

GOSPEL SHARING



THREE GOSPEL SHARING METHODS

COMMUNITY REFLECTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

For many years staff at Lumko Institute have been conducting a survey of Small Christian Communities in Southern Africa. This survey has taught us a lot, especially the needs that face members of these groups. This new series of booklets - *Community Reflections* - is our way of helping you respond to those needs.

Many Christians have told us that, although they engage in faith sharing on a regular basis, they are not sure if they are following the method correctly. Others have told us that they want a change from the *Seven Steps*. This booklet answers those two needs. It is designed to be used in Small Christian Communities and other small groups in the parish. As you work through the Meetings you will gain a thorough understanding of the *Seven Steps* Gospel Sharing method. One Meeting is devoted to each step. The final two Meetings describe how to follow two other Gospel Sharing methods. *Group Response* will show you how to connect the Bible reading with life issues, and *Look-Listen-Love* could become a most useful tool for reflecting the teaching of Jesus on to situations which arise in your neighbourhood. We at Lumko have always highly recommended that groups use different methods of sharing. We hope that the simple descriptions given in this booklet will encourage you to do that.

How To Use This Booklet

Ideally each member of the group has their own copy; or there could be a few copies shared by all. If the leader alone has a copy, the meeting could turn into a kind of teaching situation in which the leader reads to the others. Rather, if each paragraph is read by a different person, everyone in the group gets a chance to take part. Also, if everyone has a copy then all will be working through the learning process together. Another advantage is that you can work through the material again on your own afterwards.

Whenever a question is posed, make sure you do your own reflecting and discussing before reading the text. In that way you will be drawn into the learning process.

Fr Anselm Prior, OFM

MEETING 1: INVITING THE LORD

Step One: Our Relationship with Jesus

A member of the group reads the following story.

It is Sunday. The Church service is over and most of the congregation has departed for their homes. A few of the parish leaders are now preparing to lock up the building and return to their families. One of them, Siphon, says to the others, "You know, I work so hard here; I do so much for the parish. All this organizing, all these meetings! It gets me down sometimes and leaves me feeling quite tired. In fact, despite all I do for the Church, I sometimes feel quite empty inside. There's something missing, something else I need." Other leaders agreed with him, but they did not know what that "something missing" was. They all went home to their families.

What do you think is missing in Siphon's life?

After a few minutes of reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

Many Church leaders are very busy doing many things about the parish. But sometimes they neglect their own spiritual life, their relationship with Jesus. Perhaps this has happened to Siphon.

Step Two: The Story of Martha and Mary Open your Bibles to Luke 10:38-42. One of the group members reads the text.

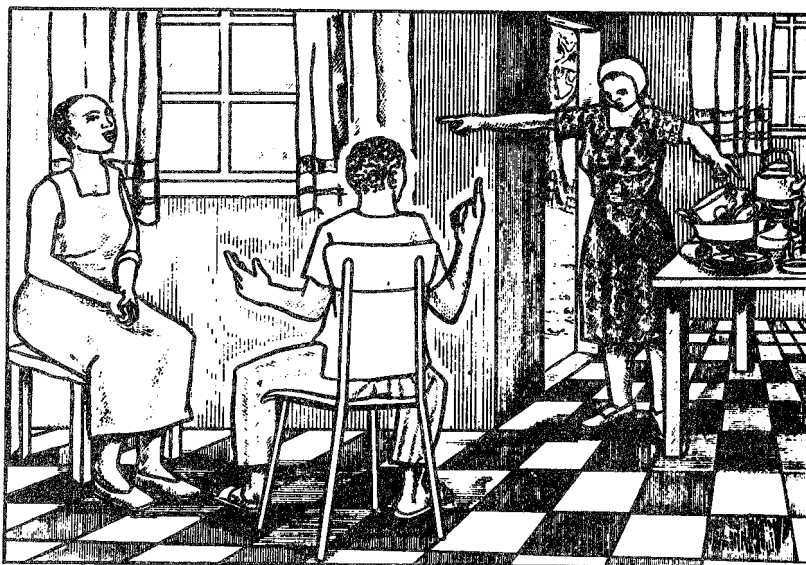
The text could be read a second time by another member of the group. All reflect quietly on the following question:

Which problem in Martha's life does Jesus point to?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group, Then read the following:

Jesus does not blame Martha for preparing the food (which he and his disciples were soon going to enjoy), He points out, however, that she should not blame Mary for taking the opportunity to be spiritually nourished by himself, the Lord.

Look at Martha in the picture below.



How might we act like Martha when performing our duties at work, in the home or in the parish?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

We can make ourselves very busy in committee meetings and parish activities. However, we might find ourselves getting on with the job, but lacking an inner motivation. This inner need we refer to as one's spiritual life, or personal relationship to Jesus.

We can be very organized in our work and do things well. Yet, we might forget that our deepest motivation for all this work is our service of the Lord. We need to become more aware of his presence and allow ourselves to be touched by him.

Even in our Small Christian Community or Bible Sharing groups we could find ourselves talking a lot *about* Jesus. We still need to allow ourselves to be met by him personally. The Risen Lord is present with us always.

Look at Mary in the picture.

How would you describe the way Mary is sitting before Jesus?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

Mary is paying Jesus total attention

She listens to Jesus' words with her ears. She looks upon Jesus with her eyes.

◦ Her open mouth symbolises how she wishes to drink in Jesus' words.

Through her faith we know that she opens her heart to Jesus.

In her body, mind and heart Mary makes herself totally available to Jesus.

This relationship of Master to disciple is based on faith and friendship.

Being totally open to Jesus and being touched by his words is the "one thing that is needed" (Luke 10: 42).

In every aspect of our lives, including our Church activities, we need to keep this teaching of Jesus in mind. There is one thing we must never let go of: keeping in touch with the Lord, listening to him and allowing him to touch us with his healing word. Gospel Sharing is one of the important ways in which we can do this

Step 3: Inviting the Lord

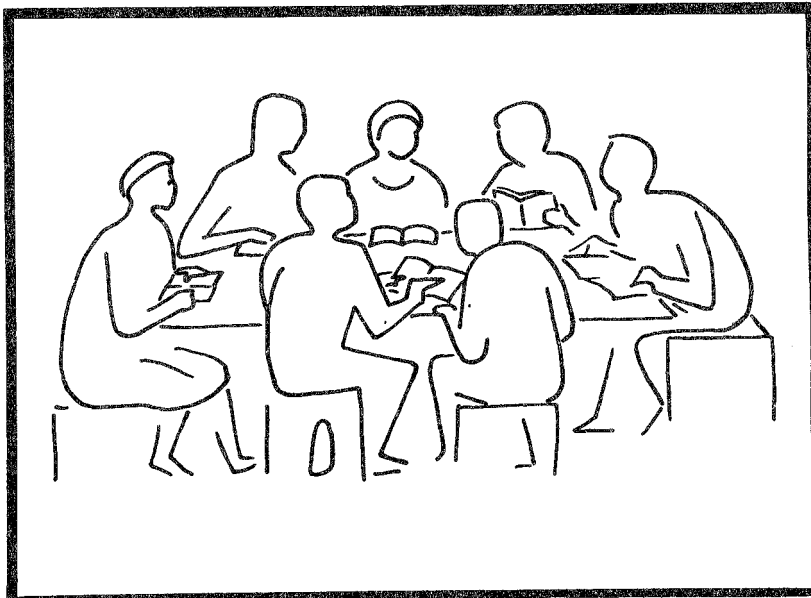
Look at the Seven Steps card. We shall finish today's meeting by looking at Step 1. One of the group members reads the instruction for the facilitator:

Would someone like to invite Jesus in a prayer and welcome him.

An example of such a prayer

Lord Jesus, we remember today the occasion when a sick woman stretched through the crowds in order to touch the hem of your garment. Because of her faith, healing power came out of you and brought her health. As we gather today we, too, wish to stretch out and touch you. We pray for your presence and healing power that we may live with your life. Amen.

Look at the picture below.



What is happening in this picture?

Can you see the Risen Lord in the picture?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

Jesus promised to be present with any disciples who gather in his name. (Read Matthew 18: 19-20.) Because of this promise, we know that when we gather in faith to read the words of Scripture Jesus is with us. Jesus cannot be seen with our bodily eyes, but we know he is present because of our faith.

By using words of invitation to welcome Jesus into our midst we make ourselves aware of Jesus' presence with us.

This is not the time to make any kind of prayer. While all prayers are good in themselves, on this occasion it is more appropriate that we invite Jesus in a personal way by speaking to him directly. Spontaneous prayers of invitation are better than using the same invitation each time.

Knowing that Jesus is present reminds us also that, as we reflect on the words of Scripture, it is he himself who is speaking to us and touching us through the words of Scripture. We are not just talking *about* Jesus. The Word himself comes to us through the words. He really enters into our present human situation, as he did when he was born at Bethlehem.

Step Four: We Prepare Prayers of Invitation

Think of a time in the Gospels when Jesus invited himself into someone's life, or others invited him into their lives.

Describe this in one, at the most, two sentences.

Ask the Lord to come into the lives of us gathered here in a similar way.

After about 5 minutes share your prayers of invitation. These form the concluding prayer of the group. After the final one the whole group prays together the Our Father and concludes with a hymn.

Note: In case you find difficulty in remembering appropriate texts take a Gospel and page through it, looking for occasions when Jesus came into the lives of people. Here are a few examples of such texts:

Mark 1: 16-20 (Jesus invites the disciples to follow him)

Mark 1: 29-31 (Jesus invites himself into the home of Peter)

Mark 2: 1-12 (A sick person is brought to Jesus by his friends)

Luke 19: 1-10 (Jesus invites himself into Zacchaeus' home)

Luke 24: 28-35 (Two disciples invite Jesus to stay with them)

Matthew 7: 21-27 (Jesus invites his disciples to listen to his word) Matthew 9: 20-22 (Jesus cures a woman of faith)

John 2: 1-2 (Jesus and his disciples are invited to a wedding)

John 3: 1-2 (Nicodemus comes at night to listen to Jesus)



MEETING 2: LISTENING TO THE LORD

Before the meeting the leader prepares small pieces of paper with the following texts written on them: Mat 5:14-15; Luke 10:23-24; Mat 18:19-20; Isaiah 55:10-1 L

Review Step One of the Seven Steps which we looked at in the previous meeting. What is the instruction to the facilitator? What are the main points we learned? Check pages 4 & 5.

Step 1: Reading the Biblical Text

Someone in the group reads the instruction to the facilitator in Step 2

"Let us open our Bibles to ... , chapter ...

When all have found the place:

Would someone like to read verses ..

The leader of the group now gives this instruction and the others follow:

"Let us open our Bibles to the Gospel of John, chapter 2."

When all have found the place, continue:

"Would someone like to read verses 23-25."

When the text has been read the leader says:

"Would someone please read the text a second time."

Step 2: How to Announce the Text

How did the leader announce the text!'

After a brief discussion share with the group, then read the following:

The leader broke the instruction into two parts. Firstly, the leader announced the book and chapter; and then the verse.

Why did the leader break up the instruction in such a way? After a brief discussion read the following:

If you announce the full text all at once some people become confused with the numbers and are unable to find the text. Also, if you announce the full text all at once there is usually someone in the group who, finding the text first, immediately begins to read it aloud. Others are still paging through their Bibles. This is not respectful to the Risen Lord who would like everyone to listen together.

Why did the leader ask someone to read the text a second time?

After a brief discussion read the following:

Is there a problem if we use different translations in the group?

After a brief discussion read the following:

All translations are interpretations of the ancient documents, Therefore no single translation can be regarded as the best one, or the most accurate one. Some translations are more close to the original, while others attempt to put the text into language which can be easily understood. All approved translations, therefore, are acceptable. When different translations are used in the one sharing session, this brings out the richness of the original text.

People often keep to a specific translation because they find it fruitful. When different translations are used in the a group, this encourages people to continue using the translation they enjoy.

The basic message remains the same

We do not always hear properly the first time, perhaps because we have not concentrated on what we are hearing. The second reading gives us the opportunity of listening well.

Sometimes we are too used to the text and do not give it enough attention. The second reading reminds us to listen more carefully. When everyone follows the text in their own Bible the unity of the group is emphasised.

The second reading helps us hear something in the text which we may not have heard before.

Step three : Why we read the text carefully

Why is it important that we read the text carefully?

After a few minutes reflection share with the group then read the following:

If you do not read the text carefully there will be people in the group who do not hear all the words. This is particularly important if there are group members who do not have their own text, perhaps because they cannot read well.

When the text is read carefully the group members do not only see the words of Scripture in front of them, but hear those words as well. Using more than one of the senses helps us concentrate more on the text.

The reading of the biblical text among a group of believers is an actual proclamation of the Word of God. When the Word is proclaimed in such a way (as during the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays) it becomes really present to those who accept it. The Church teaches us: "When the sacred Scriptures are read in church, it is the very God who speaks to the people, and Christ, present in his word, is proclaiming his Gospel.; Hence, all who are present should listen to God's word with reverence" (GIRM: #9).

We are also taught: "The Church has always treated the word of God and the Eucharistic mystery with a similar reverence and has decreed that they be so treated" (De Verbi Dei: #10). We would never think of being irreverent towards the Eucharist. Nor should we behave in such a way towards the proclamation of God's word in the Bible. Just as Christ comes to us through the bread and wine, so Christ comes to us through the proclamation of the word.

After Jesus proclaimed the text from Isaiah in the synagogue at Nazareth, St Luke tells us that he sat down and said: "This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen" (Luke 4: 20- 21). When we listen in faith to the text in our Gospel Sharing groups, these texts become fulfilled in our lives too.

When you receive a letter from someone you love you may read it over and over again. This is not because you have not understood the contents, but because reading repeatedly puts you in the presence of that loved person. In Step Two of the Seven Steps we read the text more than once in order to put ourselves in contact with Christ. This reading helps us remain in his loving presence.

Step Four: We Practise Announcing the Text.

The small pieces of paper prepared by the leader before the meeting are now distributed to some of the participants. One of those who has received a piece of paper now uses the text on it to announce Step Two as it has been explained and discussed during this meeting. The rest of the group follows the instruction, finding the place in their Bibles and one person reading the text aloud.

When this has been completed, the group members comment on the process. Did the person reading the text follow the process? If not, he/she does it again. When the group members are satisfied that this was done well, others take turns to practise how to announce the text.

The meeting is concluded with spontaneous prayers and a hymn.

MEETING 3: GAZING UPON THE LORD

Introduction

Review the previous two steps of the Seven Steps. Name each step and give the facilitator's instruction. Also summarise the purpose of each step. You may wish to refer back to pages 4-5 and 7-8.

Step 1: How to Pick out Words and Short Phrases

Turn to Luke 6: 6-11. The group members carefully listen to what the leader says. The leader goes through the text, reading aloud a word or phrase. The leader reads each three times and sees that the silence between each word or phrase is long enough for you to at least say those words three or four times to yourself. Examples of the words that might be picked out:

"began to teach" "were watching him" "to do good"

his right hand was withered"" "he knew their thoughts" his hand was restored"

The group members now comment on what the leader did. After these comments read the following:

The leader picked out no more than five words at a time. The leader read them aloud slowly.

The leader kept a reflective silence between reading them aloud.

Open your Bibles to Luke 10:38-42. One member of the group reads the text.

We are now going to practise Step Three. Another member of the group reads the instructions for the facilitator:

We pick out words or short phrases, read them aloud prayerfully and repeat them three times.

- *(Afterwards): Will someone please read the same text again.*

One person in the group then reads the following phrase as it is written below:

He came to a village" say aloud, then pause

He came to a village (silently)

He came to a village (silently)

He came to a village (silently)

He came to a village say aloud, then pause

He came to a village silently

He came to a village silently

He came to a village" silently

He came to a village" (say aloud, then pause)

He came to a village (silently)

He came to a village (silently)

He came to a village (silently)

Group members follow the same procedure with other phrases, such as

"Martha welcomed him"

"sat down at the Lord's feet"

"Just one is needed"

"Martha was upset"

"Mary has chosen the better part"

At the end of the above exercise answer the following questions:

Were any of the phrases read too quickly? Were any read too slowly?

Were the pauses in between the phrases long enough?

If the leader thinks it necessary, take another text from Luke's Gospel and go through this step once more. As many members of the group as possible could practise it until they are satisfied that they have understood it well.

Step 2: The Purpose of Choosing Phrases

Why do we repeat the word or short phrase three times? After a brief discussion read the following:

It allows the phrase to sink into our hearts.

It allows us to sit with Jesus and hear his word.

It helps us become involved in the Gospel situation. It helps us remain in the presence of Jesus.

Must we always say the phrase three times? After a brief discussion read the following:

It is not necessary to repeat the phrase three times. However, the group members need to know when to move on to the next phrase. Also, the repetition helps the group remain in silence. If the phrase is said once, other people begin to pick out other phrases straight away. Then the atmosphere of listening is destroyed. The silence between the repetitions of the phrases is a kind of emergency brake!

Can I pick out a phrase that someone else has already picked out? After a brief discussion read the following:

Yes, you pick out the phrase that has touched you, even if it has been chosen by one or more other group members. Sometimes one particular phrase touches many members of the group.

Can I pick out more than 1 phrase?

After a brief discussion read out the following

Yes, you may. However, see that you are not just looking for what attracts you, but are listening to the phrases picked out by others. Also, do not dominate, but let the other members of the group have the opportunity to share the phrase that has touched them. Be open to being touched by the word or phrase chosen by others in the group, and not just your own. Often the Lord speaks to us through others.

May I pick out a full sentence or long phrase? After a brief discussion read the following:

The point of Step Three is to allow the words of Scripture to touch us. Long phrases can destroy the prayerful atmosphere of listening. It is like eating bread. We take a loaf and cut off a slice to eat. We cannot eat the whole slice, however. We either break off smaller pieces, or cut the slice into smaller pieces, and we eat these one at a time. As we eat each piece, we become conscious of what we are doing; we toss the food around inside our mouth and enjoy the taste of it. Yes, we eat the whole slice, but one piece at a time. In the same way, in Gospel Sharing, we take a passage from Scripture. We can only absorb one small piece at a time, however, and those pieces are single words or short phrases.

Which word or phrase should I choose? After a brief discussion read the following:

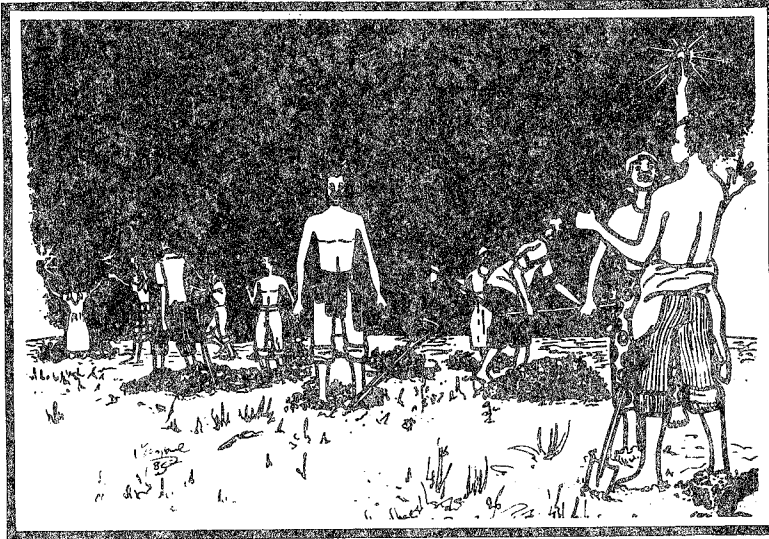
We do not look for what seems to be the most important phrase for myself. This can be a subtle way of manipulating the text. By doing this, we choose a message which suits us, whereas God may want to challenge us. The whole idea of this kind of group sharing is to help each other discover the treasure hidden in the text. The group members allow themselves to be touched by any word, however insignificant it may seem at the time. They choose the phrase which strikes them (even if they do not know why), or the phrase which someone else has chosen and which touches them deeply (again, without knowing why).

What should I do as I choose a phrase or hear phrases chosen by others?

After a brief discussion read the following:

Do not do anything! Do not engage in any mental exercise, for example, by trying to apply the phrase to your life. That will come later (in Step Four). For the moment, just let the phrase stay with you. The best way of doing this is just to repeat it continually to yourself. Just stay with the words. At this stage you are listening, gazing.

Look at the following picture.



What do you see?

People digging for diamonds.

What is the man in the foreground doing?

He has found a diamond and is holding it up.

What are the people near him doing?

They are looking at the diamond.

What is the woman in the background doing?

She is holding up two diamonds.

What are the people near her doing?

They are looking at the two diamonds.

Once you have discovered all the details in the picture, read the following:

When someone finds a diamond, they do not immediately put it in their pocket or handbag. They hold it up so that others may see it and enjoy its beauty. The others who are digging stop their work, pause and gaze with wonder at the diamond found by another.

This is what we do in Step Three of the Seven Steps. When you have found a word or short phrase that touches you, you read it aloud so that others may hear the word of the Lord and be touched by it too. In the imagery of the poster, you hold it up so that others may gaze upon the beauty of God's word.

The other members of the group stop reading the text, pause and listen to the phrase which was read aloud. They want to hear the words through which the Lord has touched another member of their group. They want it to touch them too. The phrase chosen by another may be more meaningful to one's life than one's own chosen phrase. In the imagery of the poster, the others stop digging and gaze upon the diamond. They share in the joy of the one who has found the diamond, especially as that diamond may shine more brightly than their own.

Step 3: The Prayer of Silence

"What noises do we hear each day?"

After a brief discussion see if you have mentioned any items on the list below.

- The noise of water being poured.
- A baby crying.
- Small children demanding attention.
- A programme on the radio or television.
- The traffic passing in the street.
- People shouting to each other across the road.
- The roar of the bus engine.
- The screech of car tyres.
- The hooting of taxi drivers.
- Loud music coming from a furniture shop.
- The boss shouting at work.

Now read on:

The list is endless! We are buffeted by noise all day long - and sometimes half the night! We are losing our respect for silence, for just being quiet, for listening. Step Three in the Seven Steps helps us to redress the lack of balance in our lives. It helps us restore silence in our lives. It enables us to listen again, to draw in life-giving waters from the well of salvation. In John 4, we see how the woman from Samaria had to learn how to listen to Jesus. She did and she began to live a new life.

Many centuries ago when young people wanted to become monks or nuns, the first thing they had to learn was the psalms. Yes, they learned all 150 of them! Each day the monks and nuns sang some of these psalms together. During the day they would sing three psalms and then get on with their work. Three hours later they sang another three and then continued with their work. While they worked on in silence they used to allow a phrase of one of the psalms they had just sung to arise from their hearts into their minds. When this happened, they would repeat the phrase over and over again as they ploughed in the fields, baked bread or sewed new clothes. St Benedict called this "chewing the word".

As they repeated the words of Scripture, so these words became part of the praying person till that person became a living example of the word of God. Just as the food you eat becomes part of you, so a continuing repetition of God's word enables those words to become part of your life, to influence the way you think, speak and act. Christians who regularly engage in Gospel Sharing, especially using this Step Three, truly become more like the Lord Jesus whom they gaze upon, listen to and ponder in their hearts.

We can see, then, that Step Three is not just a gimmick, some new trick, or game to be played. By observing the simple rules which have been offered, groups of believers an over our parish, our diocese and our country - indeed, the world! - are becoming more and more like Christ. They are becoming more one with the Risen Lord and more one with each other. What better method can we use to allow the Gospel to influence our culture and to bring about the reconciliation and harmony which Jesus desires!

Discuss with each other any thoughts you have about the above. Then conclude the session with a few minutes' silence, followed by everyone slowly praying the Our Father together. Finally, sing a hymn that everyone knows.

MEETING 4: GOD SPEAKS TO US IN SILENCE

Review the previous three steps of the Seven Steps. Name each step and give the facilitator's instruction. *Also* summarise the purpose of each step. You may wish to refer back to pages 4-5, 7-8, and 12-15.

Step 1: Remaining in Silence

Someone in the group reads aloud the instruction for Step 4:

We keep silence for ... minutes and allow God to speak to us.

Why do you think the facilitator states the actual number of minute for the period of silence?

After a brief discussion read the following:

A few minutes' silence can seem an eternity for some people! They may wonder if the facilitator has forgotten the time. If the number of minutes has been announced, the group members can relax and allow the facilitator to worry about bringing the step to an end.

The facilitator, also, may lose a sense of time. A minute may seem like an hour, and ten minutes may seem like two! By keeping a check on the time, the facilitator fulfils his/her role of easing the flow of the group and enabling the others to enter into a spirit of prayer without distraction.

How long should the time of silence be? After a brief discussion read the following:

This depends on the group. At the beginning groups are usually happy with three or four minutes. Later they feel the need for six or seven minutes. A few groups may like to take more than that. Each group needs to find its own level. This is something that can be discussed from time to time by group members, especially when evaluating the process (see page 36).

What should I do during this time of silence? Look at the picture below.
What do you see Mary doing?



Mary has left behind unnecessary worries (Martha has not). Mary listens with her whole person:

She sits next to Jesus. She looks at him.

She drinks in his words. She enjoys Jesus' presence.

She allows herself to be loved by Jesus.

During the time of silence we can decide for ourselves what to do. Here are some examples.

- Repeat over and over again a word or phrase that has been spoken in the group.
- Picture the Gospel scene in your imagination and remain with that.
- Put yourself into the Gospel scene and imagine what happens to you in the story.
- Take a phrase from the Gospel and ask yourself:
 "Why does this word or phrase touch me?" "What is going on in my life now?"
 "How does this text speak to my life today?"

Hand over your worries to Jesus and let him share his peace and calm with you.

Step 2: The Importance of Silence

Why are people afraid of silence?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:
By talking we come into contact with other people. Noise takes us away from ourselves. It distracts our attention. When we remain silent we come into ourselves, as it were. We are with ourselves. Silence is frightening for many people because they do not want to be alone with themselves. They do not want to hear the inner voices which they have been suppressing for years. They do not want to pay attention to their inner needs which they have been hiding from. They are afraid of meeting the weak, hurting and hurtful person that they are.

The silence of Step Four will bring out these fears, if we have them. We become aware of how empty we are. While this may frighten us, it is a good occasion to experience the presence of the Lord. It is he who comes and fills our emptiness. We then discover that, far from being afraid of what might come up from within, we experience a peace and serenity which we never thought we had. This comes from the presence of Jesus himself who always brings serenity and self-acceptance with him. Indeed, he has been within us all along, waiting patiently for us to quieten down and accept his presence. The silence of Step Four, then, is an opportunity to discover the better side of ourselves, the divine side where the Lord quietly resides.

Did Jesus ever make use of silence?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:
Yes, Jesus did make use of silence. For example, we read in Matthew 14:22-24 and Mark 6:45-47 that, after a busy time with a bustling crowd of people, Jesus "went up into the hills by himself to pray". He also invited his tired disciples to "come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for awhile" (Mark 6:30-31). Mark also tells us that Jesus spent the whole night "in prayer to God" before he appointed his disciples (6:12-16). We see, then, how necessary quiet prayer was for Jesus. He took these opportunities to remain in the Father's presence, to discover God's will for him, and to allow the presence of God to affect the way he went about his work with people during the day. Can we afford not to follow the example of Jesus?
Discuss with each other any thoughts you have about the above.

Concluding Prayer

Open your Bibles to Isaiah 49:13-16.

One of the group members reads the text aloud. All remain in silence for about three minutes. Then make your own spontaneous prayers. Conclude the meeting with a hymn.



MEETING 5: SHARING OUR FAITH

Review the previous four steps of the Seven Steps. Name each step and give the facilitator's instruction. Also summarise the purpose of each step. You may wish to refer back to pages 4-5, 7-8, 12-15, and 17-18.

Step 1: "Strengthened Together" (*Romans 1:11*)

We meet to engage in sharing but in the first four steps we have not done that, except to share the words and phrases we chose in Step Three. We shall begin our sharing in Step Five.

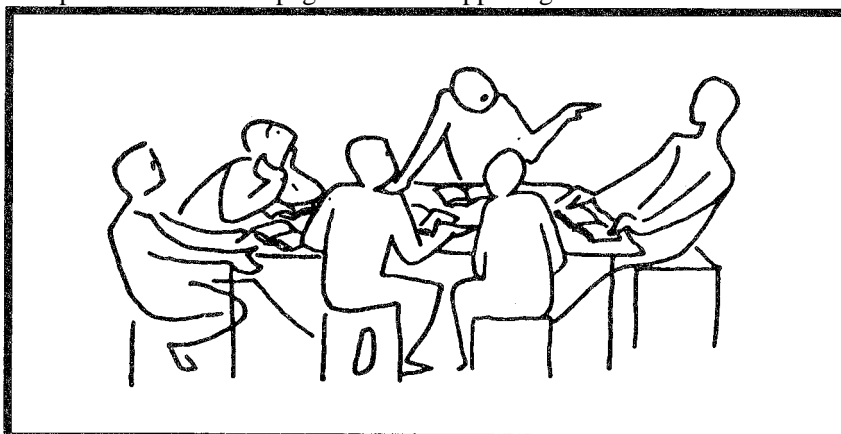
Why have we waited till Step Five to start our faith sharing? After a brief discussion read the following:

- We need time to reflect on our relationship with Jesus before we can share it with others.
- We have spent time listening to Jesus who strengthens our faith and teaches us. After this we are able to share more deeply.
- If we are to share well, we need a spirit of trust in the group. This enables us to accept each other as we are.

If there is no trust in the group, what could happen? After a brief discussion read the following:

- People do not listen to each other.
- People may repeat outside the group what has been said within it. Confidentiality is essential in all sharing groups.
- Members may judge others and not accept them as they are.
They may offer advice, instead of listening respectfully.
They might ask questions and probe into another's life.

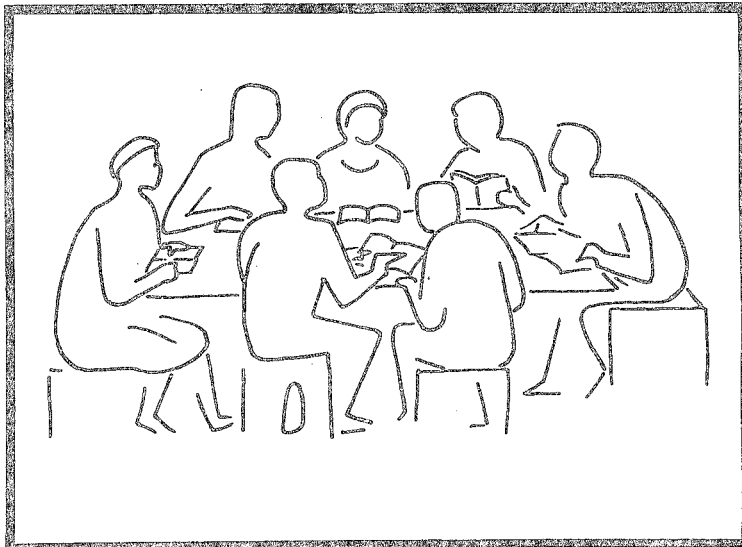
Look at the picture on the next page. What is happening?



After a brief discussion read the following:

One person is lecturing the others. That person comes over as the knowledgeable person in the group while the others remain passive learners. In some groups more than one engages in discussion. Then you hear phrases like, "I disagree with your opinion", or "The commentary I read says this or that about the text". While some are enjoying the heady arguments, others feel too ignorant to join in; they do not feel that they are being touched by the Lord.

Look at the picture below – what is happening?



After a brief discussion read the following:

One person is preaching. The others remain passive listeners. Preaching is necessary in our Church. Through it a trained person explains the message of the Scriptures to a congregation or other group of believers. These preachers must prepare their presentation beforehand. They need to know what is being taught officially about Scripture texts and how they are applied universally by the Church. This preaching is what we expect in the Sunday homily or in sermons on other such occasions. This should not, however, occur in a Gospel Sharing group.

Look at the picture below. What is happening?



After a brief discussion read the following:

The group members are equal. They all have their Bibles and are given the opportunity to share their own faith with the others. They use such phrases as, "I am touched by this word because , and "I am struck by this phrase because ... " As they share, the Spirit of Christ is speaking through them because, as we have seen, their faith puts them in touch with the Risen Lord. This kind of sharing enables all the members of the group to feel the presence of Christ. As a result, they feel strengthened in their personal faith and accepted by the other members. In this way, faith sharing builds us up individually in our faith. It also cements us together as a Christian community.

Examples of faith sharing,

The group has been reflecting on Luke 18:35-43. One woman in group listened as the blind man shouted for Jesus but was told to keep quiet. When it came to Step Five she shared with the group as follows:

"I was touched by the word 'But he shouted louder'. This word reminds me of myself. I am often disappointed if my prayers are not heard immediately. This blind man, however, encourages me not to give up so quickly, even if other people may say, 'Stop praying; this is of no use'. I know that eventually I will know what Jesus wants of me."

Another group has been reflecting on Matthew 15:21-28. A man in the group listened to how the Canaanite woman persisted in asking Jesus for what she wanted. When it came to Step Five he shared with the group as follows.

"In this Gospel text I hear a mother asking a favour for her daughter. She does not give up. This strikes me. My son left our home a long time ago after we had a fight. I had given up praying for him. This Gospel passage encourages me to continue praying for my son."

in what way were the above sharings personal? After a brief discussion read the following:

They talked about themselves.

They said something about their own prayer life

They described how the text speaks to themselves personally

They did not tell the others in the group what they should do.

They did not attempt any clever explanation of the texts

Step 2: The Importance of Faith Sharing

Why is faith sharing important?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

We engage in faith sharing because it is our way of imitating God. God is a sharing God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit share their lives completely as three Persons in One. They also share their divine life with us: firstly, by creating us "in God's image and likeness" (Genesis 1:27). Secondly, through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have been drawn into a greater unity with God. We are God's adopted sons and daughters. We have received freedom and forgiveness (Ephesians 1: 1-7).

In pairs read the following Scripture texts and ask yourself: "*What sharing is taking place here?*" Read the explanation after the texts only after you have shared your own responses in the group.

Matthew 26:26-29

For the Jews, blood is the life of God. That is why they were forbidden to spill another person's

blood and why they could not eat meat with blood in it. The body is the outer casing, as it were, that contains the life of God. Thus, body and blood are the full person. When Jesus says, "Take and eat; this is my body" and "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood", he is giving his whole self to his disciples. This is Jesus' way of showing the disciples that he has been giving himself to others all his life. Through his teaching, preaching and miracles, Jesus has been offering people the life of God, the life of himself. Now that total giving is symbolised in the sacrament of the Eucharist. When Christians celebrate this sacrament they, too, are challenged to give themselves to each other.

Luke 22:39-46

Jesus is in agony of mind and this affects his body. (Have you ever experienced perspiration when in a fearful situation?) He describes this to God and expresses his fear. He shares his agony and pain with his Father in heaven. Jesus also wishes to share his fears with his disciples. He asked them to stay with him and support him. Their presence would be comforting and supportive.

John 17: 22-23

Jesus shares his own glory, that is, the very life of God, with those who believe. As a result, God lives fully in the believers and they, in turn, live fully in God and with each other. St John is teaching us here that Christian community, despite all our efforts, is built on our acceptance of Christ in our lives.

Luke 24: 13-35

In this long and beautiful story note that Jesus' words leave the disciples' hearts burning within them. Yet, they still do not recognise Jesus! That happens once Jesus shares with them, not words, but himself in the Eucharist. (The "breaking of bread" is the early Church's description of this sacrament.) The disciples immediately get up and return to Jerusalem in order to share their newly found faith with the other disciples.

Acts 2:42-47

This early Christian community in Jerusalem seems to be sharing with each other just about everything, from prayer to food. Make a list for yourself of all the things they shared.

Galations 2:20

St Paul is so close to Christ that he shares in Christ's life fully. His strong faith allows Jesus to work through his human weakness. Also, by writing this letter, Paul shares his faith experience with his readers. Even today, two thousand years later, our faith is strengthened and built up by these encouraging words of St Paul.

Romans 1:11-12

St Paul looks forward to meeting the Christians in Rome, not just to share with them his own faith experience, but also to listen to the sharing of these new believers. This mutual faith sharing - both of Paul the apostle and the newly baptised Christians - is a gift they offer each other. Through this gift all of them will be strengthened.

Conclusion

God the Trinity shares the divine life with us and has created us in God's own image. It is in our nature, therefore, to share with each other. Unfortunately, our society and the inner selfishness we all experience, often lead us to separate ourselves from others. Through the experience of sharing, in the context of the Gospel Sharing group, we come into personal contact with the God who wishes to continue sharing divine life with us. We remember that Jesus is the "Word made flesh", that is, God as a human being. Jesus shares our human nature with us, that is, all our joys and sufferings, our feasts and miseries, our life and death. Through Gospel Sharing we become united with that loving Lord. We also get in touch with our own, human nature and the inner urge we

feel to create community. In this way Jesus saves us from our individualism and selfishness and draws us into a closer relationship both with himself and each other.

Step 3: The Word of Life

What is the "Word of Life"?

After a brief discussion read the following:

Many Christians wish that the heightened experience which comes from the sharing of their faith could be extended beyond the meeting. They can do this by taking with them a "word of life". At the end of the sharing of Step Five the facilitator asks the group which word they would like to take with them until they meet again. The group members pick out a word or phrase that has touched many in the group. If they cannot agree on one phrase, then different members can take different phrases with them. Until they meet again, they keep this phrase closely with them.

Some like to write the word of life down and carry it with them, or put it in a prominent place in the home. Each time they see it they are reminded of the faith sharing they engaged in with the others. They also remember what Jesus revealed to them. Often this word of life affects their daily lives and they undergo various spiritual experiences because of it. At the next meeting, either during Step Five or after Step Six, they share these experiences with the group. Thus, the Word of God goes on touching the believers' lives.

To conclude, reflect once more on one of the texts listed above. Share your prayers in the group and finish with a hymn.

MEETING 6: FAITH AND ACTION

Review the previous five steps. Name each step and give the facilitator's instruction. Also summarise the purpose of each step. You may wish to refer back to pages 4-5, 7-8, 12-15, 17-18 & 21-24.

Step 1: The Group Plans Action

One of the group members reads the instruction for Step 6.

Now we discuss any task which our group is called to do in our neighbourhood or parish.

- Report on the previous task
- What new task needs to be done?
- Who will do what and when?

What do we do during Step 6?

After sharing your thoughts in the group, read the following.

Many Small Christian Communities have adopted the Seven Steps as the basic format for their regular meetings. Steps One to Five create for them a spiritual atmosphere and allow them to experience the presence of Jesus in their midst. In Step Six they start to discuss the business of the group. Reports are given for work accomplished since the last meeting. Members take on tasks which they will fulfil before they meet again.

In prayer groups this is the time for the members to ask themselves how they can connect the biblical text they have been reflecting on with their own lives. They ask, "What does God want us to do?" They may need a short time of silence to reflect on this. They think of concrete ways in which they can live out the faith they have shared with each other. In some groups the individual members like to work out ways in which they can put the Gospel into practice. In other groups they like to look for ways in which they can act as a group.

Note: There are other parish groups which make use of the Seven Steps. For example: action groups, Justice and Peace groups and Parish Pastoral Councils. They use some of the previous steps to create a spiritual atmosphere for their meeting. Then at Step Six they get down to their regular business. Some use, for example, Steps Two, Three and Four. At the end of the meeting they conclude with Step Seven.

Step 2: The Link between Faith and Life

In pairs read one of the following texts and answer the questions which follow.

The Church and Justice

The Church's vocation is to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted. God has revealed himself to us in the human community and made known to us his plan of liberation and salvation which is once and for all fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Christ. Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

Our relationship to our neighbour is bound up with our relationship to God; our response to the love of God is shown to be effective in our love and service of people. Unless the Christian message of love and justice shows its effectiveness through action in the cause of justice in the world, it will only with difficulty gain credibility with the people of our times.

Synod of Bishops: Justice in the World, Introduction.

How has God revealed himself in the human community?

What does it mean to say that transforming the world is "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel"?

After you have discussed the above questions in pairs and shared your responses in the group, read the following:

We can find God revealed in the human community in the aspirations of people who long for a life of peace and safety, in which they can enjoy good housing, employment, clean water, a good standard of schooling and health care. Also, in the needs of people in our neighbourhood we recognise God inviting us to make God present through our caring for them.

By "constitutive dimension" the bishops are telling us that we cannot claim to be living the Gospel if we do not care for others. It is part of the "constitution" of the Gospel, as it were, that we engage ourselves in the transformation of society. To take part in Gospel Sharing, for example, means we must work for a better world.

The Gospel and Life

Only a re-evangelization can assure the growth of a clear and deep faith, and serve to make these traditions a force for authentic freedom. Without doubt a mending of the Christian fabric of society is urgently needed in all parts of the world. But for this to come about what is needed is to *first remake the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community itself* present in these countries and nations.

At this moment the lay faithful, in virtue of their participation in the prophetic mission of Christ, are fully part of this work of the Church. Their responsibility, in particular, is to testify how the Christian faith constitutes the only fully valid response to the problems and hopes that life poses to every person and society. This will be possible if the lay faithful will know how to overcome in themselves the separation of the Gospel from life, to again take up in their daily activities in family, work and society, an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel.

Christifideles Laici, #34.

What does it mean to "re-make the Christian fabric of the ecclesial community?"

Where do you see in your parish a separation between the Gospel and life?

After you have discussed the above questions in pairs and shared your responses in the group, read the following:

When a fabric (clothing) is torn it needs to be rewoven or stitched. The pope claims that the Gospel values which used to hold up our society have been damaged by those who do not believe in God. Our task is to bring back those Gospel values, first of all in our own Christian communities.

The separation between the Gospel and life is seen when Christians go to church on Sunday to hear God's Word and celebrate the Eucharist, but have no concern for the needs of others. We see it in Small Christian Communities where their members reflect on the Gospel but turn a blind eye to the needs of their neighbours.

Conclusion

A group which engages in Gospel Sharing - and especially if it is a Small Christian Community - should not remain a mere prayer group where people meet for prayer without any other connection with each other. The faith sharing they engage in challenges them to continue this sharing outside the group so that they can live together more fully the can of the Gospel.

Step3: How can we link the Gospel to Life?

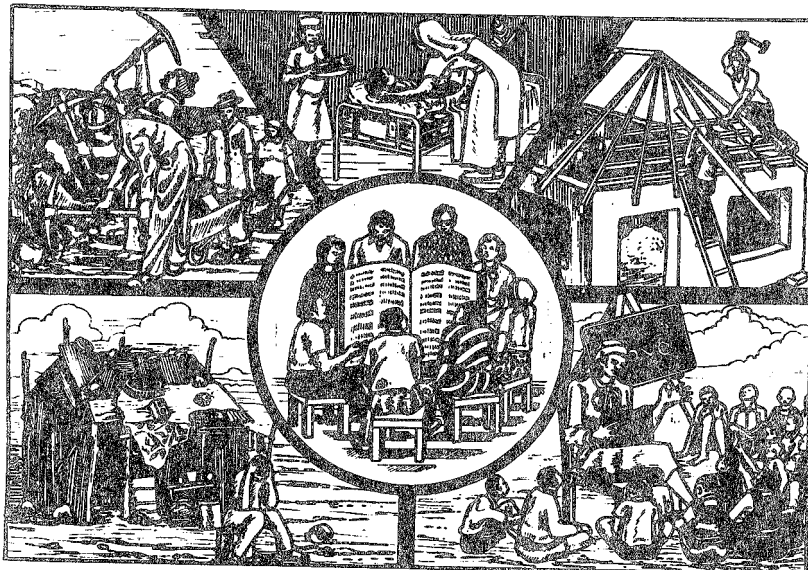
Look at the picture on the following page.

How is Gospel Sharing (seen in the centre of the picture) connected with the different needs of the community?

After discussing the above question and sharing your responses with the group, read the following:

The members of the Small Christian Community in the picture go out into their neighbourhood and fulfil various tasks:

- they visit the sick, old and lonely
- they participate in their neighbours' feasts (e.g., marriage)
- they work for the upgrading of the neighbourhood (e.g., laying water pipes, fixing the road, mending a neighbour's roof and caring for those in informal settlements).



Working together in these ways enables neighbours to rid themselves of the jealousies and fears that so often keep them apart.

What other tasks could a neighbourhood fulfil?

After discussing this question read through the following possibilities.

Who will facilitate Gospel Sharing next week?

Visiting the local hospital. Helping out at the local clinic. Visiting members of the parish, especially newcomers Helping those in need, for example, the poor, the aged, the unemployed, the hungry.

A Self-help project.

Concern for the youth.

Instructing adults wishing to join the Church. Preparing parents for the baptism of their children. Instructing couples for marriage.

Attending vigils and conducting funerals.

Helping in the collection of Church dues.

Participation in the preparation of the Sunday liturgy. •• Reconciling those in conflict.

Visiting people in prison.

Ask yourselves:

Which of the above tasks could our group take on?" Do not be over-ambitious and take on too much.

Yet, there could be more you could do in order to help link the Gospel and life in your neighbourhood.

Conclude the meeting with a few minutes' silence, the Our Father together and then a hymn.



MEETING 7: "THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER MAKE YOU HOLY" (1

Timothy 4:5)

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step 7.

Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.

We end with a prayer or a hymn which everyone knows.

Why is it important for us to conclude our Gospel Sharing with spontaneous prayers?

After a brief discussion read the following.

The message of the Bible which has come to us can flow into our prayers. We can use biblical phrases and reformulate them as our own prayers.

We can pray about our own life issues and those of the group members. In this way we can make a "life offering" to God.

An example of a "biblical prayer" .

After the group has reflected on Matthew 8:1-3 (Jesus heals a leper) one of the members prays:

"Jesus, Lord. You come down to us from the hill. Here we are, your people. Please, Lord, stretch out your hand and touch us. Your gentle touch and your powerful word will make us clean. Thanks and praise to you!"

Each member of the group takes one of the following texts. Read it carefully and reflect on it for a few moments. Then re-formulate the text as a prayer.

Matthew 14:22-33 Mark 3:31-35 Matthew 26:36-46 Mark 4: 35-41

Share your prayers in the group. Then conclude the session with a final hymn.

Self Evaluation Scheme

Step1 Was there a spirit of Prayer in the group?

Was there anything which disturbed or destroyed the spirit of prayer?

Step2 Did everybody find the text before it was read?

Step3 Did we allow a time of silence in between the words which we were picking out?

Did we read them aloud in a prayerful manner?

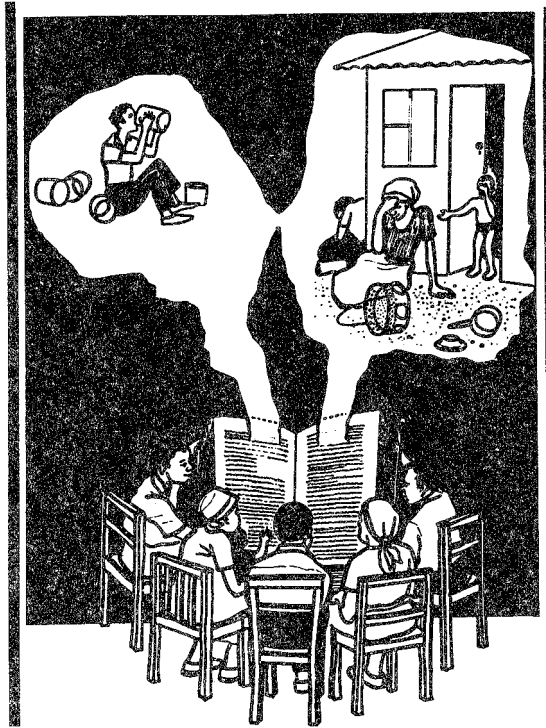
Step4 Was the time of silence too short or too long?

Step5 Was there real personal sharing or preaching to others?

Step6 Did we allow the spirit of God's word to guide our discussions on our tasks?

Step7 Did we allow enough time for everybody to pray spontaneously?

The purpose of the Self-Evaluation Scheme is to help group members assess how happy they are with the way that Gospel Sharing is progressing in their group. Do not use this evaluation after every session, but only once in a while. If it is used too often it will turn faith sharing into an instruction class. This would ruin the spirit of prayer in the group. It is advisable that the person who leads the evaluation is not the same person who facilitated the Gospel Sharing. Above all, remember that the purpose of the evaluation is not to criticise or correct anyone. Rather, we wish to use this opportunity to help the group do better in the future.



MEETING 8: "IN YOUR LIGHT WE SEE LIGHT" - THE GROUP RESPONSE METHOD

Introduction - Comparison with the Seven Steps Method

What do you gain from using the Seven Steps; method of Gospel Sharing?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

We are able to experience the presence of the Risen Lord.

We help each other be touched personally by God's Word.

Our personal sharing enables us to deepen our faith.

We are more closely bonded together in personal relationships.

Trust is created in the group.

A spiritual climate is created in the group and this helps us with our practical planning.

Despite all the wonderful effects of the Seven Steps, there is a major drawback. Many groups who use this method leave out Step Six, or find it difficult to connect the Bible text with issues in their community. In order to help them overcome this problem we to use another Gospel Sharing method. This is called Group Response.

What is Group Response?

Look at the picture on the following page. What *do you see*?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. read the following:

The Group Response method begins with a Scripture text but it does not use personal sharing. Rather, it holds up the Scripture text as a kind of mirror which the members of a group can recognise their own problems, as well as other situations of daily

This method, then, offers variety to groups which usually follow the Seven Steps method. If they use it from time to time, it will help them widen their spiritual horizon and look beyond their own individual lives.

The Group Response method is also admirably suited for use by parish liturgy committees who have the task of preparing for the Sunday liturgy. It assists them in finding the setting of a particular text of the Bible. It also helps them find out which life situation of their local community is reflected in the biblical text. This will help both preacher and people find out together what God may think about the situation. The preacher can then in the homily address the real problems of a local community.

Step 1: Inviting the Lord

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step One:

We remind ourselves that the Risen Lord is in our midst.

Would someone like to invite Jesus in a prayer and welcome him?

Note that Step One of Group Response is the same as that of the Seven Steps. If you are familiar with this step move immediately to the next section of this meeting. If not, you may like to work through pages 4-6 of this booklet.

Step 2: Listening to the Lord

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step Two:

We read our chosen text twice.

We pick out words or short phrases and repeat them prayerfully three times. We pause briefly after each repetition.

Once again, we note that Step Two of Group Response is the same as Steps Two and Three of the Seven Steps. If you are familiar with these steps move immediately to the next section of this meeting. If not, you may like to work through pages 7-17 of this booklet.

Step 3: We Search for Life Issues

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step Three:

Let us discuss the following question with the person next to us (for 3-5 minutes):

"What life situation or problem in your parish, village, town or country is similar to the situation mentioned in the text? "

After 3-5 minutes each pair reports back.

Let us choose one problem to discuss further. Does anyone know more about this problem?

Why do you think this problem exists?

In what way could this step be called ill mirror? See Fr FRank

After few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group.

Then read the following:

In this step the Bible becomes a kind of mirror through which we see our lives in a new way. The particular biblical text is a kind of parable which reminds us of a similar situation in our own life.

It is not important if our own situation is not exactly the same as the one in the biblical text. This will rarely be the case. By recognising the biblical situation in our own life, however, we are offering the Bible a home in our life. It thus becomes a visible sign of the Risen Lord. "In his light we see light" (Ps.36: 10).

By using the text as a kind of mirror we are able to come into direct contact with Jesus, just as the woman in the Gospel did when she leaned forward and touched the hem of Jesus cloak. Her act may seem superstitious to many people. But Jesus turned round and said to her, "Courage, my daughter! Your faith has made you well" (Mat 9:22). Likewise, it is the faith of the members of the group, a community of believers, which is the reason why we act in this way.

Step 4: What does God say?

Someone in the group reads the instructions for Step Four:

- *We now keep silence for three minutes and ask ourselves:
"How does God look at our problem? What does God think, feel and say about it? "*
.., *After three minutes we tell each other what we think God is saying to us about our problem.*

How can we discover what God thinks about our problem?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

At first glance, such a claim seems presumptuous. We must remember, however, what we learned during our introduction to the Seven Steps. When we gather in Jesus' name he has promised to be with us. When we, as a community, listen in faith to God's word we really do experience the presence of the Lord. If we have listened carefully to the biblical text in Step Two, then at this Step we certainly can claim to have some insight into what God may want to say to us about our life situation.

In these minutes of silence we regard ourselves as standing at God's side. We view our problem with the eyes of God. Not only will the actual text throw light on our problem but so also will the common sense of the faithful, which we believe to be alive in all believers. (*See Vatican 11, The Church, #12*)

Viewing a situation with the eyes of God is a prophetic event. The faithful are reading the "signs of the times", even if they may appear to the human eye as humble daily events. To discern God's will in situations of life is the prophetic function to which all members of the Church are called. (*See The Church, #31*)

In this step we do not share with the group a word or message which has touched us personally. We rather tell each other how we think God looks at our problem and what God is advising us to do. It may well be that different members of the group come to different conclusions about God's view. In this case more prayer and more advice from others outside the group will be necessary to discern God's will.

Step 5: Plan for Action

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step Five:

III What does God want us to do? " Who will do what and when? " Afterwards:

Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.

51 We end with a prayer or hymn which everyone knows.

What are the most important aspects of this step?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

This is when the group comes to a decision on what to do. Success in this regard will greatly depend on how you came to the decision. Remember the following:

Choose an action which is concrete and small enough to be tackled by the group members.

Allow all the members to participate by making suggestions.

Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the main suggestions - remembering God's view.

Decide on one action.

Make sure *who* is going to act, *what* they are going to do and *when* they will put the plan into action.

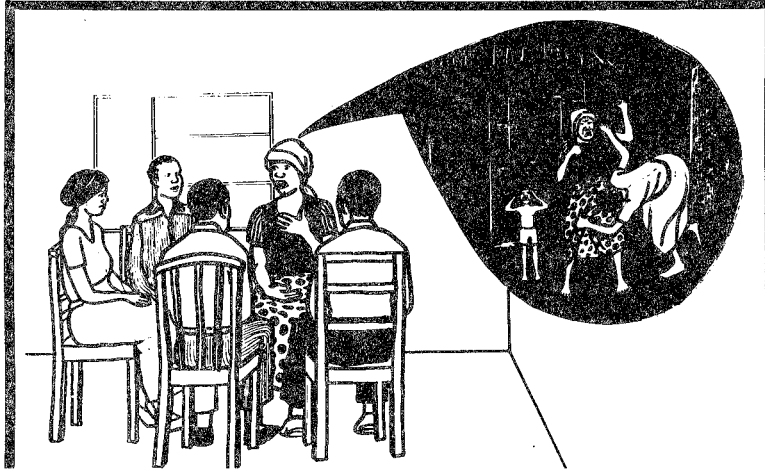
Conclusion

Bring the meeting to a close with spontaneous prayers and a hymn.

MEETING 9: "ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER": LOOK - LISTEN - LOVE

Introduction: Purpose of the Look-Listen-Love Method

Look at the picture below. What do you see?



After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

This method starts with personal life-issues of individuals in the group. In the Group Response method the members hold up the Bible as a kind of mirror in which they consider in a new way their life issues. In the Look-Listen-Love method they begin by sharing their personal experiences, happy or unhappy. These can be events which happened at home or in the neighbourhood. They want to consider these issues in the light of the Gospel.

Note that the session begins with an invitation to the Risen Lord to be with the members of the group. You should be well aware of the meaning of this invitation. If not, read pages 4-6 of this booklet.

Step 1: Look at Life

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step One:

Anyone who wishes may relate a recent personal experience. (Afterwards): Let us now select one of these experiences for discussion.

(Afterwards): We ask ourselves:

What exactly happened?

Can we be told more about it?

Are there reasons why it happened?

How do we feel about it?

What do you notice about this Step?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

In this step all the participants are invited to share with the group any event in which they were involved personally. It is not necessary for all the members to share such an experience. All should feel free.

When some of the participants have shared a problem or happy event, the facilitator leads

them in choosing one particular event to reflect on during the session. To help them understand the situation more clearly the person who first suggested the event is asked to give more details. Then the facilitator asks the other members of the group to express their thoughts and feelings about the event under discussion.

Why is it important to share one's experiences in a faith group? After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

The group members should not be left alone in their personal needs. They should experience a loving community which is waiting for them and ready to stand at their side. St Paul tells the House-Church of Thessalonika: "And so encourage one another and help one another, just as you are now doing" (I Thess 5: 11).

It frequently happens that the emotions one is caught up in are calmed when group members help that person reflect on a certain event and find more facts and reasons about why it happened.

However, not only personal problems are dealt with in this method. By the emotional involvement of one member of the group in a social or economic event, all can be helped to recognise their common responsibility for public issues.

Step 2: Listen to God

Someone in the group reads the instruction for Step Two: „ *We keep silence for three minutes and ask ourselves:*

"What does God think and feel about our event?"

(After 3 minutes): Please share with us now what you think God feels about this event.

What is God's point of view?

What should we do during the silence of this step?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

During this period of silence we wish to step back from the actual situation and look at it from God's point of view. We try to see the situation with God's eyes, though without searching for a suitable Bible quotation too quickly. It is more important to look at the problem or happy situation in the spirit of the entire biblical message. Some important words from the Bible may come to mind and we can use these in explaining how we think God feels. However, be careful of finding too quick an answer by quoting Bible texts.

After the silence we do not share on something which has touched us personally (as in the Seven Steps). We rather tell each other what God may think about the situation.

If anyone questions whether the "ordinary" believer can find out what God feels, remind them of the teaching of the Church: "It is the sense of faith which enables the believers to penetrate deeper into the faith with right judgement and apply it fully in daily life". (See *Vatican II*, The Church, #12)

It may happen that the group members come to different conclusions about what God thinks about the problem. Then the time has come for more prayer and consultation with others in the parish. Remember that a majority vote does not establish what God thinks about a situation!

Step 3: Love in Action

Someone in the group reads the instructions for Step Three:

"What does God want our whole group to do in this situation?"

"Who will do what, and when?"

• *(Afterwards): Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously. ¶ We close with a prayer and a hymn which everyone knows.*

What are the most important aspects of this step?

After a few minutes' reflection share your ideas with the group. Then read the following:

This is when the group members come to a decision on what to do. Success in this regard will greatly depend on how you came to the decision. Remember the following:

- Choose an action which is concrete and small enough to be tackled by the group members.
- Allow all the members to participate by making suggestions.
 - Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the main suggestions - remembering God's view.
- Decide on one action.
 - Make sure *who* is going to act, *what* they are going to do and *when* they will put the plan into action.

Conclusion

Bring the meeting to an end with spontaneous prayers and a hymn.

(next 4 pages is Pamphlet)

Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Revelation 3.22)
Four ways of Gospel Sharing

The Seven Steps

1. Invite

We remind ourselves that the Risen Lord is with us.

- Would someone like to invite Jesus in a prayer and welcome him.

2. Read

- Let us open our Bibles to ... Chapter ...
- *(When all have found the place:)*
Would someone like to read verses ...

3. View with wonder

- We pick out words or short phrases, read them aloud prayerfully and repeat them three times
(The silence after each repetition should be long enough for us to repeat the same word once or twice in our hearts.)
- *(Afterwards:)*
Will someone, please, read the same text again (from a different version) .

4. Listen

- We keep silence for ... minutes and allow God to speak to us.

5. Share

- Which word has touched us personally?
We do not discuss any contribution, even though some may not share personally but comment instead.
- *(Afterwards, the group may choose a Word of Life:)*
Which word from the text shall we choose as our "Word of life" for the coming week or month?

6. Plan for action

- Now we discuss any task which our group is called to do in our neighbourhood or parish.
- Report on the previous task.
- What new task needs to be done?
- WHO will do WHAT and WHEN?
- *(In Step 6, we may also share some examples of how we have applied the "Word of Life" in certain situations of daily life.)*

7. Pray

- Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.
- *(Afterwards:)*
We end with a prayer or a hymn which everyone knows.

In your light we see light (Psalm 36.10) Four ways of Gospel Sharing

Group Response

1. Invite

Today we follow a gospel sharing method called "Group Response". We shall NOT share with each other how the Word of God has touched us personally. Today we shall use the Bible as a mirror in which the life of our whole community is reflected.

- We remind ourselves that the Risen Lord is in our midst. Would someone like to invite Jesus in a prayer and welcome him.

2. Read

- We read our chosen text twice.
- We pick out words or short phrases and repeat them prayerfully three times. We pause briefly after each repetition.

3. Look

- Let us discuss the following question with the person next to us (for 3-5 minutes):

"What life-situation or problem in our parish, village, town or country is similar to the situation mentioned in the text?"

- *(After 3-5 minutes:)*
Each group reports back.
- Let us choose one problem to discuss further.
- Does anyone know more about this problem?
Why do you think this problem exists?

4 .. Listen

- We now keep silence for three minutes and ask ourselves:
"How does God look at our problem? .
In other words, what does God think, feel and say about it?"

- *(After three minutes)"*
We tell each other what we think God is saying to us about our problem.

5. Plan for action

- What does God want us to do?
- WHO will do WHAT and WHEN?
- *(Afterwards:)*
Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.
- *(Afterwards:)*
We end with a prayer or a hymn which everyone knows.

Encourage one and other (1 Thes 5, 11)

Look - Listen - Love

Today we do not begin our meeting by reading the Bible. We begin by looking at events in our daily life.

We follow the steps of the "Look-listen-Love" method.

- Would someone like to invite Jesus in a prayer and welcome him into our midst?

1. LOOK - at life

- Anyone who wishes may relate a recent personal experience.
Please tell us about an experience or event in which you were involved personally. Think of an event which happened at your place of work, at home" in the parish etc. This should be brief.
- (*Afterwards*)
Let us now select one, of these experiences for discussion.
- (*Afterwards:*)
We ask ourselves: What exactly happened? Can we be told more about it?
Are there reasons why it happened?
How do we feel about it?

2. LISTEN -to God

- We keep silence for three minutes and ask ourselves:
"What does God think and feel about our event?"

In these few minutes let us put aside our own feelings about the event. We take God's side and look at our event with God's eyes.' We just imagine: if God were to speak about this event now - what would God say? We do not open the Bible but remember silently words or events which we already know from the Bible.

(after 3 minutes)

Please share with us now what you think God feels about this event

What is God's point of view"?

(Relevant words from the Bible, especially from the Psalms, may be read or told from memory at this time. If no suitable passage comes to mind, continue with the next step.)

3. LOVE - in action

- (We do not give mere moral advice but ask ourselves:)
- "What does God want our whole group to do in this situation?
How can we together assist and support the member of our group in his/per situation?"
- WHO will do WHAT and WHEN?
- (*Afterwards:*)
- Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.
- (*Afterwards:*)
- We close with a prayer or a hymn which everyone knows.

God's word on social problems

Life - Bible - Notes

(The following "Notes" should be completed in a leaders' meeting together with the pastoral animator. The "Notes" will help them to conduct a session with their own groups at home.)

1. A Situation from Life

A common problem in our life today:

Guiding questions: .

We share all the facts and details that we know about the problem.

How do people feel about this problem? ?.

Why do we have such a problem? But why? ... But why? ... But why? "

Who suffers and who gains in this situation?

What does TV say about our problem?

What does public opinion say about our problem?

How is our problem handled in our local customs?

Other questions which look at our particular problem from different angles:

2. God's Word

A Bible text in which our problem is reflected:

Guiding questions:

At what word or sentence in the biblical text did you think *that is right I am happy to hear that*

At which sentence did you think, "I did not expect that" tell us why you thought differently

"What do you think God's 'opinion is about our problem?

- How is our problem handled in the Church?
- Other questions which can help to connect our problem with the message of the Bible

3. Our Response

- What does' God want us to do?
- We gather different proposals without discussing them.
- We discuss the advantages and disadvantages of one proposal which looks promising.
- We decide on one action: WHO will do WHAT and WHEN?

(a one page approach to praying the Scripture alone or together.)

LINKING LIFE AND SCRIPTURE ALONE OR TOGETHER
(The 6 Rs)

PREPARATION

- Find a suitable place, take up a comfortable position.
- Have the Scripture texts of the day near at hand.
- Be still, tune into your breathing, relax.
- If it helps to calm down play some reflective music.
- Decide you want to pray.

RECALL AND REFLECT

Let your mind recall the facts of the past 24 hours; happenings, meetings, moments. It may help to jot them down on paper.

e.g. conversation with someone, an activity you took part in, a meeting you were at, an event that occurred, a visit, a place you went to, a surprise ... ,
Listen quietly.

Now quietly reflect on these facts. Notice what stands out.

What are they saying to you? What purposes or meaning underlie them? What values? Is there a connection between them? Ponder and wonder. Go beneath the facts to catch a glimpse of God present through them.

How is God speaking to you?Loving you?calling you?challenging you?

(If with others, say to each other what you want to)

2 READ AND RELATE

Read the text you have chosen slowly and attentively. Notice how you are affected by it.

Is there a word or phrase that attracts your attention?

How is what you have read connected with what you have recalled and your reflection?

Ponder and wonder.

See how they relate ..

Test your perspectives, attitudes, values against those of whoever figures in the text.

Let the text encourage, challenge, surprise, disturb you to new perspectives.....

Be still and let God be God with you.

(If with others say to each other what you want to)

3. REACH OUT AND RESPOND

See is there any change, resolve, action to which you feel called now. Make an act of commitment to reaching out.

Quietly appreciate this moment of communion with your God. Feel the freedom of being an offspring of this source.

Respond to this life, this gift with thanksgiving, praise, asking for pardon, for help, in terms of what has dawned on you.

Address your God directly

(If with others, say what you want in their presence) Go in peace and let your God live in and through you.

One Framework for Christian Community Meeting

1. WELCOME:

Coordinator welcomes people informal chatting ... checking in with one another.

2. RITUAL:

Place cloth, candle, symbol in centre. Play quiet music. Let people relax. Say an introductory prayer.

3. RECALL SOME GOOD NEWS OF THE WEEK.

Coordinator invites people to recall something good that happened during the week, either to themselves or others.

4. SCRIPTURE READING.

Mark 1: 32 -39 (Have Bibles ready)

C * Will someone please read the text.

C * Let us pick out words or short phrases and read them aloud prayerfully.

5. READ SCRIPTURE TEXT AGAIN.

C * We let God speak to us in silence (2mins)

C * We share what we have heard in our hearts.

(Up to now we have used the first 5 steps of the 7 Step method for Bible-sharing. Now we introduce a short input on the text)

6. READ BACKGROUND TO TEXT

* Someone reads the background material prepared in advance (Two or three people can share the reading)
Then Coordinator asks:

1. What struck you in this reading?
2. The Gospel here describes Jesus as **HAVING TO PRAY** if he is to understand the next step in his life.
 - How does this affect your understanding of Jesus?
 - What is changing for you? Have you always seen him like this?
 - Who might be 'the invisible ones' today? Who might be these 'children of the night' in our time?

7. **Prayers** Coordinator; We now have time for each to pray for anyone or any thing you would like to mention Coordinator says final prayer.

8 **CUP OF TEA OR COFFEE** Before we have the cup of tea..... Where will we meet next? Who will coordinate the meeting? Will we use the same framework? Anything else

Tea Coffee