



Introduction: Notes for leaders

American style Sunday school

Introduction

This resource is an opportunity for the whole church to try out conversation about faith and be 'In Classes Together.'

Week 1 can begin on Easter Sunday (day 1 of the 50 days) and Week 8 end at Pentecost (day 50). You can also start on Week 2 and end on Week 6. Each session is self-contained. However, each session also follows the lectionary and the sessions can build and develop, as the group gets to know each other.

The Scripture readings used follow the Gospel lectionary for Year C. They are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Hymn extracts are taken from *Singing The Faith* (StF).

The resource provides an opportunity:

- for everyone in the local church to try out a small group before, during or after the weekly act of worship for this Easter season to Pentecost beginning on Easter Sunday and ending at Pentecost (eight classes)
- to make connections between classes and weekly worship to support the spiritual conversation of the groups, because it is a whole church project
- to make the most of the time when most people already gather for forming as disciples without adding extra meetings to the diary
- to build a sense of belonging and community and get to know a few people better
- to make space to frame a safe time to talk of God and things which are important to us
- to share a little of our faith and struggles and be listened to; to listen and hold a space for others; to listen to God together; it is not a time to try fixing others or ourselves; but a time to listen for God's grace to ourselves and others
- to help think about how we do or don't let God speak through our living day by day
- to use simple spiritual practices and key ideas to reflect on our intentional experience of loving God and loving neighbour
- to pray and seek God's presence together
- to commit to action together and be supportive of one another as we learn to live in light of the resurrection.

Guidelines for group leaders

This type of class meeting has a specific task. It is there to create safe space for people to listen to how God is speaking to them, and to explore and share a little of their insights into life and faith.

It is **not** a social meeting with chit chat. Keep that outside the group. The facilitator should gently stop this.

It is **not** a place where one expert tells everyone the answers. Keep sharing of expert knowledge for other occasions. Where listening to God is concerned, there are no experts. The facilitator should guard this.

It is **not** a place for giving advice. Give advice elsewhere. This is a place where everyone listens hard to hear God's leading to the person speaking. The facilitator should gently guard this boundary.

This type of class is a meeting place of equals. It is a place where one beggar shares with another how they have been looking for food, listening to God and where they have found sustenance. This requires a lot of deep listening, a little deep speaking, a lot of honesty and much respect for souls who are searching. The facilitator should give opportunity for each person to share (if they wish to) and all to listen.

The brothers of the Taizé community put it like this: “Often a group discussion is like a football competition where the football gets kicked around and the pushiest get the best shots and win the game. This type of conversation group is one where we reverence what each person says, the sharing of holy ground, the place where God has spoken. Our presence helps each person hear what God is deeply saying to them. Very often we do not even need to comment, except sometimes briefly to show we have heard.”

Guidelines for all group members

Everyone needs to agree the following guidelines. But it may be that someone has an idea for an amendment or addition that can be agreed and added.

- Please make a commitment to pray for and support other members of your class through the season of Easter, which includes a commitment to be there to listen to one another.
- Everything said in the class meeting is confidential and not to be repeated outside the class without permission. Our souls communicate shyly and do not want to be gossiped about.
- Listen carefully to whoever is speaking and refrain from any comment until everyone has had the chance to answer the question being addressed.
- If it feels right, share insights sparked by other people’s sharing, but never advise. It helps the person more, if you reflect back to them something of what you have heard, without any judgement.
- Respect each person’s right to explore and express their experience, even if you would do it differently.
- Allow everyone the opportunity to contribute, and don’t take others space.
- Be mindful of how long you have been speaking. Do not be afraid of silence.
- Take responsibility for sharing your perspective.
- Keep to time; the shape of the class has its own completeness.

Questions for reflection on risky venture of living with intention to share God’s love

Here are some questions to help you reflect on the experience.

1. Why did I think that God wanted me to do this particular risky venture?
2. Why was it risky for me?
3. What did I learn about the people I served and about myself?
4. What passage of Scripture does the experience remind me of, and what do this passage and my experience teach me about faith?
5. Is there something I should now do as a result of this experience and learning?