



embrace

COMMUNITY • SISTERHOOD • JESUS

Welcome to *Embrace*

Embrace is a small group movement for intentional and deep fellowship. The program design is simple and flexible. It is appropriate for women's groups, but may suit your mixed gender or men's groups just as well.

Participants will be encouraged to:

Embrace: change

Embrace: gratitude

Embrace: gifts

Embrace: newness

Embrace: age

Embrace: planting

Embrace: friendship

Embrace: freedom

Embrace: family

Embrace members agree to meet at a home once a month for a meal and a guided conversation facilitated by a leader, who has the four discussion questions for the month. When 6-8 members have signed up, a group is ready to start. The groups should not exceed 8. Each gathering will take about two hours.

The format is intended to foster fellowship on a deeper level. By meeting once a month, members are not burdened with a new program to attend, but can look forward to a once-a-month time of sharing. They can naturally develop relationships outside scheduled program time. The structure encourages sharing and sisterhood.

To watch introduction videos to *Embrace* in English and Spanish, click [HERE](#)

Embrace Basics

Choosing a Leader: A reliable, approachable, encouraging facilitator is needed. She must understand the importance of community confidentiality and when to seek help outside the group.

Format: Small Group of 6-8 consistent members meets once per month for a meal and guided conversation.

Forming Groups: As much as possible, groups should be diverse in age and background. This is not a time to put people in groups with their friends, but rather to mix existing social circles. Invitations to join can certainly be extended to people who do not attend the corps, including friends and family of corps members, staff, neighborhood folks, etc.

Setting: Ideally in a home, alternating between members. Preferably, each member will host at her home at least once. Some members may prefer to co-host at one of their homes or to meet in a public space for a picnic, etc. Alternating homes increases the intimacy among the group and prevents hosting from becoming a burden.

Costs: The meal is paid for by the host (not the corps). Establish that the meal is not a time to go “full Martha”, but rather to make/order a simple, low-cost meal. Think spaghetti and meatballs, rice and beans, soup, eggs and pancakes etc. Working with the first hosts to ensure that costs and set up are kept very informal and low-cost will help to establish positive precedent. The costs and time involved in making a meal make RSVPs very important.

Promoting Growth: About 4—5 months in do, what I call, an *Embrace Open Enrollment*. Women from the corps not currently in an Embrace group may have heard about how great Embrace is and may want to join a group. If enough women join during open enrollment, you maybe able to form a whole new group. If not add women to existing groups for the remainder of the year.

Embrace Values

Christ: The vulnerability of Jesus Christ on the cross created for us a new kind of relationship with God, and also with ourselves and each other. The freedom of authentic relationship is what *Embrace* facilitates. Members do not have to believe in Christ though to enter into an open and sincere community; *Embrace* is open.

Community: The Triune God is a community. God is in a covenant relationship with the Lord's people. Community is part of our spiritual DNA. Communities are characterized by shared experiences, values, tragedies and celebrations, work, strengths, and weaknesses. Communities are made up of people who understand they belong to each other.

Conversation: The life-blood of a community is conversation. Community starts in conversation. *Embrace* is not an educational program, a needs assessment, or a transfer of skills or resources. It is a conversation. It is a community-building conversation. Nobody is here to teach or learn, everyone is here to share and receive.

Community Confidentiality: What happens in *Embrace* stays in *Embrace*. Unless there is a question of danger, in that case, the facilitator should let someone know "I have to call an ambulance, child welfare services, etc., etc.". Members may encourage each other that it might be beneficial to address something with someone outside of the gathering and even accompany each other in the process.

Courageous Openness: Members are encouraged to share as much or as little as they are comfortable doing so. They are encouraged to be open when openness is demonstrated well. Openness is demonstrated well when people share honestly and non-abusively and when vulnerability is met with compassion, kindness and confidentiality.

Consistency: The group should meet consistently. Even if it looks like only two to three people will meet, get together anyway. Consistency keeps it going and growing.

Commitment: Commit to the group. It may take time for the group to "warm up". Keep contributing, the group will become a group. Commit to the process. Answer the questions as much or as little as you like, pass on one or two, but answer the questions. Commit to the value. This group can enhance your whole church by facilitating real fellowship. The buy-in of the leaders will be contagious.

Compassion: For the group to become a community, compassion is an essential ingredient. Encourage it.

Launching *Embrace*

Embrace Launch Party

This party will be an opportunity to demonstrate how *Embrace* works in a large, less informal setting. At this event and for 7-10 days later, folks can sign up to join an *Embrace* group.

This party could be a brunch, lunch, tea, coffee, super-informal meal held at the corps or other public venue. Choose the best option with a team invested in the concept.

If you are going for women-only groups, invite all the women from your corps, women from your sphere of influence, etc. Have others do the same.

When people arrive, give them a ticket with a number and have them sit at that numbered table. Or have them sit where they want for the meal and after the food has been cleared, have them move to the table number on their ticket for *Embrace*.

Have the packet of four discussion cards on the table. Do not put questions on the screen as it can lead to all kinds of distractions. Let a leader from each table pick any of the cards to start and the groups will move at their own pace through the four questions.

Provide a sign-up card to be turned in immediately. Providing contact information on the card will allow those who wish to sign up later to do so.

Assigning groups will depend on various factors: time, day, location, transportation, how many people sign up.

Contact participants and share with them the starting information.

Embrace RSVP

Sample form for participants to fill out:

YES, I would like to join an Embrace group at this time.

NO, I would not like to join an Embrace group at this time, but contact me in the future.

YES, I would like to be an Embrace group leader. Please consider me. I am willing to attend additional training.

FULL NAME:

MAIN TELEPHONE:

Type: Cell Home Work

E-mail address:

Home address:

Age:

Preferred Day and Time: Sunday dinner Saturday brunch Tuesday dinner Thursday dinner Wednesday lunch

If applicable to your corps community **Preferred Group:** Women only Mixed gender only Men only (you may choose more than one)

Preferred Location: In my neighborhood Doesn't matter I do not have transportation to attend a group outside my neighborhood I am not able to drive at night

Allergies/Dietary Restrictions:

Pet Allergies:

Anything you think we might need to know about you:

Other comments:

Leading *Embrace*

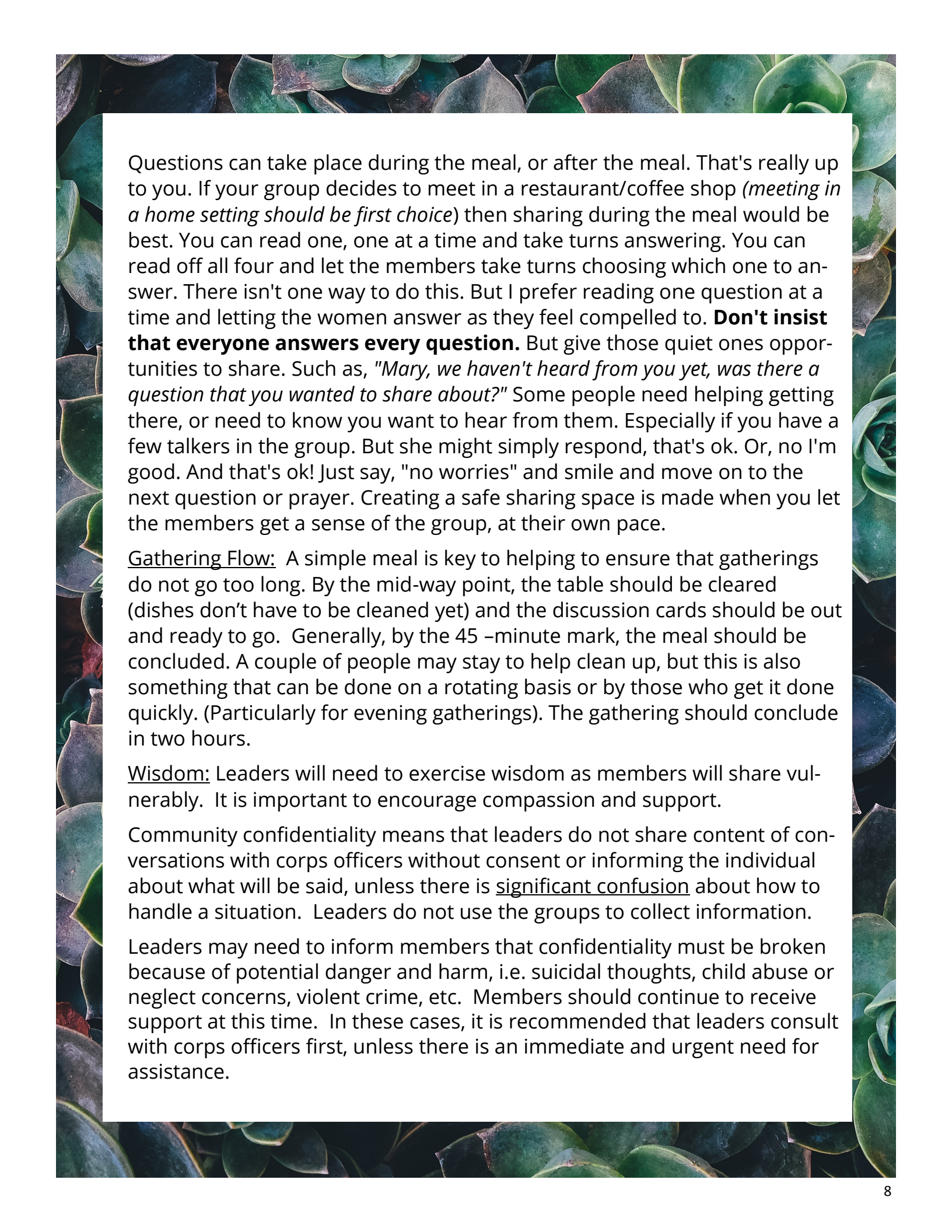
Time Commitment: Leaders should agree to lead an *Embrace* group for 8 months, barring unforeseen circumstances. It is important that leaders understand that they may not be asked to lead again the next year, so that other women can have the opportunity to lead. It is important that corps officers understand that they are asking someone to lead for a year, not for the rest of her life or until she escapes.

Organization: Leaders ensure that there is host/home each month and that communication is current. A great tool to use for scheduling your meeting is called doodle.com. It's a little bit of work getting everyone to agree on a date and Doodle helps narrow down the best day for your group collectively. Know that there will be months not everyone will be available, choose the date that most are available.

- Leaders may opt to have the group decide at each meeting when they will meet the next month and who will host or to pick a 3rd whatever of the month as the time. In case of the latter, this should be resolved with the group at the first meeting.
- Doodle.com is a great scheduling resource for groups to use
- Getting hosts to sign up months in advance is best.
- Leaders should send e-mails/texts/make phone calls reminding people of the upcoming gathering or assign a reliable person to do so.
- Leaders may like to send a weekly individual text/Facebook message/make a weekly call to all the group members.
- Leaders may need to assist hosts with understanding what is needed and coordinating help.
- Leaders should have the cards, etc., for the meeting.
- Leaders should ensure that the reminder systems at the corps is operating (announcements, Powerpoints, bulletins, e-mails, Facebook/Instagram updates, etc.)

Community Building: Leaders remind about community confidentiality, listening, etc. each week. Leaders encourage participants to bless the meal, close in prayer, etc.

Regarding the questions you'll receive, cut them out and answer them in any order.

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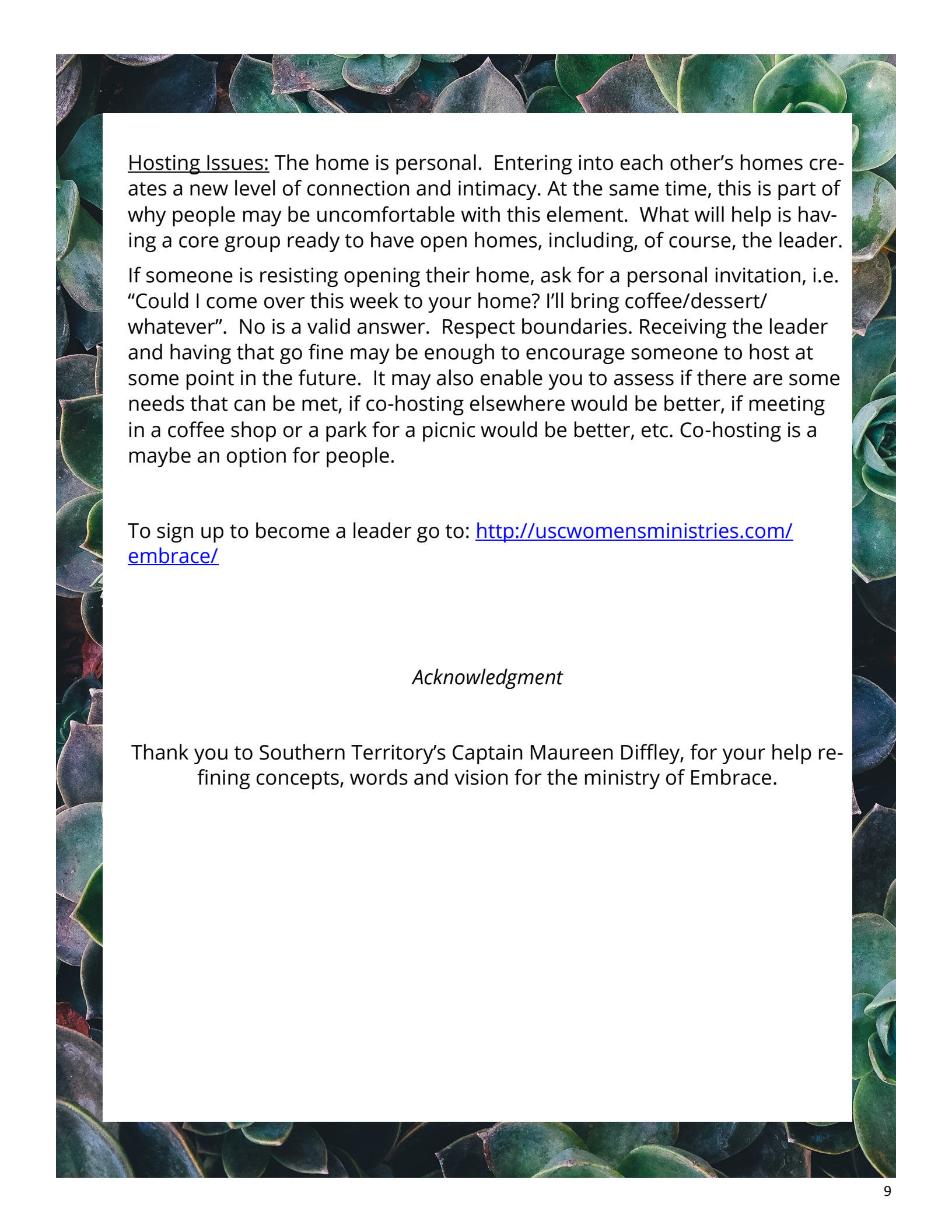
Questions can take place during the meal, or after the meal. That's really up to you. If your group decides to meet in a restaurant/coffee shop (*meeting in a home setting should be first choice*) then sharing during the meal would be best. You can read one, one at a time and take turns answering. You can read off all four and let the members take turns choosing which one to answer. There isn't one way to do this. But I prefer reading one question at a time and letting the women answer as they feel compelled to. **Don't insist that everyone answers every question.** But give those quiet ones opportunities to share. Such as, "*Mary, we haven't heard from you yet, was there a question that you wanted to share about?*" Some people need helping getting there, or need to know you want to hear from them. Especially if you have a few talkers in the group. But she might simply respond, that's ok. Or, no I'm good. And that's ok! Just say, "no worries" and smile and move on to the next question or prayer. Creating a safe sharing space is made when you let the members get a sense of the group, at their own pace.

Gathering Flow: A simple meal is key to helping to ensure that gatherings do not go too long. By the mid-way point, the table should be cleared (dishes don't have to be cleaned yet) and the discussion cards should be out and ready to go. Generally, by the 45 -minute mark, the meal should be concluded. A couple of people may stay to help clean up, but this is also something that can be done on a rotating basis or by those who get it done quickly. (Particularly for evening gatherings). The gathering should conclude in two hours.

Wisdom: Leaders will need to exercise wisdom as members will share vulnerably. It is important to encourage compassion and support.

Community confidentiality means that leaders do not share content of conversations with corps officers without consent or informing the individual about what will be said, unless there is significant confusion about how to handle a situation. Leaders do not use the groups to collect information.

Leaders may need to inform members that confidentiality must be broken because of potential danger and harm, i.e. suicidal thoughts, child abuse or neglect concerns, violent crime, etc. Members should continue to receive support at this time. In these cases, it is recommended that leaders consult with corps officers first, unless there is an immediate and urgent need for assistance.

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Hosting Issues: The home is personal. Entering into each other's homes creates a new level of connection and intimacy. At the same time, this is part of why people may be uncomfortable with this element. What will help is having a core group ready to have open homes, including, of course, the leader. If someone is resisting opening their home, ask for a personal invitation, i.e. "Could I come over this week to your home? I'll bring coffee/dessert/whatever". No is a valid answer. Respect boundaries. Receiving the leader and having that go fine may be enough to encourage someone to host at some point in the future. It may also enable you to assess if there are some needs that can be met, if co-hosting elsewhere would be better, if meeting in a coffee shop or a park for a picnic would be better, etc. Co-hosting is a maybe an option for people.

To sign up to become a leader go to: <http://uscwomensministries.com/embrace/>

Acknowledgment

Thank you to Southern Territory's Captain Maureen Diffley, for your help refining concepts, words and vision for the ministry of Embrace.



Here are some Frequently Asked Questions about Embrace that you may find helpful:

Question: What does the program for Embrace look like?

Answer: Unlike a traditional women's program that may take place, there is no 'program.' There is no craft, there is no giveaway, there is no Bible Study (unless you're in an Embrace: Campus group). The discussion questions the leaders receive on the first of the month *are the program*. Here's what a typical Embrace meeting may look like:

6pm: Arrive at hostesses home (leader brings four questions)

6:15pm sit down for dinner (host provides)

6:30pm – Leader introduces the Embrace theme of the month and begins questions

Could simply look like: *"well, our theme for the month is grace and the first question is..."* after that the conversation can flow! Sometimes the conversation doesn't flow. And that's ok too, the group has to get comfortable with one another. It takes time.

Try to wrap up by 8pm with a prayer.

Question: How long do the groups last for? 4, 6, 9 or 12 months?

Answer: Each group, corps, church is unique so the answer may not always be the same. Ideally following the school/program calendar may serve you best. But we are

very flexible and want groups to start during any month. So here are a few scenarios:

- *If your group starts in January, run all the way through August and form new groups (if possible) in September.*
- *If you start in March, April May; again, run all the way through August and form new groups (if possible) in September.*
- *If it's summer time host an event to promote Embrace and start in September and run through May.*
- *If it's October, November, or December start right away and run until May.*
- *If you were able to use September – May use the summer months to still meet but maybe in a more casual way. Like a BBQ or picnic. If your corps/church has multiple groups use the summer months to meet all together for a picnic or BBQ.*

Question: How do you choose the groups?

Answer: I (Sarah) am a women's ministries secretary at corps and I oversee five groups. I select the groups as well. I ask around to see if there are willing leaders for each group. Once I get all the women from the corps signed up (I use a Google form survey to email out) and I have the leaders in place then I start forming groups. I have had best results when I have literally, believe it or not, drawn names. After drawing 6 – 8 names per group I look over the results to make sure there is a good balance of age/generations and mix up of friendship groups. Usually I get great results. Pray over the names first!

Question: When do the groups meet?

Answer: The groups meet when it works best for them to meet. The tool I use that is very helpful is called Doodle.com. It's a scheduling tool. Once each person enters their availability by selecting the dates they are free, Doodle tells you what day works best. Or another option is to have the same day every month, like, the second Sunday night of the month. Again each group is unique and should try to accommodate each other.

For any unanswered questions email Sarah Micula:
sarah_micula@usc.salvationarmy.org