

## **Discipleship Quads: Cultivating Spiritual Intimacy in a Small Faith Sharing Community Experience in the United States**

By Deborah Kispert

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has stressed that the church's mission and evangelization efforts involve personal growth in holiness and sharing the joy of the *Gospel* with others. St. Pope Paul VI shared in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "The church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the 12...the most immediate and most visible fruit of this activity: 'Go therefore, make disciples of all nations' (*Matthew* 28:19)."

Over recent years, at [Notre Dame of Mt. Carmel Church](#) in Cedar Knolls, New Jersey, USA, we have been on mission in renewing the culture of the parish and assisting people into a deeper encounter with Jesus. Part of this renewal has included a variety of Small Faith Sharing Communities. One example is Alpha. Alpha USA equips parishes in their mission to help people encounter Jesus through an 11-week program. The focus of this program promotes a warm and welcoming environment for larger groups in which individuals can grapple with the deep questions of life: where do I come from, what difference can I make, where am I going and how can I find purpose and meaning in my life?

While this program has been highly successful, it does not allow for an intimate encounter over a longer period within a smaller community setting. With that said, our witness, our testimony and our stories offer great insight to help others who are struggling to make sense of life and the presence of a higher being in our lives. Drawing on materials provided by the Steubenville Conferences, an outreach of the [Franciscan University of Steubenville](#), Ohio, USA, we have encouraged Discipleship Quads at Notre Dame. The development of this model was created over 35 years ago from research and study done by Greg Ogden, a Presbyterian minister in the USA. He compared the typical 6–10 person Small Community to a "micro-group" of three--four people. What he discovered was that spiritual multiplication was more effective from these smaller, intimate groups which work within the context of the average person's life. Thus, empowering a person to disciple others and not rely on parish support.

As the name describes, a Discipleship Quad is a group of *four* people who journey together as disciples through weekly gatherings, companionship, ongoing conversation and learning. The 44-week path of accompaniment fosters growth through prayer, accountability and authentic relationships. One of the ground rules of Discipleship Quads is that the group is the same gender. In our Discipleship Quad we are four Catholic lay women. In this way, the atmosphere allows for increased intimacy and vulnerability. While there is a Quad Coordinator, there is no hierarchical structure. The coordinator merely assembles the group and helps facilitate conversations. The best environment is within one of the participant's homes. Because of today's technological advancements, a hybrid of online and in-person gatherings can easily assemble a group. The group makes a commitment to grow closer to Jesus as his disciples by learning together, sharing life in community and creating a place for accountability on the journey.

A Quad can be made of people at any level of spiritual maturity, that is to say, from long-time committed Catholics to those who are just beginning their spiritual journey. In addition, Quad members should desire to be formed as disciple-makers. Keeping the Quad a secret defeats the purpose of sharing the Good News with others. The individual experience supports knowing the love of Jesus Christ and deepening a relationship with him. As we know, Jesus is critical to our ongoing growth in faith. And as such, our peace, joy, and fulfillment in life is the goal. Because of this, as part of the Discipleship Quad, each person learns with and from others in the Quad, prays together with one another, and shares life experiences with those who will become good friends. These are essential in a busy and complicated world. As a result of the Quad experience, our parish has missionary disciples who are undertaking the mission of cultivating spiritual intimacy, one Quad at a time. In turn, these experiences have the potential to change our culture in discipling others into a deeper relationship with others and with Jesus.

The very intent of Discipleship Quads is to help a group of sisters or brothers become more joyful disciples of Jesus Christ. “Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples,” as Pope Francis proclaimed in *Evangelii Gaudium*. Throughout the 44-week process, the accompaniers reflect on weekly themes intentionally focused on the Seven Characteristics of a Disciple: Identity, Prayer, Sacraments, Obedience, Community, Service and Sharing. The purpose is to evaluate how the Lord is at work in our lives, to challenge each member to get out of their comfort zones and to go where Jesus is calling her/him to go.

While I am still in the midst of this year-long commitment, nearly three-quarters complete, our Discipleship Quad has allowed for each person in the group to grow by recognizing personal traits and challenges. In addition, it has supported collaboration and recognizing complementary gifts. Participating in this small faith community has fostered self-awareness and self-reflection but also elicited support and accountability. Each woman has grown spiritually in unity with Christ and building on the Word of God. We participate regularly in the sacraments and are more aware of sin and spiritual suffering in our lives. We have deepened our love for the church, and our devotion to the Eucharist. This small community has been more effective with those we serve and has us pondering more deeply where we can be putting other efforts into place. We also have begun considering who we will invite into a new Quad community to continue the mission.

The weekly structured outline has allowed the group to grow and flourish taking insights from our own personal stories and testimonies about how Jesus has worked and continues to work in our lives. While intimacy and trust with one another has only deepened over time, the chemistry felt from within the first few weeks is all the work of the Holy Spirit and His Divine Providence. There has been no judgment of one another which has opened up profound and powerful prayer requests and intentions in which we have witnessed many prayers answered. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (*Matthew* 18:20). The graces have been immense.

On a personal note, I have deepened my faith by incorporating more intentional daily prayer into my routine, especially through the prayer requests of my three “sisters”. I am more sincerely rooted in reading the Word of God because of the weekly assigned readings. And lastly, I have grown in my understanding of the Catholic Church including her teachings,

traditions and sacraments. Two of the four women from my Quad had discerned for quite some time who to invite to this intimate group. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit granted us with an amazing group of spiritually hungry, dedicated, holy women. Our bond occurred quickly. We continue to learn about each other's gifts and talents along with struggles and challenges. Each woman has exhibited such grace, patience, love and kindness for one another. God willing, as we continue to journey together, we will be holier women who are seeking new disciples willing to learn and spread the Good News!

After we finish this Quad, the four of us hope to start separately new Quads.

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