

How to Read the *Called to Holiness* Books

Getting the Most From Your Reading and Reflection

You can use each book in the *Called to Holiness: Spirituality for Catholic Women* series alone or in a small group, such as a spiritual book club, faith sharing community or women's gathering. The books provide a wonderful opportunity to deepen your spiritual life; to learn more about the Christian tradition as it applies to our global context; to honor, celebrate and support the riches of women's spiritualities; and to grow in love and the freedom that truth brings.

What follows are suggestions to help you use the book material in ways that are most enriching to you personally and most effective in the context of sharing with others.

For Personal Enrichment

If you are reading and reflecting alone, set aside time to read but also allow yourself the gift of time to think about what you read. You will know the best times for you to engage in this process, perhaps while driving alone or taking a shower or gardening. Ideally, give yourself twenty minutes to sit quietly with the thoughts and ideas that draw you in positive or negative ways.

Prayer and ritual are treasures of our tradition, and many of the prayers and even the rituals in the *Called to Holiness* books are appropriate for someone reading outside of a group setting. Allow these treasures to enrich your reading and reflection.

Do not skip the reflection questions at the end of each section or chapter. They will help you understand more clearly and more fully what you think and feel about the topic. Taking the questions seriously will help you make the most of the reading you have done and aid in integrating into your daily living whatever you choose from the readings and

your own insight. Sometimes you might find it helpful to share with a friend some particular thoughts or ideas that are significant or puzzling.

Within a Group Setting

Group leaders might find the recommendations below especially helpful.

Before your small group gathers:

- Read through the chapter, noting any preparations needed for the prayer or ritual.
- Prepare nametags if everyone in the group is not acquainted with each other.
- Ensure that simple refreshments are available. You can provide these the first time and then ask for a volunteer for subsequent gatherings.
- Provide a list of names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of the group members.

At the first gathering:

- Greet each person as she arrives and help with introductions, placement of coats, getting nametags, etc.
- Start on time. It is a sign of respect for those present to begin and end at agreed-upon times.

During the gathering:

- Ask group members to get acquainted by telling a bit about themselves before your first discussion begins. People may want to talk about their curiosities, hopes, past experiences or any special circumstances in their lives at the present time. Of course, if your group is already close friends, simply reconnect with a brief “catch-up.” In a new group, people will feel more at ease if there is a brief get-acquainted time.

- Call a person by name whenever you address her. During discussion, if a few people in the group start a separate conversation, pause and invite them to rejoin the group's discussion.
- Encourage all persons to speak. You might ask a quiet person if she or he has anything to add. Take care, however, not to pressure anyone who chooses not to share with the group. If the opposite situation occurs and someone dominates the discussion, thank her for her comments and suggest that others might have something to say.
- Respect the unique rhythm of the group and be open to short silences. Allow such "sacred spaces" to occur for a while before moving on.
- Take a bit of time at the end of each meeting to "take the temperature" of the group. Ask people how they think it is going and what they might want to change about this time together. If problems are mentioned, ask the entire group to address or solve them.
- Be silent for a few moments to transition from discussion to prayer or ritual.
- Choose different people to take leader roles in the prayer/ritual. Be sure to notify them ahead of the gathering so they can prepare properly. Provide details of what the leaders are supposed to do and/or bring.

Group participants should read together the following suggestions before the first gathering:

- Make every effort to arrive at the agreed-upon time. This will allow the group to end on time and thus respect each person's needs and commitments. Notify someone in the group if you are unable to attend a gathering.
- Help others feel comfortable in the group, especially someone who may not know others.
- Be conscious that each person brings a unique gift to the group—her thoughts, insights, feelings and experiences. Do not hesitate to share your gift! At the same time, listen consciously to each person and do not monopolize the discussion. Do

not pressure anyone to speak; everyone should feel comfortable speaking and sharing. Do whatever you can to facilitate an atmosphere of openness and trust.

- Be open to the gift of silence. It can be helpful to sit with your thoughts in a few moments of quiet. Relax and take the time you need.
- Respect each person's right to her opinion, even when that opinion differs from yours. You are not obliged always to agree with someone. Be open to learning from others.
- Resist the urge to take the discussion in another direction when a topic triggers something in you or tempts you. Help the group stay focused.
- Take your turn providing refreshments for the group when you are able. When you agree to lead a prayer or ritual, take the responsibility seriously by preparing properly.
- Contribute to the richness of the shared experience by offering your suggestions at the end of the meetings about how to improve the sharing.
- Enjoy yourself. Make the most of the group experience and be grateful for this opportunity to share and learn!