



The Word Spoken

A resource to support Leaders of
Owning our Faith and Calling,
a work for the new Evangelisation
in the parish of St Nicholas Boldmere.

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Aim of Small Group

To help participants

- to a new experience of Church and their part in it
- become more comfortable with praying together and discussing Scripture
- become more comfortable in praying together and discussing the meaning of faith

What's the Small Group going to be looking at?

Our own experience and understanding of faith; and passages of Scripture and sections of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) that deal with the person and mission of Jesus.

What is CCC?

CCC was prepared following Vatican Council II, a meeting of the bishops of the world to highlight the Church's apostolic and pastoral mission and by making the truth of the Gospel shine forth to lead all people to seek and receive Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge.

CCC offers a compendium of all catholic doctrine. The presentation of doctrine is biblical and liturgical, sound, and suited to the present life of Christians. CCC was prepared over 6 years and was published under the authority of Pope John Paul II, in 1992.

Table of sessions

Session 1	Jesus	Especially the name of Jesus
Session 2	God in flesh	Especially the Incarnation
Session 3	As promised	Especially Jesus as fulfilment of God's promises to Israel
Session 4	The Kingdom	Especially what God's mercy offers and invites us to
Session 5	Passion	Especially the saving death of Jesus
Session 6	Mystery of Christ and the Church	Especially what it means to call Jesus 'Lord'

Working with small groups

We study and learn in many ways. One of the richest ways of studying and learning is to do so in a group. That way one is able to benefit from people's many different perspectives on the matter in hand, the fruit of their different experiences and situations in life. It is a way of learning that is particularly respectful of our identity as members of the Body of Christ, giving a precious opportunity to explore things not only intellectually but at the level of faith also. Insights that might otherwise simply pass anyone of us by often make more of an impact when they are heard in the context of a group.

The role of the Leaders

The task of the leadership within such a group *is simply to assist the group to engage with the materials set.*

How each group does that will depend on a number of factors particularly, the people in the group, their past experiences, and present situation. There are no goals that can be pre-set for all groups, nor is it wise to try and work out an achievement target for any particular group.

The group provides an opportunity for people of good will to come together and reflect on the materials given. They have the task of reflecting on what the materials are saying. The materials provided are key texts from the Church's tradition – especially Scripture, CCC and the prayer tradition. Some of them are rather densely written; it takes a little effort for some of these to 'speak' to most of us. The group provides a healthy context for considering these writings, and seeing how what they say connects with our own experience, and with our hopes and fears, joys and longings concerning the life of our parish and our own role in that.

The process is likely to work best if each group has two leaders – the first looking after matters to do with hospitality, the second looking after the session itself.

1. THE LEADER OF HOSPITALITY makes sure that

- the meeting space is prepared for the group (this might be in someone's home, a meeting place in the church; a table in a local pub/café/restaurant)
- the materials for the session are ready (i.e. the leaflets for each session and, where appropriate and practical, a focus for the prayer – for example a covered table, with a candle and a bible). The leader of hospitality will need to liaise with the Session leader in order to know what form the prayer will take each week. There are suggestions in the Leaders' notes, but they are only suggestions...
- Have tea and coffee ready for the group (be that as people arrive, or at the end of the session)
- Ensure people are welcomed when they arrive (including any late-comers, so they can then comfortably enter into the group)

Although the leader of hospitality has the responsibility for ensuring all these things are in place, they do not, of course, need to do them all themselves. It will often be more appropriate to share tasks out around the group, over the weeks.

Offering refreshments does incur costs (particularly if something more than tea and coffee is involved.) Decisions need to be made in advance of the first meeting about whether it is possible to offer refreshments, and if so whether the proposal is that the cost will be borne by the host, the group or the parish.

2. **THE SESSION LEADER** makes sure that:

- ***the group starts and finishes at the agreed times.*** If members need to leave promptly at the agreed time, they should be able to do that, without feeling that they are missing out on what they came for. Others in the group may be free to stay to chat over tea or coffee, for example, but it should be made clear that this is 'extra' to the work of the group.
- ***the group keeps to the timetable for each session.*** As can be seen below, time has been allocated to each part of the session, according to what is judged necessary. If the timetable is not kept to then what will end up being squeezed out are the consideration of practical application of the things discussed, and the final prayer. That would be a great pity. Don't worry if you don't finish all the questions or if the discussion takes a different form. But do try to keep to the over-all shape of the session intact.

the group keeps to the task in hand. Leaders' notes for each session indicate the main themes of each section. It would likely be harmful to the working of the group if the session leader insisted that each theme/question was touched on – groups just don't work like that. However if the session leader has prepared well, and noted the main themes, then should the group find difficulty in coming to grips with the material, the session leader can ask a supplementary question or say something like "looking at this the other day, I wondered about..." just gently steering the group to what might be a more fruitful approach.

- Above all, the session leader ***should have a care for the healthy working of the group.*** Each group is going to be different, but a few pointers to the sort of 'difficulties' that can arise might be helpful
 - Often a group will contain one or two people that will sit quietly, perhaps nervous of making any direct contribution to the discussion. The leader should be aware if any people seem to be being 'left out'. They may not wish to say anything, but may simply be too nervous, in which case gentle encouragement might really help them to feel welcome and able to make a contribution. The materials for the sessions give the option of people making notes in response to the questions – so that the leader might ask: 'Has anyone got anything else written down?' or inviting people in turn to share something of what they have thought or written down. A leader should never force anyone else to speak but can offer gentle encouragement for them to do so.
 - Often a group will contain a person who, left to their own devices will seek to dominate the group – always willing to talk, but not willing to listen. There are some 'ground rules' for groups below. At the first meeting ask everyone in the group whether they are happy for the group to oper-

ate according to them. If so, it should be easier, if a particular person is dominating the group, to gently thank them for their contribution, and ask whether anyone else would like to say something.

- There will sometimes be someone in the group who is always ready to tell others “What the Church teaches”, or whenever a question is asked, become immediately pre-occupied with “What is the official teaching about this?” Such attitudes can prevent individuals and groups looking at the life of faith – which is just as important as consideration of teaching and doctrine. We can know all the doctrine and still have impoverished faith. ***The work of the small group is above all to help us explore what our faith means to us, and how it connects and has connected with OUR lives. We can best learn about this when we listen to each other: as in faith we reflect on what is taught and consider our experiences of the life of faith.***
- Sometimes a group or someone in the group will come up with a question that can seem very important, but no one present knows the answer to. There is no need to panic! No group knows the answer to everything, and sometimes we can't find the right answer to even the most basic sounding sorts of questions. If this happens – just acknowledge the question and ask if anyone would like to try and find out something more about it for the next meeting. If no-one else feels up to it, it is probably best if you say you will take it on. (And then after the meeting ring someone up, who you think might be able to help you come up with something!)

Before you begin

Little things can make a great deal of difference to how your group will work. Be sure that the group's leaders meet before the first session, to agree on who is looking after what.

Beginning your first session

- **Timings** Make sure everyone knows what time the group begins and ends.
- **Introductions** Don't presume that everyone in the group knows everyone else. One way of making introductions, of course, is simply to ask everyone to introduce themselves. Maybe a better way is to ask everyone to speak to the person next to them, learn their name, and something about them, and then for these couples to introduce each other to the larger group. (One particular benefit of doing this, is that it means everyone has already spoken with someone else in the group, and to the group – in a relatively unthreatening context - before the session properly gets under way.)
- **Guidelines for the group** The following guidelines will help people feel confident in the group. At the first meeting read them out and ask people whether they are willing to accept them as governing the group.
 1. Because the group provides an opportunity for those taking part to learn from one another it is very important that we try to listen to each other. If anyone becomes aware that they are not listening for at least twice as long as they are speaking, they are going to be talking too much!
 2. People will be invited to share their reflections in the group. However, no-one should feel pressured to share anything that they would rather not share.
 3. That appropriate confidentiality should be maintained. What is said in the group, is for the group, and not to be casually shared elsewhere.
- **The structure and timing of each session**

A.	Welcome	10 minutes
B.	1. Scripture	
	2. Our Experience	20 – 30 minutes
C.	The Church Teaches	20-30 minutes
D.	Act	5 minutes
E.	Prayer	10 minutes

It is suggested that each session lasts about an hour and a half. The timings given above are rough estimates as to how long each part will last. It does not matter if it feels time to move from one part on a little early, or if you take a little longer over another part. However, do try and keep to the general timings suggested, and always try to

make sure that you finish at the agreed time.

It is proposed that each session is held during the week after the first Sunday of each month, as that will best coordinate with Sunday preaching and follow-up material in the newsletter and parish blog. But if that is not practical for whatever reason, the session should be held when is most suitable for the group

- **Leaders' notes** Separate session leaders' notes are available for each session. These will help you prepare for the session. It is important that you do read them through carefully, so that you are aware of the content of each session, and of any particular things you need to have got ready beforehand.

The elements of each session

A. *Welcome*

You may wish to begin with a prayer, a moment of silence or by lighting a candle.

After introducing the session, allow some time to share about the previous month's action.

B1. *Scripture*

Each session includes the reading of scripture. The scripture reading for each week is printed in the participants' material, mostly using the *English Standard Version*. This is the version that is intended to be used in the new translation/edition of the Lectionary for use at Mass in England and Wales, due in the next year or two. Some participants might prefer to use another translation, such as the *Jerusalem Bible* translation used in the current Sunday or weekday lectionary, or another translation they may use in their regular prayer or Bible reading. There is no reason for everyone to use the same translation, and there are many advantages in encouraging people to bring their own bible to the meetings.

The following is a tried and tested method of the scripture being read, heard and reflected on. It follows the principles of lectionary-based catechesis, very often used with adults learning about the faith, and preparing for baptism.

1. Have the text read through twice with a different reader from the group for each reading (deciding on the readers before beginning)
2. Allow a significant silence between each reading (about 3 minutes)
3. Invite the other members of the group to listen without reading the text for themselves.
4. After the silence, invite each person to share what has struck them from the reading: a word, a phrase, a sentence; perhaps an image, perhaps a question. Maybe not everyone will say anything but allow time for people to mull over what they hear, before moving on. However, **DO** limit people to **ONE** statement, and do not allow discussion at this stage.

B2. Our experience

Sometimes the questions asked in this section will link quite directly to the scripture reading. At other times they will not. However, they will always be opening up the things that will be explored in the Read & Reflect section.

‘Ordinary’ people’s experience is too often neglected as a resource for the community’s learning about the ways of faith. Yet it is a rich resource, giving a context to the questions being explored, putting flesh on the bones of the ‘theory’ and sometimes challenging the truth of the ‘theory’, helping us to find new ways of expressing the unchanging core truths of our faith.

C. The Church Teaches

The documentation is drawn from CCC.

Those who are familiar with the ‘Penny Catechism’ will recognise that CCC is something very different.

The ‘Penny Catechism’ gave terse, summary responses to questions

1. **Who made you?** God made me.
2. **Why did God make you?** God made me to know him, love him and serve him in this world, and to be happy with him for ever in the next...

CCC is doctrinal too, but biblical and liturgical in its language and expression. It is perhaps more open to the experience of the mystery of faith in history, and the Penny Catechism seemingly more ‘scientific’/technical in its expression.

Enabling reflection

With each of the elements of the sessions it is important that there is time for reflection, not just a first hearing, but allowing for pondering on what has been heard.

Sometimes, as with the scripture reflection there is a rather formal process suggested. At other times simply allow a little time and space. You may wish to have the texts read aloud with a pause between each one. It may also be helpful to encourage people to look over the material before the meeting. The participants’ booklets give space for them to write down first reflections in response to questions — again, helping people to think for themselves before opening things up to the group as a whole.

Taking things further

The themes and topics of each month’s session will be explored further in Sunday homilies and material in the newsletter/parish blog in the weeks following. If group members want to suggest material/questions, please forward them to Fr Allen.

D. Act

Thinking and talking about the things of faith is good. Putting them into practice is better.

In each session some practical steps are suggested by which those taking part can explore the theme in the coming days and weeks.

Those taking part are likely, also, to benefit from keeping a journal. Although this might sound something unusual and unlikely, it can be very helpful.

Often over a series of meetings all sorts of things can come up – new insights, feelings. Unless we take a moment to note them, they are often quickly forgotten, and an opportunity for deeper learning is lost. All that is necessary is to write down just a few thoughts and observations, after each meeting, or practical exercise, perhaps also after Mass each Sunday. Simply note what has struck you and, perhaps, how you feel about what has struck you.

Don't worry about whether you are putting things in the right words... these are just notes for you, to help **you** call to mind what you thought at the time. Reviewing your journal before each meeting is a good way of preparing for it. Reviewing your journal at the end of the series of meetings is almost certain to reveal what a rich process of reflection you have been part of.

It is important to stress that what is written in each journal remains private to that person, and is not to be shared with others, unless they so choose. At no point in the process are those taking part to be asked to share what is in their journal and this should be made clear to all at the first meeting.

E. A time of prayer

Each session ends with a time of prayer.

It should be based on the simple structure of:

- Gather
- Listen
- Respond
- Send forth

What is important is that the group spends time praying together. So, if the suggestions of particular music, readings or actions given in the leaflets do not really seem to suit your group, then feel free to adapt them as necessary. However, the suggestion is that you take care to ensure that however you change them, you try to link the prayer, actions, texts and songs with the topics being considered, in the same way we have tried to do.

The person preparing the prayer will need to liaise with the leader of hospitality, so that the way in which the prayer focus for each session is prepared suits the nature and content of the time of prayer.

The **Gather** and **Send Forth** provided for the first session can be used each week, or feel free to substitute suitable alternatives:

Gather:

O God, come to our aid.

O Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,

**as it was in the beginning,
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

Spend a minute or so in silence, and bring to mind the things that have struck you during the meeting - the things you have heard and talked about; the people you have been with; and the Lord who has spoken...

Send Forth:

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us
all,
every more. Amen.**

Let us go in the peace of Christ.

Thanks be to God.