

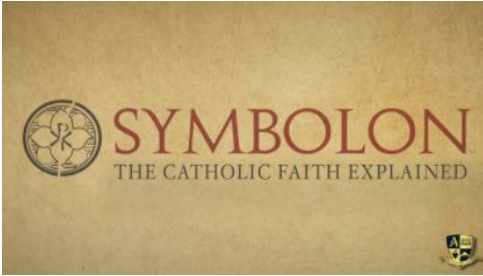
# A Plan to Make Missionary Disciples with *Symbolon* Growth Groups

from Augustine Institute; videos available on FORMED.org

## What is a missionary disciple?

- They are faithful – dedicated to prayer, study, service, and frequent reception of the sacraments.
- They are fruitful – dedicated to helping others become faithful and fruitful.

## Why *SYMBOLON*?



Jesus commissioned his disciples to teach “*them to observe all that I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:20). To be a missionary disciple is to faithfully hand on the teaching of Christ according to a hierarchy of truths (General Directory of Catechesis, 43) that are foundational and illuminate all other truths of the Faith. These truths are (1) the Blessed Trinity, (2) the Person of Jesus, (3) the Paschal Mystery, (4) the dignity of the human person (imago Dei), (5) the Church, with Mary as her Mother. [\*SYMBOLON Knowing the Faith\*](#) is 10 episodes that beautifully present the hierarchy of truths.

In addition, the *SYMBOLON* Group Guide empowers a facilitator to create a conducive environment for which these truths are presented, discussed, and embraced. The HABITS acronym is introduced in the guide and reviewed each week, so that the group has the goal of growing together in the HABITS of a disciple. Those HABITS consist of the following:

- **Holy hour** – commitment to daily mental prayer
- **Accountability** - commitment to honest sharing with one another and encouragement
- **Bible** – commitment to reading and praying with the Bible
- **Invest** – commitment to investing your time, talents, and treasure at your parish
- **Tell** – commitment to telling others about your faith
- **Sacraments** – commitment to frequent reception of the Eucharist and Penance

## Do the members of the group watch the *SYMBOLON* videos together or on their own time?

The members watch the videos in their own time and are encouraged to watch them with their spouse, family, or friends. This maximizes the group time for getting to know one another, and the Faith, more deeply.

## What is a growth group?

A growth group is a small group with these intended outcomes:

1. Growth in knowledge of the Faith
2. Growth in relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
3. Growth in authentic friendship with one another
4. Growth in spiritual habits
5. Growth in zeal for souls
6. Growth in leadership
7. Growth of new groups

These expectations should be clear to all participants when joining the group. If groups are to multiply, participants must be committed to these intended outcomes. In short, a growth group has two goals: faithfulness and fruitfulness. Jesus invites each of us to faithfulness and fruitfulness: “*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

### **Why small groups?**

Christian discipleship was never meant to be lived in isolation. We are made for community and are destined for community within the eternal exchange of life and love in the Holy Trinity. A small group allows members to be known and cared for, and these are fundamental needs for growth. A small group also allows for meaningful discussion, transparency, and accountability, which is necessary when taking personal ownership of one's faith. Research demonstrates that acquiring a mature faith is like learning a new language. You need regular exposure to native speakers and opportunities to engage in conversation. Small groups provide this.

### **How do groups get started?**

Jesus gives us an encouraging vision for his Kingdom: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants"* (Matthew 13:31-32). It seems the Lord is telling us to start small and grow big. Think mustard seed to movement! It takes just one missionary disciple to think and pray about five people to invite into their *SYMBOLON* Growth Group. In the invitation, the expectations of faithfulness and fruitfulness should be clear. In addition, the missionary disciple assures them that he/she is committed to helping them become competent and confident in leading their own group.

The mustard seed multiplies from there: 5 – 25 – 125 – 625 – 3125 – 15,625 – 78,125 – 390,625 – 1,953,125 – 9,765,625 – 48,828,125 – 244,140,625 – 1,220,703,125 – 6,103,515,625.

Imagine, it will take just 7 cycles for that mustard seed to fill a football stadium and 14 cycles to reach the population of the world. Therefore, if it takes 10 weeks to complete *SYMBOLON Knowing the Faith* and another 3 weeks to launch the next cycle of groups, that mustard seed will reach the population of the world in just over 15 years.

Of course, this multiplication strategy looks great on paper but is not reality. We are dealing with the human heart and the restraining forces of the world and the devil. Not everyone is going to accept an invitation to join a small group. However, we can be confident that God *"desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim 2:4) and wants that simple mustard seed to become a movement more than we do! And, we have the power of the Holy Spirit. So, let us be bold in our faith and faithfully plant a mustard seed and let God do the rest!

### **Do groups continue to meet after launching new groups?**

Yes, but less frequently. It will be important to gather with your initial group for encouragement and advice when leading your own group, perhaps every other week. The goal is to facilitate the group you are leading with excellence while remaining connected to the group you participated in for ongoing faith formation, accountability, and support. [\*SYMBOLON Living the Faith\*](#) is an optional additional 10 episodes.