

Group Leader Guide

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Will You?



A LENTEN STUDY OF BAPTISMAL PROMISES

The Basics

This Lenten group study focuses on the five “will you” questions of the Baptismal Covenant and is a companion to the book, *Will You? A Lenten Study of the Baptismal Promises*. The group study begins with a “gathering in” and ends with a “sending out” and follows the arc of the Baptismal Covenant questions.

The first meeting is an introductory gathering over a shared meal on Ash Wednesday or soon afterward. The next four weekly meetings are discussion-based, covering the first four “will you” questions of the Baptismal Covenant. The sixth meeting, on Palm Sunday or shortly before, combines a brief discussion of the fifth “will you” question with a shared eucharist, coordinated with clergy.

Participants are asked to commit to a personal study of seven brief devotions each week throughout the five weeks of the program. The devotions for each week from the *Will You?* book prepare the group participants for the upcoming meeting.

This Group Leader Guide is intended to help you facilitate the six group meetings. Format and content are suggestions only and should be customized to fit your group’s context.

Introductory Meeting

(on Ash Wednesday or soon afterward)

This first meeting is about getting to know the group, passing out materials, answering questions, and building community. There is no preparation necessary from participants for this meeting. I recommend the group share a meal and set aside time for introductions. During this time, you might ask participants to briefly share who they are and how they came to the Episcopal Church, and you should go over the basics of the study.

This study is designed to be done during Lent. As part of the study, group members are asked to take on the practice of praying for each group member by name. Sharing the names of the group members with the group quickly after the first meeting should be a priority.

Materials Needed

Nametags

Will You? books

A sign-in sheet to gather participants’ phone numbers and email addresses

Blessing for the Meal

Lord, we thank you for this opportunity to be together in fellowship and preparation. Please bless this community of faith as we journey together through Lent, exploring ways to live according to the promises we have made to you and to each other in our baptisms. We thank you for this food, and we ask that you bless the hands that have worked to prepare it and to bring it to our table. Please use it to nourish our bodies so that we will be strengthened to participate in your healing, compassionate work in the world. Amen.

Group Discussion

Read the Introduction of the book, pages ix-xi, together. This should answer most of the group's questions.

Points to highlight:

- ◇ The book has five chapters, each focusing on one of the “will you” questions of the Baptismal Covenant. Each chapter is divided into seven brief reflections, which should ideally be read on separate days during that week. Each chapter of the reflection book is intended to prepare participants for the discussion to be held at the next week's meeting.
- ◇ *Will You?* is written in a conversational, first-person style for reasons detailed in the Introduction. Reflections are the author's own opinions and experiences. They are intended to prompt readers to thought and discussion, not necessarily to agreement. The meetings are dependent on the group's willingness to discuss, so participants should come prepared to share some of their responses to the Invitation questions from the week and to dive deeper into these topics together. Dialog should be respectful, and there should be space for all to share. *It may be helpful to spend some time during this initial meeting creating a Group Covenant for discussion. Kaleidoscope Institute's Respectful Communication Guidelines may be helpful in guiding this process (kscopeinstitute.org/kitoolkit).*
- ◇ Participants should bring the book and a pen for each meeting. They may want to bring a notebook as well, if they have made notes or would like to make notes.

Looking Ahead

Each week, I will suggest a question or activity to connect the conversation from the current week to the upcoming week's question. This week's activity is gathering in community and fellowship, breaking bread together, and praying a prayer together to bless the food. The whole of this introductory meeting points toward the first week's question: “Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?”

Closing

For the closing, you may ask participants to open to page vii of their books and read through the Baptismal Covenant as a group.

Week One Meeting

Will you continue in
the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread,
and in the prayers?



This meeting is held after the readings from Week One are completed, ideally on Day Seven of Week One.

Materials Needed

Nametags

A way to show video from the internet

Either *The Book of Common Prayer* for each group member or copies of the Lord's Prayer from page 364

Paper and Pen for participants

A Sharpie and Large Memo Pad or similar

Opening Prayer

Prayer for the Unity of the Church
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 818

O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our

calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Check-in

Ask participants to share how their childhood communities of faith approached communal prayer. If group members need further prompting, consider questions such as: Was communal prayer seen as important? Was it only considered legitimate if extemporaneous, or were pre-written prayers acceptable? Who was allowed to pray publicly? Was there also communal lament?

Group Discussion

Some questions for group discussion can be found in the Invitation at the end of each day's readings. In this section of the Group Leader Guide, you will find additional conversation starters. Prior to each weekly meeting, make a tentative plan combining

Invitation section questions from the week's reflections with additional questions from the list below. This plan should be flexible so that you can respond to the flow of the group's discussion.

Ask the group to throw out some of the first words that come to mind when they think about evangelism. For any word or phrase that is unfamiliar to you or seems unfamiliar to the rest of the group, ask the person to briefly explain to the group what that word or phrase means.

Presiding Bishop Michael Curry is quoted in the Invitation section of Day One. As a group, watch the short video of sermon highlights from Bishop Curry's Evangelism Matters Sermon ([youtube.com/watch?v= z3jb0s2rA4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3jb0s2rA4)). Ask the group to share their answers to what "a way of evangelism grounded in the loving way of Jesus" looks like to them. Discuss whether Bishop Curry's address held any surprises about his view of evangelism.

This week's Baptismal Covenant question comes from Acts 2:42-47 (found on Day Two). Read this passage together. In what ways is your church community similar to this picture of the first-century church? In what ways is it different?

On Day Four, Bishop Phoebe Roaf lists several groups that may be missing or excluded from church communities. What groups are missing from full participation at your community's table? If group members have a difficult time getting this conversation going because most Episcopal churches see themselves as "open and affirming," some of the following questions might help: Does your community of faith exclude anyone from receiving Communion? Does your church offer a non-alcoholic wine alternative for those in recovery? Do you have fellowship events that are alcohol-free? Do you ever have a different style of music in your worship services? How are the bathrooms labeled in your church? Could someone in a wheelchair use the bathroom at your church? Could someone in a wheelchair serve as a lector? Are your service leaflets easy to follow? Do you offer interpretive services? Assistive listening devices? Services in different languages? Looking at the imagery in your

church, is it a space that would be comfortable to black and brown people? These questions are not a list of "things your church needs to do." They are just a way to encourage group members to think about their church realistically and not idealistically. No matter its stance on being "open and affirming," no community is open and affirming to all.

Ask if anyone went to The Contemplative Society's website referenced on Day Five and tried a contemplative practice found there. If so, ask if they would be willing to share their experience with the group.

When we think of welcoming people into our communities or gathering together for communal prayer, contemplation is not the first thing that comes to mind. Ask the group to explore how silence and contemplative spaces might be seen as welcoming and community-building. If group members need further prompting, consider questions such as: Is there silence at the beginning of your worship service? If so, how might this be viewed by visitors? How might this period of silence be explained graciously by greeters? Does your worship service have intentional pauses, places of silence? Are these inviting us to participate in some way in the liturgy, or are they just making the service longer? Does your church have a place of contemplation, such as a small side chapel or labyrinth or memorial garden? If so, what could be done to make these spaces more welcoming to those who are unfamiliar with your traditions?



Looking Ahead

Next week's question is: "Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?" The Lord's Prayer is the principal prayer of the Christian religion and is the only prayer that has been handed down to us that was composed by Jesus. It has a place in every Episcopal act of worship. Both the traditional and more modern language versions of the Lord's Prayer use the phrase "deliver us from evil." Ask participants if any would be willing to share what they mean when they pray this part of the prayer. For example, someone might say that one of the things they think of when praying this part of the prayer is, "Deliver me from complacency and delusion. Help me to walk through the world in a way that allows me to see the reality of other people's lives."

Group Activity

Divide the group members into groups of two or three. Using either the traditional or more modern language versions of the Lord's Prayer found on page 364 of the Book of Common Prayer, divide the Lord's Prayer into sections, giving one section to each pair. Ask the pairs to be creative in writing their own versions of the sections they have been given. After a few minutes, reconvene the group and go through the prayer, writing each pair's new version on a pad or dry erase board where all can see. As a closing, have the group pray this prayer together. After the meeting, email the group's version of the Lord's Prayer to all group members.

Closing (if not doing group activity)

Use one of the versions of the Lord's Prayer found on page 364 of the Book of Common Prayer, a version that you have made on your own, or the version below, written for your use.

God who is within and without, at work in our world, Guide us in honoring the Names we call you through our care for ourselves, for each other, and for all of Creation. May we have enough and be satisfied with it, and may our work be reconciling and healing, revealing the kingdom of God. Help us to forgive ourselves and to seek forgiveness from others for the violence and injustice done by us and perpetrated on our behalf, and help us to be compassionate and loving towards those who hurt us. Ground us in the sacred, even in difficult times. For you are the I AM, in all and through all, now and forever. *Amen.*

Week Two Meeting

Will you persevere in resisting evil,
and, whenever you fall into sin,
repent and return to the Lord?



This meeting is held after the readings from Week Two are completed, ideally on Day Seven of Week Two.

Materials Needed

Nametags

Either copies of the Confession of Sin from the Book of Common Prayer, p. 352, and the Confession of Sin from *Enriching Our Worship* for each group member or a sharpie and large memo pad

Either a way to show video or printed copies of “Speaking of Freedom” for each participant

Opening Prayer

Prayer for the Church
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 816

Gracious Father, we pray for thy holy catholic Church. Fill it with all truth, in all truth with all peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in any thing it is amiss, reform it. Where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in want, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ thy Son our Savior. *Amen.*

Check-in

Ask participants to share something they have given up or taken on for Lent either this year or in the past.

Group Discussion

Lead the group discussion by combining Invitation section questions from the week's reflections with additional questions from the list below.

If you asked group participants last week to name what they thought of when they pray, “Deliver us from evil,” in the Lord’s prayer, ask if any of them changed or refined those answers during the past week of reading and reflection.

Matthew 7:12-14 can be found in the Day Two reflection. Read this passage together. These verses have been used to condemn and shame and to advocate for a life of strict adherence to a set of narrowly defined rules. Ask participants to discuss alternate meanings for the narrow gate and hard way that leads to life.

The Day Three reflection discussed Julian of Norwich's view that sin causes us to *see* our connection to God as broken when she believed we can never lose our connection with God because being grounded in God is what it means to be human. Ask group members to react to this theology of sin. How do their theologies align with or differ from this view?

Discuss Days Three and Four reflections, which explore receiving messages from beyond. Ask group members to discuss ways in which they believe they receive messages or direction from God. What are the "acceptable" ways for God to communicate to God's people by modern societal standards?

There are many examples from the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion's shared history of blindness to evil, silence about it, and direct participation in it. Ask the group to discuss some of these. Name some ways in which the Church has apologized publicly for many of the wrongs committed in its name. Some examples can be found online ([episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/episcopal-presiding-bishop-katharine-jefferts-schori-issues-pastoral-letter-on-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-indigenous-peoples/](https://www.episcopalchurch.org/publicaffairs/episcopal-presiding-bishop-katharine-jefferts-schori-issues-pastoral-letter-on-the-doctrine-of-discovery-and-indigenous-peoples/) and [episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/03/23/new-york-service-to-offer-institutional-and-collective-apology-for-dioceses-complicity-in-slavery/](https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2023/03/23/new-york-service-to-offer-institutional-and-collective-apology-for-dioceses-complicity-in-slavery/)) As a group, read the Associated Press article from January 2023 that details the Church of England's apology for its treatment of LGBTQ people (apnews.com/article/london-england-religion-lgbtq-people-f645680c8cecd031bbcfddde9cc0c3628) Ask participants to discuss their reactions.

The Confession of Sin from *Enriching Our Worship* is referenced in the Invitation section of Day Five (and can be found on page 19 of the PDF www.churchpublishing.org/siteassets/pdf/enriching-our-worship-1/enrichingourworship1.pdf). Write this confession and the Confession of Sin from the Book of Common Prayer, found in the Day Five reflection, on a board where all can see (or have copies of both prepared in advance.)

Lead the group in discussing the differences between the two confessions.

Looking Ahead

Next week's question is, "Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?" Ask group members to discuss together if, and if so how, public acknowledgment of sin can be a proclamation of the Good News.

Group Activity

Watch together the video of the Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas, the Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers, and the Rev. Winnie Varghese reading "Speaking of Freedom," their joint letter to the church (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WX94bgC7dBM>). This is an open letter to the Episcopal Church written in July 2020 addressing the church's historic connections to white supremacy and the ways in which Episcopal churches and dioceses still benefit from those ties. It proposes actions to address and make amends for these sins. Alternately, you could print out copies of the letter (revsteph.medium.com/speaking-of-freedom-54ad2a49eb05) for each participant and ask group members to take turns reading sections of it. After watching or reading "Speaking of Freedom," ask group members to discuss their reactions.

Closing

Lord God, we thank you for the drive to wrestle with our doubts and fears, with our histories, and with you. Help us to see those we encounter as necessary for our journey toward a fuller understanding of the truth, as bearers of pieces of the truth we do not yet have. Bless us as we strive to partner with you in the creation of a new heaven and a new earth, where all creatures will be reconciled with you and with each other. *Amen.*



Week Three Meeting

Will you proclaim
by word and example
the Good News of God in Christ?



This meeting is held after the readings from Week Three are completed, ideally on Day Seven of Week Three.

Materials Needed

A way to show video from the internet

Opening Prayer

*The General Thanksgiving
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 101*

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in

holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. *Amen.*

Check-in

We have all “evangelized” at one point or another about a product purchase that seemed to be the perfect fit for our lives. Once we started using it, it was hard to believe that we had made it to that point without it. Briefly give us your testimony about a product that changed your life.

Group Discussion

Lead the group discussion by combining Invitation section questions from the week’s reflections with additional questions from the list below.

Without using the actual word, “testimony” was emphasized in this week’s reading. This is a word we generally associate with more theologically conservative denominations and a word that probably falls just below “evangelism”

and “sin” in Episcopalians’ ranking of words we find uncomfortable. How essential is it for us to articulate the ways we have been transformed by God’s love? In what situations do we feel comfortable verbally sharing those stories of personal or communal transformation? Discuss whether there are other or better ways to share these stories than with words.

Watch together the message about story sharing from Bishop Carlye Hughes of the Diocese of Newark ([youtube.com/watch?v=QUneDX20Kl0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUneDX20Kl0)). Discuss the importance of not only story sharing, but also story receiving and the power of the simple sincere question, “How are you doing?”

Romans 12:9-17 can be found on Day Two. Read this passage together. Discuss ways in which these verses articulate a vision of evangelism that aligns with Madeleine L’Engle’s quote from the *Day One* reflection: “We do not draw people to Christ by loudly discrediting what they believe, by telling them how wrong they are and how right we are, but by showing them a light that is so lovely that they want with all their hearts to know the source of it.” In what ways does your faith community resemble this ideal picture of love in action?

The Rev. Canon Stephanie Spellers serves as Presiding Bishop Curry’s Canon for Evangelism and Reconciliation. At the 2018 Evangelism

Matters conference, she said, “If you’re out there doing all of your good deeds, doing all of your outreach, but you’re not saying anything about Jesus, why do you think anybody is going to associate Jesus with what you do? We have to narrate. We have to say, ‘And by the way, the reason I’m here is Jesus.’” Ask group members to react to this statement.

In the video that was suggested in the Group Discussion section of the Week One Meeting ([youtube.com/watch?v= z3jb0s2rA4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3jb0s2rA4)), Bishop Curry says, “Evangelism is not about building a bigger church. It is about building a better world.” We looked at the importance of community in our Week One readings. How important is bringing people into the Church? Where is the balance between bringing people in and sending people out? What does that “better world” we are supposed to be building look like?

Looking Ahead

Next week’s question is, “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?” Read the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:25-37. Reflect as a group on this story. One method of reflection could be using the four Godly Play wondering statements to guide the group: “I wonder what part of this story you like best. I wonder what part of the story is the most important. I wonder where you are in the story. I wonder if there is a part of the story we can leave out and still have all the story we need.” Alternately, you could reflect individually on the characters in this story: the robbers, the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan, and the innkeeper. As with all good parables, we should be able to identify with every character. Ask group members to name the feelings/thoughts/justifications behind each of the characters’ actions.



Group Activity

As a group, watch the video “Remembering Jonathan Daniels” from the Episcopal News Service ([youtube.com/watch?v=UKlp8NpdT84&t](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKlp8NpdT84&t)). Ask the group to share their thoughts after watching. Alternately, read the following reflection aloud to the group:



After the first attempt at the Selma to Montgomery March ended in Bloody Sunday, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. asked clergy to travel to Selma, Alabama, and join the protesters. Jonathan Daniels was an Episcopal seminarian, and like clergy and lay people from all over America, he dropped everything to answer this call. Unlike most, though, he stayed after the cameras left, living and working alongside those he was trying to help.

It was after the crowds and cameras had gone that Daniels, Catholic priest Fr. Morrisroe, and several others were arrested while holding a voting rights protest in a small Alabama town where no African Americans had been able to register to vote even though thousands were eligible. The arrested protesters were released after six days, and the group walked to the store half a block away to purchase sodas, with teenager Ruby Sales in the lead. She was met on the steps of the grocery store by Tom Coleman, who pointed a shotgun at her chest. Daniels pulled Sales from in front of him and pushed her down to the ground. Coleman shot him in the chest, killing him instantly. Morrisroe grabbed the other teenager, started running, and was shot in the back and side, leaving him alive but permanently injured. Tom Coleman immediately turned himself in. And 40 days later, he was acquitted of all charges, never having served a day in jail.

At the annual Jonathan Daniels pilgrimage, the procession moves from the Courthouse Square to the jail where Daniels and his companions spent six days under inhumane conditions to the store where Daniels and Morrisroe were shot. A part of the story is told and there is a prayer at each stop, with spirituals sung in between. The pilgrimage ends at the Lowndes County Courthouse where Tom Coleman was acquitted, and Holy Eucharist is celebrated using the judge’s bench as the altar.



Ask group members to consider the many ways this story and the public liturgy that commemorates it proclaim the Good News of God in Christ. Using the judge’s bench as the eucharistic altar is a sermon without need of words. How can the reimagining and repurposing of physical spaces and objects be a testimony to God’s transforming love?

Closing

*Collect for Feast Day of
Jonathan Myrick Daniels, August 14*
Lesser Feasts & Fasts

O God of justice and compassion, who puts down the proud and mighty from their place, and lifts up the poor and the afflicted: We give you thanks for your faithful witness Jonathan Myrick Daniels, who, in the midst of injustice and violence, risked and gave his life for another; and we pray that we, following his example, may make no peace with oppression; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Week Four Meeting

Will you seek and serve Christ
in all persons, loving your
neighbor as yourself?



This meeting is held after the readings from Week Four are completed, ideally on Day Seven of Week Four.

Materials Needed

Either The Book of Common Prayer for each group member or copies of the Maundy Thursday service on pages 274-275

A way to show video from the internet

Either a Sharpie and Large Memo Pad or similar

Paper and pens for group members

Opening Prayer

*Maundy Thursday
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 274*

Leader: The Lord Jesus, after he had supped with his disciples and had washed their feet, said to them, “Do you know what I, your Lord and Master, have done to you? I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done.”

Group: Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

Leader: I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you.

Group: Peace is my last gift to you, my own peace I now leave with you; peace which the world cannot give, I give to you.

Leader: By this shall the world know that you are my disciples: That you have love for one another.

Check-in

Name someone who has been a neighbor to you, showing you mercy in a time of need.

Group Discussion

“The Way of Love: Practices for a Jesus-Centered Life” is an initiative that encourages Episcopalians

to follow a Rule of Life consisting of seven practices: Turn, Learn, Pray, Worship, Bless, Go, and Rest. As a group, watch together the video “Explore the Way of Love: Go” (episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love/go). Ask group members to identify any phrases or images from the video that were surprising or that particularly spoke to them. The narrator says at the beginning of the video, “The pursuit of Jesus can often mean moving out of our circles of comfort and going to other places...” What are some ways these words can be interpreted in light of this week’s Baptismal Covenant question, the Week Four reflections, and the Way of Love video? If group members would like more information about the Way of Love, encourage them to visit the website at episcopalchurch.org/way-of-love.

This week’s Day One reflection and invitation focused on compassion. Ask group members if any would like to share with the group an act of compassion that helped them when they were suffering. They can expound on how the person they named at check-in showed compassion or choose another situation. How did it feel to be in the position of needing help? What could, or did, the person who was showing compassion do to preserve the recipient’s dignity?

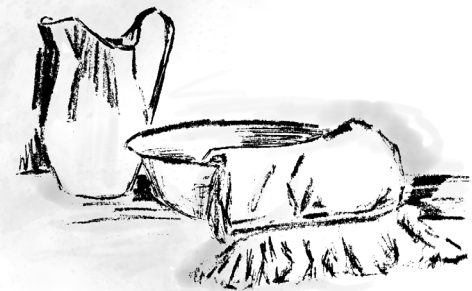
The Day One reflection contained the following statement: “There is an idea that’s taken root in the world that a person’s worth can be determined by race, economic status, ability, belief system, sexuality, or behavior. I do not believe this is God’s vision of the world. This is a vision of the world created by the world and a sign of the world’s brokenness and sinfulness.” Most people would readily voice agreement, at least in a small group setting, with the first two: race and economic status. Ask the group to discuss the last four listed—ability, belief system, sexuality, and behavior— and whether any of these categories should determine how worthy a person is of a Christian’s compassion.

Look back at the Invitation section of Week Two Day Three, which includes a modern language version of a quote from Julian of Norwich: “When we look at another who has fallen into sin, we

should focus only on compassion and our own brokenness, longing for God’s healing for us both. Without this attitude, our own souls will trip and stumble into sin. Compassion is our protection.” Ask group members to react to this theology in light of this week’s Baptismal Covenant question. Should Christians ever focus on someone else’s sin? Could attempts to seek and serve Christ in someone lead to a glossing-over of that person’s wrongs and a lack of accountability?

Psalm 139:12-16 can be found as part of the Day Two reflection. Have the group read this portion of Psalm 139 together in whatever way seems natural for your group context. This psalm is probably most familiar to group members as part of an argument in the fight over access to abortion or in conversations about transgender individuals. Ask group members to discuss what this psalm says to them about those with differences in physical or intellectual abilities. How might it be read by those who have been differently abled since birth and their parents?

The Rev. John Bauchamp, Diocesan Disability Ministry Enabler in the Diocese of London, said, “My role as Disability Ministry Enabler is to share a vision of a church in which we move beyond just welcome and inclusion of people with disabilities and replace this with a new understanding of belonging and participation. Not a church in which people who regard themselves as able make space for those they regard as disabled but a church in which all people belong on equal terms.” Ask group members to comment on the power dynamics

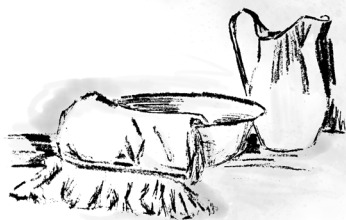


at play in this difference between “welcome and inclusion” and “belonging and participation.” You might watch the video “The Church is not Complete without People with Disabilities” (www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNraSttJ8Hc) from Joni and Friends, an organization led by evangelical leader Joni Eareckson Tada. This is not an Episcopal organization, and the churches featured are obviously not Episcopalian. What would have to happen in your congregation to make full belonging and participation of differently abled individuals possible? How can this be seen through the lens of evangelism?

“As a spiritual practice, I try to treat every single interaction as a cross-cultural exchange.” After making this statement in a podcast interview, Rabbi and Chaplain Abby Brockman goes on to explain that she tries to do this whether she is encountering someone with a different language or from another country or whether she is talking with a close family member. She says that this helps her to approach conversations with a sense of respect and curiosity and attentiveness that is difficult for her otherwise. Ask the group to discuss how this practice would help them seek and serve Christ and love their neighbor and how it might hinder those goals. How would it change interactions with your closest family members, or those who know you best, to try this practice with them?

Group Activity

Write a collect together. A collect is a short prayer with a defined structure. It begins with an address, consisting of a name for God and often a description of God’s character or actions. Next, there is usually a thanksgiving to God. Then,



there is a request. This section asks for something and then often attaches a “so that” clause, saying why we are asking for this thing. It concludes with praise for God and finally the Amen. The easiest way to write this as a group is to use a large memo pad or dry erase board, something that everyone can see, and take the prayer section by section - address, thanksgiving, request, reason, and praise. Write down ideas as they are called out and then come up with a consensus for what the group wants each section to say. As a closing, have the group pray this prayer together. After the meeting, email the group’s collect out to all group members. If you’re looking for sample collects, you can find several in the Book of Common Prayer.

Looking Ahead

Next week’s question is: “Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?” This activity is designed to show group members how little we know about each other when we have only the labels that society has placed on someone. It is adapted from Episcopal Relief and Development’s Power Walk Activity (jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Power-Walk.pdf). It can be done standing and moving around, or the group can remain seated and write their responses on paper.

Choose several roles from those listed below, or create roles that more accurately reflect your community, and assign one to each group member. Alternately, you could print the roles onto strips of folded paper, put them all in a basket together, and let each group member choose.

Sample Power Walk Roles

- ◇ Female divorced hotel manager, 3 children in high school
- ◇ Male restaurant owner, undocumented immigrant with wife and 2 children who are US citizens

- ◇ Male local government official with university education, married, 3 adult children
- ◇ 15-year-old girl, pregnant, living with grandmother
- ◇ Female accountant, married, 2 children in elementary school, addicted to opioids post-surgery
- ◇ Male dentist, married to same sex partner, 2 children in elementary school
- ◇ Male former convict, unemployed, single, no children
- ◇ 16-year-old boy in high school, lives with two parents and one younger sibling
- ◇ Female elementary school teacher, married, 1 child
- ◇ 18-year-old girl, high school dropout, sex worker, supports disabled mother and younger siblings
- ◇ Male widower, blind, lives with son, unable to work
- ◇ 14-year-old transgender male kicked out of family home and living on streets
- ◇ Female restaurant owner, no schooling, 5 children, abusive husband

Once participants have their roles, have each group member stand against a wall in an even line with each other. Alternately, participants may stay seated and number their papers from 1-9 (if using the list below). Read each of the following statements (or come up with your own statements that are more applicable to your context) and give participants several seconds to think and decide whether they should take a step forward or backwards or whether they should stay in place; or if staying seated, if they should write a plus sign, a minus sign, or a zero down on their papers for each statement. If group members do not have enough information to make a good guess about whether the statement is applicable to the role they are representing or if a statement has no effect on their role, they should stay still (if group is standing) or write a zero (if group is seated).

Sample Statements

- ◇ Take one step forward if you have had or will have opportunities to complete your education.
- ◇ Take one step forward if you can earn enough money to make a good life for yourself and your children.
- ◇ Take one step backward if your livelihood was negatively impacted by the pandemic.
- ◇ Take one step forward if you grew up in a loving and stable home.
- ◇ Take one step backward if you are more likely to die by violence.
- ◇ Take one step forward if you can determine when and how many children you will have.
- ◇ Take one step forward if you could get a bank loan to start a business if you wanted one.
- ◇ Take one step backward if you regularly worry about having enough food to eat.
- ◇ Take one step forward if no one has had to march for your basic human rights in the last ten years.

Reflect as a group on the power dynamics revealed during this exercise. Discuss what information was missing that made decisions about whether to take a step difficult. What does this indicate about our level of understanding of the lives of those about whom we have only surface-level information? You might tie this discussion back to the conversation about treating every interaction as a cross-cultural exchange.

Closing (if not doing Group Activity)

Prayer for Social Justice
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 823

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

Week Five Meeting

Will you strive for
justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity
of every human being?



This meeting is held after the readings from Week Five are completed, ideally on Day Seven of Week Five.

Materials Needed

Communion bread and wine, either ready to be consecrated or from the reserved sacrament

Vessels and linens to serve communion

Copies of the eucharistic service to be used

This last meeting is about wrapping up the study. The group should have a brief discussion and then share eucharist together if possible. This should be arranged with a member of the clergy so that eucharist can be celebrated in the group, or a clergy member or Lay Eucharistic Minister can arrange for the group to have communion from the reserved sacrament. If possible, use the collect that the group wrote together at the Week Four meeting during the eucharist. Whatever form of service is used, the post-communion prayer on page 366 should be incorporated at the end of the service so that group members can acknowledge the nourishment they have received in the eucharist strengthens and prepares them for the work they have been given to do.

Opening Prayer

The prayer from Day Seven is the post-communion prayer, found on page 366 of the Book of Common Prayer. It should be said at the end of the eucharistic service.

adapted from *Micah* 6:6-8

O God, with what shall we come before you, and bow ourselves before you on high? Shall we come before you with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will you be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall we give our firstborns for our transgressions, the fruit of our bodies for the sins of our souls? No. You have told us what is good; and what you require of us: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. *Amen.*

Check-in

Ask participants to take a few minutes each and express their thoughts and feelings about the journey through Lent that they have been on together. How has it felt to hold each other in prayer and to be uplifted in prayer by the members of this group throughout the study? What new insights have been gained? What has been stripped away?

Group Discussion

Group Discussion will be brief to give time for eucharist. Concentrate on the invitation questions at the end of each day's reflection over the past week.

Revisit the question from the invitation section of Week One Day One: "Presiding Bishop Michael Curry has called Episcopalians to a 'way of evangelism grounded in the loving way of Jesus.' What does this look like to you?" How has this picture changed over the last five weeks?

Looking Ahead

Ask group members to share any new commitments that they are making as they come to the end of this study.

Group Activity

The group should end as it began, with sharing a meal together, this time the bread and wine of communion. The first meeting's meal was a gathering in, and following the arc of the Baptismal Covenant questions, this eucharistic meal is a sending out.

Closing (at end of Eucharistic service)

*Post-Communion Prayer
The Book of Common Prayer, p. 366*

Almighty and everliving God, we thank you for feeding us with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; and for assuring us in these holy mysteries that we are living members of the Body of your Son, and heirs of your eternal kingdom. And now, Father, send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ our Lord. To him, to you, and to the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

The priest may bless the people.

Dismissal

Leader: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

People: **Thanks be to God.**



Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright ©1989 the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Psalm quotations are from the Book of Common Prayer.

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