

AT THE MEETING

The back page of each leaflet offers a meeting structure to help everyone take turns to lead a meeting. This is most important! We have tried to include as much information as you need, so that you can lead the meeting even if you have never done anything like that before.

Some practical hints: First, if you meet in each other's homes, as many CLCs do, ensure that your host is not also leading the meeting. Check that the phone is switched off and that the dog/cat can't interrupt. When it is coffee time, put on the kettle *after* the review of the meeting. Sharing and listening well are more important than avoiding delay in offering refreshments! Finally, begin and end on time. Not doing so can lead to later problems and can even cause a group to fold.

As far as possible, sit everyone in a circle for the meeting. You may find it helpful to have a candle or some other focal point on a small table in the middle of the circle.

Some groups lead into the opening prayer with a few moments of silence, others make this a slightly longer time and play music to help people settle. It's good to end this time by saying a formal prayer together, such as the CLC opening prayer. At the beginning of this leaflet are the prayers for meetings which most CLCs use. It's up to you whether you use them or not. You may want to find something of your own instead.

After noting the grace for the meeting and listening to the scripture, we suggest ten minutes silent reflection before you move on to the sharing. This is not instead of the preparation for the meeting, which we hope you will have done beforehand. It is simply a time to remember your preparation. If your

group is new to silence, start with five minutes, gradually building up to ten. It is the job of whoever is leading to say when this time of silence is over and to invite the group to move on to the sharing.

The heart of the CLC meeting is sharing and listening. This is so important that we have devoted two pages of this leaflet to it. Please do follow the advice. When you are able to attend regional or national events you will also see how other people in CLC run listening groups.

Some groups include intercessory prayer in the meetings, usually after the sharing, but sometimes after the practicalities slot. The meeting outline at the back of the leaflet is only a suggestion so decide as a group how you want to alter it to suit your needs.

Finally, however late it is, take time to review the meeting. Reviewing is Ignatian and sensible; it helps you to notice good practice (to repeat it) and to nip problems in the bud. If you can't find something good to say about the meeting, you're in a *very* bad way, and if you can't find anything not so good (not *bad* or *negative*) then your group is obviously quite perfect!



Enjoy your meetings!



MEETING PLANS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

WELCOME!



INTRODUCTORY
LEAFLET

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WELCOME!

Welcome to the CLC series of meeting plans. This leaflet is an introduction to the series and contains information and hints that we hope you will find helpful for *all* the leaflets to come. You may like to keep it by you and refer to it occasionally.

Don't feel that you have to follow everything in the leaflets exactly. Be flexible, and use the review of the meeting to check out what does and does not work for you. There isn't room in the leaflets to keep reminding you about this, so please do remember!

We send our monthly newsletter *Focus* to new members through to the end of their first full calendar year without charge. All we ask is that you tell us how many copies you would like for your group and to whom we should send them. Please write to the CLC Membership Secretary as soon as possible and a form is enclosed (opposite) for you to do so.

If you find yourselves becoming anxious about 'doing it properly', or would just like to make contact, why not invite the Regional Representative, Regional Chaplain or National Chaplain for a visit? You will find addresses in *FOCUS*, or write to the address on the front of this leaflet or email to info@clcew.org.uk.

Most CLCs choose prayers to begin and end their meetings. The following are those which many use, and which we also often say together at regional or national meetings.



THE OPENING PRAYER

Show us, Lord, what we should do,
and help us as we do it,
so that our prayers and works
may begin from you,
and through you meet with success,
through Christ Our Lord.
Amen.

THE CLOSING PRAYER

Dearest Jesus, teach us to be
generous,
to serve you as you deserve to be
served,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and to ask for no reward
except that of knowing
that we do Your holy will.
Amen.

TWO GROUP STYLES

LISTENING GROUPS

people use a lower voice
the only reply is 'thanks' - if that
everybody listens to one person
at a time
after each speaker,
there is a short pause
reverence each speaker
the speaker uses only 'I'
deal with lived experience
aim to listen from the heart
have no right or wrong answers
work by self-discovery
draw the group together
can involve personal struggle
make no suggestions,
give no advice

DISCUSSION GROUPS

have a high decibel count
talk goes back and forth
several conversations go on at once
speakers tend to interrupt each other
promote acceptance or rejection
speakers use 'he', 'she', 'it', 'they'
deal with ideas and principles
aim to stimulate the mind
make judgements
work by persuading others
people take different positions
may not cost a lot
try to correct and help

**Discussion groups enlighten the mind.
Listening groups touch deeper into the heart and enable us,
like Mary, to treasure what is shared and to ponder it.**

ABOUT THESE LEAFLETS

THE LISTENING GROUP

The atmosphere should be relaxed, friendly and warm. People should feel unpressurised, able to share when they are ready and free to be themselves. If this is to happen then each member of the group should be willing to:

- * LISTEN * BE PATIENT * SHARE * BE ACCEPTING * KEEP AN OPEN MIND
 - * BE NON-JUDGEMENTAL * DO NOT DOMINATE IN ANY WAY *
 - * KEEP AN OPEN MIND * RESPECT OTHERS' OPINIONS *
 - * KEEP EVERYTHING IN THE GROUP CONFIDENTIAL *
- * It is good to sit in a circle that has only as many chairs as are necessary, in which as far as possible members can see and hear each other comfortably.
 - * The aim is to provide a supportive environment within which each person can articulate their own experience.
 - * Our purpose is to obtain a communal sense of how God has spoken to us in the period previous to the group meeting.

The listening group falls into two parts:

THE FIRST ROUND

Each person shares when they are ready what has happened to them as they prayed, how they felt, how this has affected their life and how their life has affected their prayer. Each tries to share how the Lord seemed to communicate. No-one is obliged to share what they are not ready to share. It may be that someone does not want to share at all, in which case they should indicate this by saying something like, 'I want to pass'. Share what you are comfortable with. Usually there is a brief period of silence after each person has shared to savour what has been said.

THE SECOND ROUND

After everyone has had a chance to share (usually with a brief period of silence after each one), the leader calls for a brief period of silence to reflect on what has been said. Each is then invited to share what happened in them as they listened. What impressed me? What touched me as others shared? Did something "ring bells" with me? Did I have any new insights? The important thing here is to stick to *my* reactions; to avoid comment, interpretation, judgement or advice. The second round is an opportunity to affirm each other, certainly not to disagree or criticise. Stick to sharing experience. Try to stick to 'I' statements (eg 'When you said that, I felt. . .')

It is always important to remember that there is only a limited time for sharing and to be sensitive to the task of the group leader who must ensure that all have time to share.

What you need

All you need to prepare for and run a meeting is the meeting plan, this leaflet and a bible. Meeting plans may also refer to or assume knowledge of previous leaflets so be aware of that if you gain a new group member later.

Structure of the leaflets

The leaflets offer material for **personal prayer before the meeting** on the inside pages. 'Hopes and Dreams - towards the second meeting' gives the preparatory prayer text, points to the importance of concluding prayer by talking directly to the Lord, and offers hints for reviewing prayer.

After that, each leaflet includes **a reminder of the suggested stages for your prayer time** and offers prayer material for the time between meetings. Usually there is an article or something to pray with or as background. (Page 4 of the first meeting plan ('Starting out Together - towards the second meeting') has a good way of praying.)

Additional optional meetings

After you have completed the second meeting plan ("Hopes and Dreams - towards the second meeting") **there an additional set of three extra meetings that you can choose to do before you continue with the subsequent meeting plans.** These are further helps in praying for people who are not so familiar with reflective or meditative prayer. **Please read the 'Introduction' leaflet in this small sub-set to help you decide if they are appropriate for your group.**

The article 'Aids for Prayer' on the following pages of this leaflet offers more help for prayer. Of course if something happens in your life that you need to take into your prayer, stay with that instead of the material in the leaflets.



Be creative and flexible!

Some people find it helpful to pray with colour or symbol as the second leaflet suggests. Feel free to continue with this, in following weeks and to bring your painting, clay or symbol to the group

Moving on to the next leaflet - or not?

We assume that groups using this material are meeting fortnightly. If you meet weekly, please spend two meetings with the leaflets as they take time to sink in. Sometimes they might take longer still, so be prepared to stay with the same meeting plan until most of the group feel that they have 'received the grace'. Repetition is one of the key tools of Ignatian spirituality and it applies to a meeting plan as well as to a scripture passage.

Another reason you may decide to stay with a meeting plan could be if a number of members had missed a meeting (although this should be rare!) and you didn't want them to miss the opportunity to share on that topic.

So do not feel that you always have to press on with the next leaflet, but decide (either in the practicalities part of the meeting or after the evaluation) whether to move on or not.

AIDS FOR PRAYER

✚ Find a suitable prayer place. Many people create a little shrine, with favourite icons, pictures and symbols of prayer. Some alter the prayer place to suit the theme of the prayer.

✚ Whether or not you use a focal point like a picture, you may find it helpful to light a candle when you pray. It is often an aid towards stillness and can be good to come back to after a distraction.

✚ Harmony of body and spirit is important, so take a peaceful and relaxed position - sitting, kneeling, standing or walking (not a restless pacing). The aim is to help concentration in a relaxed way.

✚ Enter into prayer slowly and deliberately, remembering what you are going to do and whom you are going to meet. Rushing into prayer is counter-productive and unsettling.

✚ Spend a short while quieting yourself. It helps many to do a stillness exercise; others prefer to listen to music or quietly repeat words, such as 'Jesus', or 'Come, Holy Spirit'. Discover what helps you.

✚ Pause to remind yourself that the persons of the Trinity are looking at you with love. They are on your side. Prayer is *their* work. Make some act of reverence to acknowledge their presence. (You might want to open your hands with palms upright, make a little bow or the Sign of the Cross - whatever you find helpful and comfortable.)

✚ Surrender all that you are about to do through the preparatory prayer. You want everything that happens in this prayer time to be to God's praise and service. Give this time freely to God.

✚ Ask for the grace or gift you desire - the leaflets offer you a grace to pray for. Don't just say the words, ponder their meaning. Perhaps imagine what it would be like to receive the grace. Don't rush this part of the prayer about give it time. It is good to pray the grace before you move on to whatever text the leaflets offer you.

✚ It can be helpful to return to the grace repeatedly during the prayer time, especially when nothing seems to be happening.

✚ When you are ready, read slowly a number of times the scripture passage (or the article) you have decided to use. Try to lose yourself in the passage, not thinking or figuring things out on your own, but letting the Holy Spirit pray through you (cf Romans 8: 26-27). If it recounts an event of Christ's life, be there in the mystery. Share with the people involved. Respond to what Jesus is saying. Remember that Ignatius invites us to imagine what did happen in the scripture, but also what *might have happened*

✚ Some words or phrases may carry special meaning for you - savour them, turning them over in your heart. There is absolutely no rush in prayer! Or you may want to speak or recite a psalm or some other prayer. Really mean what you are saying.

✚ When something strikes you, PAUSE. This is God speaking to you in the words of scripture. Do not hurry to move on. Wait until you are no longer moved by the experience.

✚ If you are praying an article (and most leaflets offer one), read it right through first of all without stopping, but then return to it slowly and deliberately. When something touches you, stay with it and savour it as in the 'Benedictine method' (see back page of the very first leaflet). When you are ready to move on, ask yourself: 'What is my reaction to the content of this article?', 'Is it in tune with my experience?', 'What use can I make of it?' Talk to Jesus informally you to talk to God. about the article and try to listen to his response. If something challenges you, then it is even more important to bring it to God. Try to use the article as something that leads you to talk to God

✚ Don't be discouraged if nothing seems to happen. All you can do is be there - it's up to God to do the rest. Simply be faithful to the prayer, however it feels. An attitude of listening is a sign of love for God, and a real prayer from the heart.

✚ As your prayer time comes to an end, talk to Mary or one of the divine persons as you talk to people you love, with openness and confidence, saying what you want to say or simply staying with them in an attitude of praise or gratitude or however you feel. In particular, you may want to talk about the grace you have been praying for.

✚ Just as you made an act of reverence at the start of your prayer time, you may like to do so again at the end. Some people end with a 'formal' prayer, perhaps the Lord's Prayer or a *Glory Be*. Use whatever feels right for you.

PREPARATORY PRAYER

O Lord, guide all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer, all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; may everything be for your greater service and glory and to my growth in the Spirit. Amen.