Contact outside of meeting should be attempted by PF or other designated member to reach out- ask/listen – offer help tactfully, non-judgmentally. Interest in their well-being should be expressed and an invitation to resolve problems, if possible. If they think it best to leave, an invitation to a "Goodbye" ceremony may be offered where blessings may be imparted. If they just never come back, the ceremony can be prayed together by remaining members about the loss, upset or confusion. This can be quite healing and unifying for remaining members.

Divorce:

The couple experiencing difficulty may not reach out to group or reveal they have problems much less say how they may need your support. If problems become known to an SCC, an angry spouse may, if not re-directed, "vent" without other spouse present. Although, at first, it seems good to support an attending member, to prevent "choosing sides", meeting must be directed away from these divisive conversations. It's recommended that outside of the meetings, the other spouse should also be contacted by PF or other designated member to listen and what is needed. This needs to be on-going communication of support, without pestering.

All information must be kept in strict confidence. Don't take outside group in any way. Don't choose sides. Allow them to decide who stays.

Have a "Goodbye" ceremony with one or both persons in attendance, if you can. If not, conduct one for the remaining group.

Addiction:

As with any illness, addiction can afflict our members. Reliance on Prayer and use of Serenity Prayer and St. Francis prayer for Peace can be favorites. One addicted member offered that in some cases the truth of addiction has to be told, because you are more worried about the person than just their feelings. Fearlessly love the afflicted and discuss the gorilla in the group. Although the meeting time is not for counseling, we can go to person see how they need to be loved. Listen and let vent. SCC is extension of St. Monica and we can support the healing process as they get professional help.

Illness:

Prayer is a main-stay of the SCC group who loves an ill person. They can pray with them in meetings or go to individual and pray at home and in the hospital. It can help bond every one and help the ill person maintain their peace and sense of connection. Support the ill person by taking care of practical needs, i.e. cooking, cleaning, running errands, driving to appointment, etc.

Death:

When you walk with a member who is preparing to die, it focuses everyone on what's important and the spiritual nature of death. It can become a blessing of how we should walk the journey. Ask what they specifically need prayers for. Reliance on prayer is essential. It was suggested to pray a rosary at beginning of meetings for dying member. Scripture can be healing. Prayerfulness pulls group together.

It becomes a concrete opportunity to serve others. Persons in hospice may need people to visit, pray with them or just be with them. Sometimes SCC members can have problems with uncooperative family members and some controlling friends that may attempt to limit access to ill member. We should be careful to treat grieving family members with respect and kindness as they deal with the illness of their loved one.

Because death is so significant, the experience can enrich and unify the SCC. Rejoicing can go along with grief. Everything is gift.

General Principles

- Confidentiality is imperative.
- If people are not at meetings, PF can be the contact person unless it is determined that another member is more appropriate.
- Contact outside of meeting should be made without judgment or guilt: the goal is to express concern, to really listen.
- Ask people *specifically* what they need and how individuals or the whole SCC can help.
- Meetings should not turn into counseling sessions. Format should, especially when scripture is used, continue as Presence of the Lord for all members including those with devastating problems. There should be an opportunity during meetings for persons to share their needs for prayer and other practical actions.
- Don't choose sides in a divorce situation. Support both outside of meetings. Allow couple to decide if one will stay and one will go.
- "Goodbye" rituals can acknowledge membership change in group even when the departing member(s) are not present.
- Patiently walk with people during their trials knowing we can deepen spiritually from the experience and the SCC can become closer for loving more.
- **Prayer is the most powerful gift we have. We can become non-judgmental intercessors for one-another. Prayer helps us have compassion and makes forgiveness and healing possible. It always promotes unity even when we don't understand and brings us to thankfulness even for our trials.**