

## Diocese of Portsmouth: Stewardship Reflections

### Year C: Lent and Eastertime

#### Group Leaders' Notes

Thank you for agreeing to lead a Stewardship reflection group. We hope that it is an enjoyable experience for you and helps you and your group to explore the spiritual dimension of Stewardship through the readings of Lent and Eastertime.

#### **What is in the pack?**

The pack contains a leaflet for each week of Lent and Easter. Each leaflet follows a similar format:

- Opening Prayer
- Sharing from the 'Reflection Notebook'
- Scripture Reading
- A thought to prompt reflection
- Questions for personal reflection
- Questions for group discussion – or personal reflection if doing the leaflet alone
- Closing Prayer
- Stewardship Link
- Something to do during the following week

Ideally, each member of the group should have their own wallet for the sheets. Although all the sheets could already be in the wallet, it is probably better to give them out week-by-week – simply to reduce the temptation to read the Fourth Week of Easter during the Second Week of Lent! If your group is not meeting every week, you may wish to give people the sheets for the intervening week(s).

#### **Preparing for Meetings**

There are two main aspects to your preparations – hospitality and creating an atmosphere that will help people to pray. You do not need to do it all on your own – in fact, asking others to help with the teas and coffees and to read parts of the material encourages them to feel a sense of belonging and involvement.

#### **Group size**

The most appropriate size of group for these sessions is up to 8 people. Above this size, it may be difficult for each person to have time to speak during a meeting.

#### **Hospitality**

Keep it simple! Tea, coffee and biscuits will be sufficient (though remember that, in Lent, many will have given up chocolate!)

Decide whether to have the refreshments available before the meeting or at the end. This may depend on the time of day of your meeting. If you serve them at the beginning, ensure that you start the meeting on time. If at the end, those who need to get away promptly can do so, while others have an opportunity to stay and chat. This can be an

important part of the meeting but, again, ensure that you stick to the time given for the end of the meeting.

### **Keeping to time**

The meetings should last an hour to an hour-and-a-half. Always start and finish on time. Remember that some people will have to get back for babysitters or leave to catch buses.

You might find it useful to jot down the time you intend to start each section of the meeting. For example:

7.30pm	Opening Prayer and Sharing
7.45pm	To listen (Scripture Reading)
	To think about
	To reflect on
8.00pm	To discuss
8.30pm	Closing prayer
	Stewardship link
	To do – looking at what people might like to do during the coming week
8.45pm	Refreshments
9.00pm	End

### **Creating a prayerful atmosphere**

If you are meeting in your home or in a parish room, it can be helpful to create a setting so that those coming know that this is not a purely social event or a business meeting. In Lent you might use a purple cloth with an open bible and a candle. In Eastertime, replace the purple cloth with a white, yellow or gold one.

If time and inclination permit, you might like to add various items appropriate to each week. This is not essential but ideas are offered below.

Consider having quiet music playing as people gather. Some of the songs of Taizé would be appropriate – or Gregorian chant – or “mood music”. If you would like further ideas, ask your church or parish musicians.

### **Leading the meeting**

However experienced we may be in leading meetings, it is natural to be a little apprehensive in setting up a new group and helping people to feel at ease and able to contribute. The great advantage you have in leading meetings such as the Stewardship Reflections is that you are not doing it on your own – the Holy Spirit is also present and the people coming have chosen to be there!

Do not be tempted to feel that you have to do everything. Remember that a key part of the spirituality of Stewardship is the recognition of God-given gifts, being grateful for them, and using them. Giving people an opportunity to recognise that they have a gift for welcoming, or reading, or serving tea with a smile, or creating a setting that enables people to pray, is part of building up their sense of being stewards of the gifts they have been given.

Don't be afraid of silence. You are leading meetings that are encouraging people to be reflective and thoughtful – silence gives them the space to do that.

Try to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak. Some may not wish to do so, but should feel that this opportunity is always available to them.

It is important that participants listen carefully to what others are saying, and treat each other with respect, even if they don't agree with them, and that people trust each other not to reveal anything that has been said in the group that is of a personal nature.

If a member of the group seems to dominate it, be firm in thanking them for their contribution and invite others to offer their thoughts for the discussion.

### **Reflection Notebook**

Each week, people will be invited to share something from their Reflection Notebook. People can be invited to buy a small notebook in which to record their reflections on the sessions, and how they have put the 'to do' section into practice. What they write is for their eyes only – they will only be asked to share what they feel appropriate.

### **Week-by-week**

Read through the notes and Scripture readings ahead of time. Use spare moments to reflect on them (supermarket queues and waiting for kettles to boil are good opportunities for this!)

If you have time, look into the background of the Readings. Websites such as [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) , [www.wellsprings.org.uk](http://www.wellsprings.org.uk) and <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Lent/> offer information and reflection material. There are also quite a few books available that could help you to gain useful insights e.g. Tom Wright's books 'Matthew / Mark / Luke / John for Everyone' (published by SPCK).

Reflect on your own responses to the questions. What other thoughts come to mind that might help you to extend the discussions?

**For more information, or if you have any questions about these sessions, please contact**

Teresa Keogh, Department for Pastoral Formation [tkeogh@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk](mailto:tkeogh@portsmouthdiocese.org.uk) or 01329 835583

## **LENT**

'Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter. For the Lenten liturgy disposes both catechumens and the faithful to celebrate the paschal mystery: catechumens, through the several stages of Christian initiation; the faithful, through reminders of their own baptism and through penitential practices.'

*(General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar para 27)*

### **LENT 1**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent is always the Temptation of Jesus. Why do you think the people who compiled the Lectionary chose to follow this pattern?

News items or magazine articles about "celebrities" that speak of what is often presented to us as "success" could be used as prompts for discussion.

#### **Hospitality**

At this first meeting, make sure that people in your group know each other's names – definitely make sure that *you* know everyone's name! Name labels might be an option if there are a number of people in the group who have not met each other before. If you know that someone in the group has a particular gift for welcoming, ask them to be alert to people who have come alone or who don't often come to church-y things.

#### **Setting**

Consider using large stones or sand or something else that might speak of desert or wilderness.

### **LENT 2**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

The Gospel for the Second Sunday of Lent is always the Transfiguration. Why might this be an important theme during Lent?

Think about stories you have heard about people and mountains – from Moses to people like Edmund Hillary. What are the common features?

#### **Setting**

Pictures of mountains.

#### **During the Meeting**

The notes refer to the Eucharist and the Mass – if yours is an ecumenical group, encourage participants from other denominations to speak about the forms of worship in their own churches.

### **LENT 3**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

Are there gardeners in your group who could use their gifts and expertise to explain what is happening in the Gospel? If so, prime them in advance of the meeting so they come prepared. Jesus was obviously basing his words on something he had seen or heard.

#### **Setting**

Bare (unfruitful!) twigs and a couple of figs (or similar fruit)

#### **During the Meeting**

You have plenty of questions to encourage discussion. Watch the time – choose a couple of questions to focus on, with others as follow-up if needed.

### **LENT 4**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

The Gospel is very well-known and quite long. How could you help people to hear it as if for the first time? Having different people for different characters is one way – or break the parable into sections and invite people to spend a few moments reflecting on each one.

#### **Setting**

A selection of pictures illustrating the Prodigal Son which could prompt thoughts about how artists have interpreted the Gospel story.

#### **During the Meeting**

Invite people to reflect on the various characters in the parable – and on times when they might have experienced life from the point of view of one or more characters in the parable.

## **LENT 5**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

The Gospel story this week was at one time found in Luke's Gospel – and only appeared in manuscripts of John's sometime in the third century. This suggests that people were not quite sure what to do with it. As you read it, ask yourself why this might have been.

### **Setting**

A tray of sand or a very large stone (large enough to invite the question as to whether people could imagine themselves throwing this at another human being)

### **During the Meeting**

If appropriate to your group, think about the significance of the gift of the Sacrament of Reconciliation – particularly in Lent. Do people actually see it as a gift?

## **PASSION SUNDAY**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

There are three powerful readings this week – allow time for reflection on them. Which words or phrases speak to you? Use them as a mantra – taking a few words and their meaning deeper into your soul.

Have different voices for the readings. As your group now knows one other reasonably well, people might be willing to take one of the readings. Ensure they have them in advance so that they can prepare them.

### **Setting**

A crucifix, a cross or an icon. You may also like to include palm leaves or palm crosses.

### **During the Meeting**

Give space for people to reflect on the Readings and their responses to them.

## **EASTER TRIDUUM**

‘Christ redeemed humankind and gave perfect glory to God principally through his paschal mystery: dying he destroyed our death and rising he restored our life. Therefore the Easter Triduum of the passion and resurrection of the Lord is the culmination of the entire liturgical year. Thus the solemnity of Easter has the same kind of pre-eminence in the liturgical year as Sunday has in the week.’

*(General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar para 18)*

### **EASTER TRIDUUM**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

Will you be able to have a meeting in Holy Week? How could you make it possible for people to attend?

#### **Setting**

Bowl of water – to represent the Washing of Feet

Bread and wine – for the institution of the Eucharist

Cross – for Good Friday

Candle – for Easter

#### **During the Meeting**

Each of the three days of the Triduum has a different ‘feel’ but each is part of a whole.

How could the group support one other in attending the Liturgy of the Three Days in your community?

## **EASTERTIME**

‘The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one “great Sunday”.’

*(General Norms for the Liturgical Year and Calendar para 22)*

### **EASTER 2**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

The reading about Thomas and his doubts about the resurrection of Jesus is always read on the Second Sunday of Easter. Why might the people who put the Lectionary together have chosen to do this?

#### **Setting**

Create something that speaks of the change of Season – with a different coloured cloth, candles – perhaps a bowl of water with floating candles (to remind us of baptism), flowers etc.

#### **During the Meeting**

How might you incorporate a little Easter celebration into the meeting?

### **EASTER 3**

#### **Preparing for the Meeting**

Rather like the disciples in the Gospel, life is getting back to normal for many of us after the rigours of Lent and the dramas of Eastertime. How can you keep up the energy for your meetings over the coming weeks?

#### **Setting**

A small fishing net or pictures of fisher folk (particularly from the Middle East)

#### **During the Meeting**

Have there been changes in your community over recent years? Are there changes in the offering? What have people’s reactions been? How might this Gospel help to put such changes into context?

## **EASTER 4**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

This Sunday is often called Good Shepherd Sunday and is a day of special prayer for vocations. What does the word vocation mean to you?

### **Setting**

Pictures of shepherds – from this country and the Middle East. Or, look for material from the Vocations office (website: [www.ukvocation.org/](http://www.ukvocation.org/)).

### **During the Meeting**

Use an egg timer and invite people to use it for a period of prayer. Suggest ideas such as: silently repeating a simple phrase; praying for people who come to mind; making a gratefulness list. What does this tell everyone about building time for prayer into daily life?

## **EASTER 5**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

Collect some information about groups in your community who offer practical love and support. Don't forget groups which are based outside the immediate parish community e.g. Guides and Scouts, Meals on Wheels volunteers, etc.

### **Setting**

Cards with the names of the different groups/ people working to put Christian love into practice.

### **During the Meeting**

Invite people to talk about some of the things they do to put love into action. How could they encourage others to be involved?

## **EASTER 6**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

Try reading the whole of the 'Great Discourse in John's Gospel from Chapter 13–Chapter 17. What impression of Jesus' 'last will and testament' are you left with?

### **Setting**

As the 'Great Discourse' takes place at the Last Supper, you might like to add bread and wine (or grapes) to the setting.

### **During the Meeting**

The things that John quotes Jesus as saying had stuck with him for many years before he wrote them down. What words or sayings have particularly struck people in the group during the course of these meetings?

## **FEAST OF THE ASCENSION**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

If time and talent in the group permit, you might like to make a prayer card using a "Praying Hands" image for people to take away as a memento of their time together.

### **Setting**

Picture of the praying hands used in the Session notes.

### **During the Meeting**

Give the group slips of paper and invite them to write down the names of some of the people whose sacrifices have brought them to this point in their lives.

## **PENTECOST**

### **Preparing for the Meeting**

This will probably be the last meeting for your group – at least until Advent. What might you do to mark it? Could people be invited to bring food and drink to share?

### **Setting**

The liturgical colour for Pentecost is red so you may like to use a red cloth for this meeting. Flames cut out of red or gold card would also be appropriate.

### **During the Meeting**

Explore whether people might like to continue to meet regularly for prayer – perhaps monthly. Could they set up a prayer chain? What other prayer opportunities exist that people might like to try in order to carry on praying? Is there any action people might like to take in terms of living out their faith?