

Despair into Hope

Small group for October

Introduction & Welcome (5-8 minutes)

Start the meeting by having all group members share a **consolation** and **desolation** from the past few weeks. Or use another activity of your choosing.

Consolation

- Directs our focus outside and beyond ourselves
- Lifts our hearts so that we can see the joys and sorrows of other people
- Bonds us more closely to our human community
- Generates new inspiration and ideas
- Shows us where God is active in our lives and where God is leading us
- Releases new energy in us; restores balance

Desolation

- Turns us in on ourselves
- Drives us down the spiral ever deeper into our own negative feelings
- Cuts us off from community
- Makes us want to give up on things that used to be important to us
- Covers up all our landmarks [the signs of our journey with God]
- Drains us of energy

Opening Prayer

[Mentor uses the grace below to create their own prayer or use the prayer provided]

Grace: for the strength to move from despair into hope; for the strength to offer our grief to God and look to **community** as a source of inspiration and motivation.

*“Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory;
rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves,
each looking out not for his own interests,
but also for those of others.
Have in you the same attitude
that is also in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 2:3-5)*

Despair into Hope

Small group for October

Let us pray: God, we are awed by your creation and its constant cycles of transformation. Jesus' resurrection is manifested in every season, whether it is a time to harvest, to plant, or to await new life. We gather today as we seek guidance for how to respond to the challenges and changes in our planet and in our lives.

Amen.

Short Check-in (~10 minutes)

Use this time to discuss themes or challenges you noticed Fellows were facing as you had your one-on-one meetings with them earlier in the month. **If nothing came up, move on to the focus exercise.**

Focus Exercise: Despair into Hope (~30 minutes)

Remind the Fellows that this month, they were confronted with the realities of the state of our common home. It can be overwhelming to try to grapple with these troubling facts and statistics; often, we are tempted to embrace despair and resort to hopelessness or sadness.

Read:

As God's people, we are called to be faithful – even in these desperate times. However, in order to do this, we first need to emotionally and prayerfully process the challenge we're facing. Today, we're going to take some time to grieve – with God – all that we've lost and all that we stand to lose as damage is done to our planet. Through grieving, we can move from **despair into hope** and begin to think about how our community can take action to make that hope a reality.

We're going to spend the next few minutes in silence, taking time to write down in our journals the emotions stirred in us by the state of our Earth. Perhaps you are feeling angry, hopeless, sad, or despairing. Perhaps you encountered something in the activities earlier this month that made you feel sad or afraid.

Give Fellows 5-10 minutes to journal. You can play music, if you'd like.

After 5-10 minutes, invite the Fellows to join you in prayer:

Read:

Merciful God, we believe that you uphold and sustain all you have made, while also lovingly giving us the freedom to live in relationship with the rest of creation. We acknowledge that this freedom has been abused, and we bring our lament and our longing for a renewed Earth to you now:

Despair into Hope

Small group for October

Invite Fellows to share what they journaled about. After they have shared, continue:

Read:

As your people, we come to you weary and heavy laden. We ask that you bring peace, hope, and joy to our activism.

This month, we learned about the hope that we can feel when working collectively and sharing our activism with a strong community. Let's take a moment to sit in gratitude and reflection with a passage from Peter's First Letter:

⁸ Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. ⁹ Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. (1 Peter 4:8-11)

Amen.

Now that Fellows have voiced their grief and reflected on the power of community and collective action, invite them to discuss some of the following prompts:

- Is there any place in nature that you feel especially connected to? How does it feel to think about that place while also considering the damage being done to the planet?
 - What worries you about nature, the environment, and humanity?
- As you worked through the activities earlier this month, when did you feel hopeful?
- What are some lessons we can take away from this passage from 1 Peter?
 - If nobody responds to this question, remind them of these lines:
 - *Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.*
 - *If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*

Going Deeper (~5 minutes)

Remind the group that toward the end of each meeting, we take some time to reflect together on what each of us has felt or experienced during the meeting. This will act as a mini check-in on the meeting itself. The following are some questions that might help you go deeper.

Despair into Hope

Small group for October

- *As you listened to people share tonight, what themes did you hear emerge? Was there anything you heard that surprised you? Resonated with you? Are there any subjects you want to return to later, either on your own or as a group?*
- *How did you feel over the course of the meeting? For example, did you notice yourself becoming more curious, anxious, excited, or unsettled while listening to someone share?*

Looking Ahead

[Mentor shares announcements, etc.]

Closing Prayer

Loving God, May we never lose hold of the hope that is in you. We pray for our common home, scarred by conflict and natural disaster. Bring healing to its lands and cleansing to its waters. Bring justice to its peoples and peace to its nations. Bring life for today and hope for the future. God of all Eternity, ignite in us, your people, the hope that we will heal our broken world, and grow in us the perseverance to keep praying and working towards that day when your creation will once again be whole and free. We ask all these things in and through the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.