



LAUNCHING A PARISH-BASED WIDOWED MINISTRY

FAQS FOR LEADERS



OFFICE OF
FORMATION &
DISCIPLESHIP
Equipping Catholic Leaders
ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA

As you consider starting a widowed ministry in your parish, you may have questions yourself or be asked questions by others. This FAQ guide should help you answer the most common ones.

QUESTION: Why would a parish need a widowed ministry?

In 2018, over 15 million widowed persons were living in the United States, and this number is projected to grow every year as the population ages. The death of a spouse is cited as the most significant stressor a person can experience in life, bringing with it a range of emotional, practical, and spiritual challenges. At this time of trial and often extended transition, many look to their faith communities for consolation and support.

Such was the case when Marguerite Pons lost her husband in 2003 after an extended illness. Marguerite recognized that she needed the support of both her faith and the company of those who were living a similar reality. Out of this need, Marguerite built on the efforts of those before her, collaborating to found a new ministry at St. Ann's parish in Marietta, Georgia. Widowed Helping Others, or "WHO" for short, has since touched thousands of lives and spread to other parishes.

Through involvement in widowed ministry, participants make connections, fending off the loneliness and isolation that can often afflict the widowed. Participants mourn together, worship together, eat together, serve together, laugh together, and simply accompany one another through the next phase of life. Many have found new meaning and purpose as they assist others and work to sustain the ministry.

Scripture exhorts us to protect the widow and offer comfort in affliction. Forming a widowed ministry is a demonstrated way to answer this call right in our own parishes.

QUESTION: How is a widowed ministry different than a grief support group or a social club?

Grief support groups serve anyone after the death of someone close to them -- parent, sibling, friend, spouse, or child. While there are commonalities with all these losses, it is recognized that the death of spouse is experienced in a markedly different way.

Members of a widowed ministry are all in different stages of the grief process, and some widowed persons do choose to continue in a separate grief support group. However, the focus of a widowed ministry is on connecting with others who have experienced what it means to be single again after the death of a spouse, and are in search of ways to build a meaningful life as a widowed person.

While social time and fellowship are integral to the success of a widowed ministry, prayerfulness and generous acts of Christ's healing love in community are what define the ministry. Those who are further along in the journey of widowhood welcome the newly widowed by offering a compassionate listening presence, as well as a living witness to hope and healing.

QUESTION: Can people from other Christian communities or other religious backgrounds join the widowed ministry?

All widowed persons, regardless religious background, who are seeking a hospitable and compassionate group for practical, emotional, and spiritual support, are welcome. The widowed ministry is hosted by the local Catholic parish, so all activities are in keeping with the teachings of the Catholic Church.

QUESTION: I'm convinced of how helpful a widowed ministry can be, but how do I even begin planning for one at my parish?

As with all things, begin with prayer. Invite the Holy Spirit into every aspect of discerning, planning, and implementing a widowed ministry. Ask for the necessary graces, a discerning heart, the right people, and appropriate resources to do the Lord's will. Return to this prayer at each step along the way, so that you can be confident in the Lord's call. Essential will be a shared discernment with your pastor and following his direction.

Contact the Office of Formation & Discipleship to receive the free copy of "Launching a Parish-Based Widowed Ministry: Leaders' Planning Guide." This publication offers detailed guidance on seeking approval and support from your parish pastor, forming a leadership team, growing membership, organizing meetings, and other important topics.

The Office of Formation & Discipleship is here to help continuously guide leaders in the process. Please contact:

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