



# *Christian Life Community*

*praying our life  
and living our prayer*



## **Discovering the way God is leading our Community**

**An evaluation for established groups**

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Discovering the way God is leading our Community

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# CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMUNITY

## Discovering the way God is leading our Community

### INTRODUCTION TO THIS MATERIAL

*You saw how God carried you all along the road you travelled on the way to this place.*

This resource will be most useful for a more mature group, that is one that has probably been in existence for a minimum of 5 years and has been meeting regularly. The group would have been through most of the Formation Programme (meeting plans) and members may have had other CLC Formation Experiences such as Prayer days, Regional or National Assemblies and some form of Ignatian Retreat. At a certain time through the prompting of the Holy Spirit the members sense a need for guidance to discern the way God is leading them individually and as a community. This is when *Discovering the Way* may be helpful.

Many of us, at some time or another, have been asked to reflect back upon our lives to see where God has been, to see how God has worked to bring us to where we are now. When we do this we realise anew, as Mary did, how 'God has done great things for me'. We also pick up some clues as to how God may work in us in the future, since there are often patterns in our faith history, a sense of 'having been here before' - although it is never quite the same place.

In the same way a group can reflect upon its story, to remember the graces of the past, both in the joys and the difficulties, and to see more clearly the way God is calling the group to move forward. Reflecting upon our shared story as a group is particularly grace-filled, for other people in the group see what I have missed. When we share our experience and memories we put together an amazing testimony of how powerfully God works in us and how He has enabled us to **discern, send, support and evaluate** our lives of loving service.

And that is what we are asking you to do now. This pack contains a wealth of material to help you - all explained in '**How to use this material**' (pp6-7) and '**Spending more**

***time together'*** (pp24-25) based on the experiences of the groups who piloted this material.

The material is not just someone's inspiration. It was compiled a while ago by the people listed below and piloted by two CLC Groups who gave some very helpful comments and suggestions. The reports of these groups and other groups who used the pack were so positive the National Formation Team requested that it should once more be made available to all local CLC communities as a tool to help them recognise how God is leading them.

The two CLC groups who piloted the Project spoke of how moved they had been by the whole process. Various comments of members from these and other groups expressed the certainty that the groups had grown immensely by working through this material, and that it had strengthened and deepened the bonds of community

So we are confident that in this pack we are offering you something special and the members of the National Formation Team will be praying that you find it very helpful.

Original compilers of material and roles at that time

- Maria Evans (Loyola Hall CLC)
- Tony Horan sj (National Chaplain)
- Eileen McConnon IBVM (former North Region Chaplain)
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Updated 2012 by the National Formation-Retreat Team

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## HOW TO USE THIS MATERIAL

This pack contains four sections outlining a process consisting of **two personal prayer sessions** (pp12-13 and 18-19) and **two group sessions** (pp14-16 and 20-22). There is also a **preliminary prayer session** (pp10-11), which you could use before beginning the material.

There are at least three ways in which you could use this material, over a weekend, a day and evening together, or over a series of group meetings.

1 You could put aside **two of your usual meetings**. 'Personal prayer time 1' should be used before the first of these meetings and 'Personal prayer time 2' in - between the two meetings. If at all possible, try to plan for longer than usual meetings, especially for the **first group session** (pp14-16). If your usual pattern is to meet fortnightly, it might be helpful, just for once, to have your second group session a week after the first, rather than waiting the fortnight.

Or if this is not possible:

2 If the group can manage it, you could put aside **a weekend** and use the material then. The section '**spending more time together**' on **p24** suggests how to do this, based on a 'pilot' experiment. But please do note that, however odd it seems, it is preferable to avoid a residential weekend, since a gap (even as short as going home overnight) is helpful after the first group session.

3 The other 'pilot' experiment was a compromise between these two. The group spent **a day together** and then, a few days later, used their **normal group meeting** to complete the process. Again, the section '**spending more time together**' on **p25** suggests how to do this.

Whichever way you use, it is very important that **all** the group members, however long they have been in the group, take part in the whole process.

## Help with the process

One of our 'pilot' groups asked someone to facilitate this process and the other didn't. Feedback was that it is very difficult to do it *without* an outside facilitator! We are therefore recommending that you find someone to guide you through this process. If you need help with finding someone, don't hesitate to ask the National Formation Team Convenor via the address given below.

If you have a Group Guide (as our pilot without the facilitator did) we still recommend very strongly that you find a facilitator. If you are really stuck, the Guide could be asked to facilitate, but as they should really be taking a full part in the process, it isn't ideal.

The person you **can't** ask to facilitate is your longest established member! This is simply because they will need to be able to take a full part in the process.

## Afterwards

Please do let the National Formation-Retreat Team know via the address below, how you did it and how you-got on with it. That would be very helpful.

National Formation-Retreat Team Convenor  
Christian Life Community,114,Mount Street, London W1K 3AH  
Email:<mailto:info@clcew.org.uk>

## SOME NOTES ON SHARING IN THE GROUP

*Please note that this section relates more to the 'Discovering the way...' process than to the normal CLC meeting. For example, it speaks of sharing on prayer, whereas in our meetings we share on both life and prayer. It is recognised that you are an established CLC group and experienced with listening, but these notes are provided merely as a gentle reminder.*

One of the gifts of CLC is listening. In our meetings we take time to try to put ourselves in the shoes of the person sharing, we listen without interrupting, trying to focus on what is being said and to notice the feelings of the speaker. Ours are listening groups, not opportunities for discussion or study. Rather, we try to gain a sense of how God has spoken to each of us in the prayer-time preceding the sharing.

So the main purpose of our group sharing is to hear what each person is saying and feeling, and to provide a supportive place in which each person can try to put into words their own experience. It is therefore important not to interrupt, not to comment on what has been said, not to pass judgement or even to give advice! Simply, we are here to listen.

- **First Round** Each person takes it in turns to share. (You can either go round the group in turn or, probably better, share in no particular order.) When I share, I focus particularly on how the prayer went (easy, distracted - whatever) and how I felt. I share what/how I felt the Lord communicating with me. And it is particularly important to remember that no-one is under any obligation to share what they don't want to share; I share as much as I am comfortable with.
- **Second Round** After each person has had a chance to share (usually with a brief period of silence after each one), the person leading invites a second round of sharing. This is my opportunity to share reactions to what I have heard. What impressed me as I listened? How did I feel? Was there something in particular that 'rang 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. Try to stick to 'I' statements (eg 'when you said that, I felt...'). This is a deeper listening. Listening to the Spirit of God moving in the group.

- **Third Round** It can be helpful to make time for a third round gathering the fruits of what we have heard and shared. What grace have we received for which we want to give thanks to the Lord?

### Remember...

When it is my turn to share, I need to be aware that there is only a limited time for our meeting and I try to be sensitive to the task of the person leading whose responsibility it is to ensure that the meeting finishes on time. Good preparation, so that I know beforehand what I want to be the focus of my sharing, is most helpful here!

The person leading needs to keep an eye on time to ensure that everyone has a chance to share and that the meeting ends punctually. (Remember that often the person feeling most vulnerable may choose to be the last to share and they won't be helped by a sense that time is running out.)



## Discovering the way God is leading our Community: Preliminary Prayer

### **PRELIMINARY PRAYER** before using this material as a group

We recommend that you pray this material in advance of the time your group has set aside for 'Discovering the way'

*You will need blank paper (A4 will do) and coloured pens for this exercise.*

#### Preparatory prayer

I begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting myself in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in my mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God.

#### Asking for what I want

I ask for openness and perceptiveness, and a deeper understanding of the way the group helps and hinders my movement towards God.

#### Prayer

They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the community, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone.

They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.

*Acts 2: 42-43, 46-47*

With this scripture passage as background:

-I get in touch with what it felt like to join the group. What were my hopes, desires, fears?

-How do I feel now about the group? Again, what are my hopes, desires, fears?

### Expressing our Prayer

Here are some different options for expressing our prayer, choose which appeals to you most:

- When it feels right, turn to your paper and coloured pens and draw something of your reflections; one drawing for what it felt like to join the group, one for how it feels now.
- Call to mind an image or symbol which reflects what it was like to join the group and what it is like now. Note down the meaning behind your symbols.
- Divide a piece of paper in two. Write down all the words associated with how you felt about joining the group and how you feel now.

### To conclude my prayer

I put this paper aside and spend some time talking to the Lord about what has come up for me in my reflection. I may like to end with a *Glory Be*.



## Personal Prayer Time 1

### Preparatory prayer

I begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting myself in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in my mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God.

### Beginning to set the scene

*A word of scripture to focus me*

'Do not take fright, do not be afraid. The Lord your God goes in front of you and will be on your side. In the wilderness you saw God: how the Lord carried you, as a father\* carries his child, all along the road you travelled on the way to this place.'

\* You may find it more helpful to use the image of a mother here. Choose which image helps you most.

Deuteronomy 1, 30-31

### Asking for what I want

I pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to recognise the significant moments of our group history and to see how God has led us through them.

### Entering into the picture

I take time to remember my local Christian Life Community. I imagine myself with all the people, events, feelings and patterns which have been there for my group, as it is in my memory. I don't worry about what I can't remember or about accuracy - and I resist all temptations to consult a diary!

### Going deeper

I ask the Lord to be with me as I go further along memory lane, and each time I notice how I am feeling:

- I remember how I came to join this group and what I was looking for.
- I recall anything I have heard of the group's history before I joined and what I know of its beginnings.
- I remember the times when I was especially enthusiastic about belonging to this community.
- I bring to mind the hard times, when I wondered why I bothered to come to meetings.
- I notice anything else which comes to mind.

### To conclude my prayer

I put this paper aside and spend some time talking to the Lord about what has come up for me in my reflection. I may like to end with a *Glory Be*.

### Review after prayer

After the prayer I take some time to look back over my prayer time and jot down a few things which moved me or which I particularly remember. I don't try to remember everything, but I do try to note those events which were important for me in the life of my CLC group.

**NOTE** *You may find that you need to spend more than one prayer time with this exercise. If, when you review the prayer, you have a sense that there is more - like an orange which isn't quite sucked dry - go back to those places where you were most moved, whether it was consoling or desolate.*

## Group session 1

### Preparatory prayer

We begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting ourselves in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in our mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God.

### Beginning to set the scene

*A word of scripture to focus us* (someone could read this aloud)

'Do not take fright, do not be afraid. The Lord your God goes in front of you and will be on your side. In the wilderness you saw God: how the Lord carried you, as a father\* carries her child, all along the road you travelled on the way to this place.'

*Deuteronomy 1, 30-31*

\* You may find it more helpful to use the image of a mother here. Choose which image helps you most.

### Asking for what we want

We pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to recognise the significant moments of our group history and to see how the Lord has led us through them.

### Recalling the time of prayer

In silence for ten minutes we recall the time of prayer which we had spent remembering the story of this Christian Life Community. In particular, we remember those events which are important and notice what feelings we have around them.

## NOTES

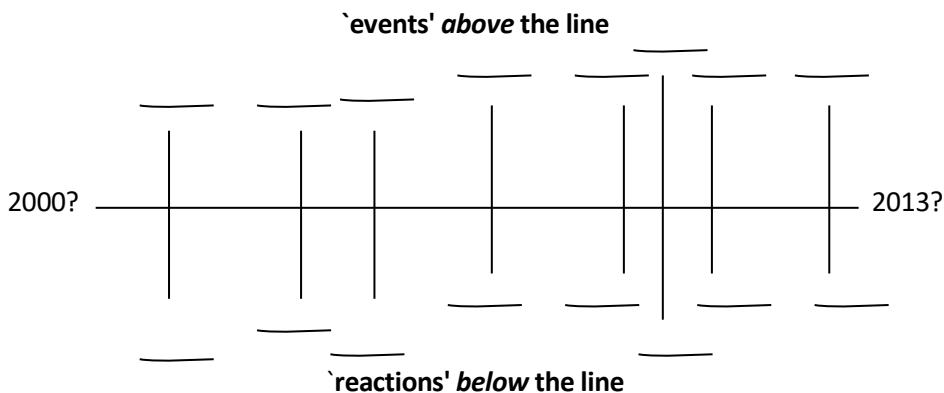
*You will need felt pens and a really long piece of paper - perhaps the back of wrapping paper or a roll of brown paper or several sheets of A3 paper put together.*

*Resist the temptation to do your history line in more than one meeting, even though you will have to be disciplined to fit it into one evening. It is very important not to worry about recording everything, and it is better to keep up the momentum and do it in one session. Good preparation by everyone in the group - and perhaps agreeing to have a longer-than-usual meeting - will help.*

### As a group, we compose our history line

Place the piece of paper so that its longest side is horizontal and draw a line half way up the piece of paper and parallel to the horizontal side - like the illustration below.

What is the date of the earliest event which is relevant to your community? Mark that date on the left hand end of the line and today's date on the right hand end. Now you have a scale for your history line.



- 1 Record events - involving people, places etc - which have moved or affected your CLC as you experience it, and note them above the line on the sheet of paper. Don't rush, and take time to listen to each other. At this stage, don't discuss whether an event was important, just collect the fruit of each person's prayer.

As you do this, share some reflections. What does this event mean or signify to each of us? How did it affect the group? How are we feeling about it now? Jot down key words or phrases below the line. Go with what gives the group energy and don't rush in order to squeeze everything in.

*The aim here is to notice the people and events which have made a difference to the group, not to produce a historical record of everything that has happened. It is vital here to stay with what is important for each person and to resist the temptation to record events simply because they are missing from the history line. If you do that, you may find you become overwhelmed by trivia which obscures what really matters.*

- 2 When you have finished marking the important events, stand back from your history line and see if you notice anything about any period of time (as opposed to particular events). For example, you may see that during some months the group seemed to have a lot of energy - or hardly any energy. You may wish to name one period as a time when the group was in turmoil, or particularly at peace. See if you can identify the movements in your history and note them on your chart as comments or symbols.

### Concluding this group session

Make sure there is time at the end of the meeting for a short period of prayer. Perhaps be still for about five minutes and then each share on what has been good about the meeting, what has been not so good, and what each person thinks they will take away. End with the CLC closing prayer.

#### **NOTE**

*At the end of this meeting, each person might find it helpful to make some notes on the history line as a memory jogger for the following session of private prayer.*





## Personal prayer time 2

### Preparatory prayer

I begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting myself in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in my mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God.

### Putting myself back into the scene

*A word of scripture to focus me*

‘When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and I called my son out of Egypt.  
I myself taught Ephraim to walk,  
I took them in my arms.  
I led them with leading strings of love.  
I was like someone who lifts an infant close against his cheek;  
stooping down, I gave her food.’  
from Hosea 11, 1-4

### Asking for what I want

I pray for the grace to be open to the Lord and to understand better the importance of the different events in our group history.

### Remembering with the Lord

I take time to recall the meeting in which we drew our history line. I don't try to remember everything, but am content to stay with whatever the Lord brings to my mind.

### Points for prayer

As I go deeper into the memory of our meeting, I choose two particular events or periods of time on the history line which stand out for me for whatever reason. I choose one which gives life, or consolation; one which brings darkness, or desolation.

I notice what about these events or period of time excites me, what saddens me, what makes me think, etc.

Do I know why I have chosen these particular events or periods of time? Why are they important or memorable or significant for me? Did they bring life/consolation or darkness/desolation at the time? How am I feeling now as I remember them? Were they creative or destructive? What did they mean for me? What did they mean for my local CLC? Has there been a change - do they mean something different now? Was there an invitation from God in the events? What is the gift that God is trying to give us?

### To conclude my prayer

I put this paper aside and spend some time talking to the Lord about what has come up for me in my reflection. I may like to end with a *Glory Be*.

### Review after prayer

After the prayer take time to look back over your prayer time. In turn, remember the two events or periods of time on which you focused in your prayer. Note how you felt about each one in the prayer, and what you thought about them.

Then stand back from the events and look back over the whole prayer time. Did you get caught up in anything in particular? Where did you spend the most time? Do you feel moved to go back to that place?

**NOTE** As you will be sharing on this prayer in the next session, it is important to make some notes as you look back over your prayer time. You will need to bring them to the next meeting.

## Group session 2

### Preparatory prayer

We begin, as usual, with a short time of stillness, putting ourselves in the presence of God and asking for grace that everything that happens in our mind, heart and imagination may be directed purely to the praise and service of God.

### Putting ourselves back into the scene

*A word of scripture to focus us*

(someone could read this aloud)

'When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and I called my son out of Egypt.  
I myself taught Ephraim to walk,  
I took them in my arms.  
I led them with leading strings of love.  
I was like someone who lifts an infant  
close against his cheek;  
stooping down, I gave her food.'

*from Hosea 11, 1-4*

### Asking for what we want

We pray for the grace to be open to the Lord and to understand better the importance of the different events in our group history.

### Recalling the time of prayer

In silence for ten minutes we recall the time of prayer which we had spent reflecting on the history line of this Christian Life Community. (Don't hesitate to use your notes as an aid to memory).

## Sharing our experience

Each person's sharing has three parts:

- First, the person simply shares on the two events or periods of time on which they have prayed.
- Secondly, when they have finished, the rest of the group, in turn, respond by saying what that sharing has triggered off in them. Take care to make personal statements about your feelings; don't comment on or judge what the person sharing has said. If their event(s) are yours, too, resist the temptation to share the fruit of your prayer now and stick to saying what the sharing has triggered off in you - although you may want to say that you have chosen that same event.
- Thirdly, when each group member has responded, the person sharing may want to respond in some way. Then they write **below** the line on the group history line, words or symbols which say what the invitation from God is from the events, what was the gift in the event. They may add anything from the rest of the group which may describe a different viewpoint.

After everyone in the group has had their turn to share, take time to notice any patterns and connections in what you have written. Looking at the whole 'picture', what does it tell you? Is there a pattern in what brings life, energy or consolation and what brings darkness, apathy or desolation? Can you name or find symbols for the patterns?

## Prayer together

Spend fifteen minutes in quiet prayer together in the group, reflecting on the sharing that has taken place. You might want to focus on the questions below.

Where do I find God in our group history?

What am I taking forward with me from our history-line?

How is God calling us to move forward as a group?

Share on the outcome of this prayer time.  
Take time for a second and third round of sharing.

How is God calling us to move forward as a group?

Record what the group wants to take forward.

**You might want to take a short break before the final sharing and review**

Final sharing

Take 10 minutes silence to review your experience of 'Discovering the Way'.

Take turns to share what has been good about this experience, what has been not so good, and what you want to take forward from the 'Discovering the Way' experience.

End with the CLC 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

ACCEPT  
LORD  
the work  
of our hands

DEUT. 33:11

## Appendix

### SPENDING MORE TIME TOGETHER

Our two 'pilot' groups were able to put aside more than two normal meetings for this exercise and if at all possible, we strongly recommend that other CLC groups try to do so too. They used the following two patterns, both of which worked well.

#### 1 A non-residential weekend

The group prayed '**personal prayer time 1**' (pp12-13) before the weekend and came ready to share. They spent the Saturday morning sharing a little bit of their life stories (worth trying, even if you think you all know each other really well), including how they had been drawn to CLC and this particular group.

Alternatively, they could have used, instead, the **preliminary prayer** outline (p10) and spend some time praying and sharing with personal prayer time 1 at the beginning of the weekend.

After lunch, the group used '**group session 1**' (pp14-16). They particularly appreciated having quite a bit of time in which to do this.

On the Sunday morning, the group spent a short time sharing how they felt now about how yesterday had gone, and noticing what in particular had stayed with them. Then they spent forty minutes to an hour praying '**personal prayer time 2**' (pp18-19).

After lunch, the group used '**group session 2**' (pp20-22). They concluded the day with Mass, celebrated by their facilitator. (It is important not to 'import' someone for this who has not been involved in the process. If neither your facilitator nor a group member is a priest, opt for a non-Eucharistic liturgy instead.)



## 2 A day and, later, an evening together

The group prayed '**personal prayer time 1**' (pp12-13) before the day together and came ready to share. They started the morning with a brief sharing on what they had left behind (or needed to leave behind) to be present and then spent forty minutes to an hour praying alone with the prayer outline included in this section (p12). Then they shared on their prayer in a listening group before breaking for lunch.

After lunch, the group used '**group session 1**' (pp14-15). They, too, appreciated having time in which to do this. The day ended with a simple non-Eucharistic liturgy.

In between the day together and the evening meeting (which was longer than their usual meeting) each person took time to pray '**personal prayer time 2**' (pp18-19).

At the evening meeting, the group used '**group session 2**' (pp20-22). The meeting was rushed, and they stress that you need more than two hours for this exercise.

### Common elements and tips

As stressed in '**How to use this material**' (pp6-7), both groups would advise bringing in an outside facilitator. One had done so and one tried without - and noticed the need afterwards. Therefore we think it will be helpful to have a facilitator.

Both groups, too, would stress the need for all members of the group to be present for all the process.

Take enough time for the sharing's - and for lunch, too! It's good to try and timetable a long lunch, as that's an important time together, too.

Finally, both groups speak eloquently of how much they enjoyed the process and how much they gained from it. They hope you will enjoy and gain, too.





# Discovering the Way God is leading our Community

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