



WHAT IS A PIVOT GATHERING GROUP?

These groups are designed for 20-somethings who hunger for real conversations about the things that matter. There just aren't that many places today to have conversations about the big things in a way that goes beyond the trivial, where people can share themselves safely, without judgment, without polarizing discussions, and without someone trying to fix them or preach at them. The guides are designed to create that space where people can meet, have real conversations, and walk away changed—knowing themselves and others a little bit better.

By the way, you can name your group whatever you want and still use our information. We don't even want credit, except where it helps others find and use our resources. We just want to help the church empower young adults and leaders of young adults.

THE HOW & WHY OF PIVOT GATHERING GROUPS

As humans, we are wired to share with each other over a meal where we find nourishment for our bodies and souls. The research evidence is clear: Families that eat together are emotionally and physically healthier. And one of the most common images of how Jesus spent his life on earth was eating with the people around him—with his friends Mary and Martha; at a wedding banquet; and in the upper room of a house with his disciples.

Someone might physically host and other people might provide the food. Maybe find a nook in a beloved restaurant, or share lunch together at work. Whatever the specific place, our suggestion is to consecrate it (make holy/sacred) to signal the importance of the meeting. That includes inviting the participants into an intentional space that aims to be safe and vulnerable.

THE APPROACH

The Pivot Groups are designed for people to have open discussions about a number of topics that are particularly relevant to 20-somethings. The gatherings are structured to be a time when people can get to know one another and think about the deep questions in our lives. The questions are built around the intersection of the "good news" that the church has to offer and the place where everyone struggles. They are designed to be open discussions where people can bring their experience and thoughts to explore themselves and a pressing topic in more depth.

WHOM ARE THEY FOR?

Anybody! The topics chosen are particularly relevant to people in their 20s, but could include anybody.

Beyond that, the groups will be most powerful when they include a wide variety of people—men, women, married, unmarried, Christian, religious, or not religious. The only guide is to create a space where everyone can bring their authentic selves, views of the world, and honest experiences while also creating a safe space that invites others to be authentic, as well. The questions have been specifically selected so they won't have "right" answers.

WHO SHOULD LEAD THE GROUP?

The groups might start within a church, be self-created by a group of good friends outside the church, or even at work as lunchtime conversations.

As Part of a Church: If established from a church, we recommend that the facilitator be someone with a leadership role in the church—an emerging 20-something leader or a mentor or church leader who loves and is committed to working with 20-somethings. The groups aren't meant to be marketing toward or things done "for" 20-somethings. It is a way to learn alongside them and should include downward mentoring and upward mentoring. The groups are a chance for members of a church to engage in authentic conversations with a generation that increasingly doesn't see many reasons to engage with the church, let alone participate regularly in the community.

Self-Organized: If self-organized, find a group of about six people and divide up the tasks. One person might organize the time and place, another the food, and another person may be in charge of facilitating the discussions.

WHAT IS THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE?

As the facilitator of the group, your role is not to have the answers, but to enable the discussion. You are the "Sherpa," a guide to help the group on its journey. Your job is to involve people who might be quiet, making sure everyone has a voice. Continually ask yourself, how can the group members listen and learn from each other?

Part of guiding your group includes directing them toward guides suited for their level of desired conversation. Each guide has a rating in the upper left corner:

1 =  : These guides are great for a casual and safe conversation that is unlikely to become too emotional or challenging. We recommend you don't start with the first level of intensity because then you don't have a place to retreat to when things do get intense. These casual conversations are good if you are meeting in a distracting environment (perhaps it is a public space or there are kids present), or if you need to scale it back for a week.

2 =  : We recommend you start here or below when forming new groups or visitors are present. Setting the expectation at this level will hopefully create a positive culture of engagement. This is also a good place to start for a group that is relatively new to each other. If you have a group that already knows each other, feel free to start with more intense guides.

3 =  : This is where most of the conversations should exist. Level 3 provides a worthwhile discussion that is not too divisive, but intense enough to merit deep thought.

4 =  : At this level, feelings of abandonment, shame, anger, exclusion, or questions about core identity may arise. Be prepared to sit with people in their struggles and affirm their willingness to be vulnerable.

5 =  : These guides are very challenging and best suited for a group that has successfully had prior Pivot guide discussions in which members felt loved first and challenged second. Advanced guides will likely bring up deep emotions and divisive points. Again, feelings of abandonment, shame, anger, exclusion, or questions about core identity may arise. Don't be surprised if some stories bring tears. These guides are supposed to be hard since these are, admittedly, hard conversations to have. The conversations, at their best, will be a mixture of laughter, tears, silence, and encouragement. Christians believe we can rest in the assurance that the Holy Spirit is present, serving as a comforter and connector to each other and to God's love.

This first half (pages 1-2) is designed to situate the leader in the role that best fits the accompanying guides. The 2nd half (pages 3-5) is designed as a resource for refreshers and pointers before and during a group. Although some people are naturally good group discussion leaders, we believe anyone can learn or improve in this task. To that end this is a Beta document and we invite suggestions for improvement.

HOW BIG SHOULD THE GROUPS BE?

The groups should be about 6 people. If more people come, then divide into sub-groups of up to 6 people for the conversations. Feel free to begin and end in a bigger group if you break into smaller groups for the bulk of the discussion.

GATHERING GROUP PHASES

Pre-Greeting

As the facilitator, take seriously the possibility that people might be arriving with low emotional resources. Knowing that before the conversation starts can help you as a facilitator avoid derailment of the group. Therefore, a recommendation is that you intentionally check in with people individually as they enter and watch for signs of reactivity.

Greetings:

Welcome everyone. Share names with each other. Make sure everyone feels welcome.

Share a blessing before eating. How this is done might vary widely from a formal prayer to a poem that captures the spirit of your time together.

One suggestion is this prayer*:

May I be filled with peace, and give peace to others. Where there is hatred, may I give love; Where there is injury, forgiveness; Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; And where there is sadness, joy; May I seek to console, understand, and love, More than I wish to be consoled, understood, or loved.

*Modified from a Francis of Assisi prayer

Jumpstart Questions:

Use the jumpstart questions to open the conversation. Find one or two questions that are most compelling for the group. Use them as a way to get to know one another.

We highly recommend that you start with the jumpstart question at the beginning. This creates an invitation for everyone to join the conversation in a low-pressure icebreaker. The leader ought to invite every person to answer the question so that every voice has a chance to be heard at the outset of the conversation. Allow people to pass.

Going Deeper:

Suggested guidelines for more powerful conversations:

These questions are designed so people can humbly share their stories and experiences in the world and humbly listen to others do the same.

Focus on the questions that are most compelling to the group in the order that makes sense, skipping and returning as needed. Let the conversation go wherever there is energy and the group wants to go.

Ideas for creating a sacred space

- Start a fire in the hearth and extinguish the fire at the end
- Light a candle at the beginning and blow it out at the end
- Ring a bell at the beginning and ring the bell again at the end

Keep in mind that the questions on the guides are not the most important questions around these topics; these questions are the jumpstart to the better questions that come about in these conversations. Not all questions will resonate with you or your group, so feel free to talk through which questions don't resonate and why, and what other questions come to mind. Remember that the conversation matters more than the questions. The conversation will reveal the questions that really matter to your group.

Stay away from a single person dominating the conversation, evaluations, and advice. There are other places to have these conversations. Invite quieter folks to contribute, but also allow them to pass.

Feel free to move the discussion from "I->we" or "we->I," inviting the discussion to vacillate between the personal and the communal.

Take your leadership role seriously. Do not shrug it off or diminish it. People will feel safe knowing there is someone in charge of the discussion who will step in to protect their vulnerability if they share, and their time, if things are going long.

Stick to the arranged time of the conversation. It is actually really good to end the conversation when it is still going strong. It reinforces that these are not easily resolved conversations. It is good to encourage people to bring questions and comments back at a later date. Encourage participants to write down or record their questions and intervening thoughts between the just-finished group time and the subsequent meeting.

This is not a forum to solve things personally or institutionally. The church has mechanisms for making institutional change, and there should not be an expectation for people to leave with an immediately altered worldview. Rather, this is a place to plumb the experiences, histories, feelings and curiosity of faith. **Listening is the goal and primary activity.**

This is also not a place to collect or share gossip. Be clear of the need to maintain that culture to protect the intimacy of the group. While reviewing the guidelines, define the level of confidentiality your group agrees to adopt.

Silence is a great tool to slow things down and is particularly important after a poignant story or share. In today's tech-infused world it is an expensive luxury that can create and maintain a sacred space. Use it strategically and demonstrate as a leader that silence doesn't need to be filled. **The more your group learns to sit in "awkward silence" without anxiety, the less awkward the silence will feel and the more you will incorporate voices in the conversation that need more time to process.**

Closing the Time:

Acknowledge the gift of everyone being present, listening and sharing. If applicable, acknowledge and thank specific folks in the group for any way they have challenged the group or been vulnerable (often one in the same). Feel free to incorporate any other "examen" practices that may help the group to bookend the time with an awareness of any emotions or anxieties that surfaced or that people brought. There are many great ways to punctuate and sacralize a group that come out of various traditions (see breakout box above). A few are highlighted on pivotnw.org.

Review the time for the next conversation. Point people to any web link for the next conversation's prompts.

These questions are also designed to be returned to from time to time. Annual or semi-annual repetition of a discussion (depending on frequency of meetings) may reveal the way our worldviews transform with our exposure to new people and ideas in a group setting like this.

We suggest ending every session with a prayer such as the one below by Francis of Assisi:

Remember that when you leave this earth, you can take with you nothing that you have received--only what you have given: a full heart, enriched by honest service, love, sacrifice, and courage.

FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

We recommend using this checklist as you facilitate to keep yourself accountable with facilitation best practices, and the goals of learning and listening. Feel free to copy this into notes you will look at as you facilitate, check in with yourself afterwards, or invite group members to provide feedback based on this checklist:

1. I talked less than 10% of the time.
2. Most eye contact was between members, and not between members and me.
3. I asked questions more than I made statements.
4. My group was characterized by love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
5. I had at least one key learning or story from today that I will remember.
6. Everyone in my group participated or was given the opportunity to participate.