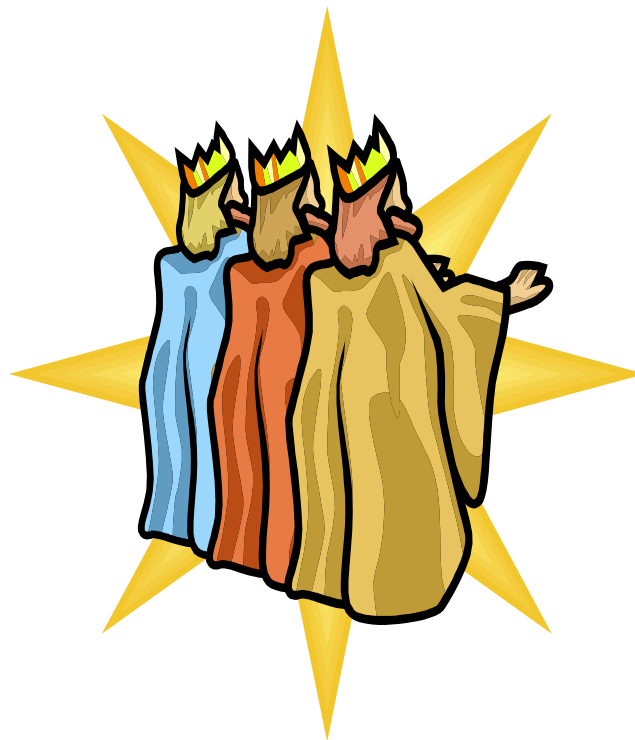


# NORTH EAST HAMPSHIRE PASTORAL AREA

## ADVENT HOME GROUPS

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WHAT CAN I GIVE HIM: GIVE MY HEART



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### SESSION 5

## REMEMBER, REFLECT, REVIEW & RESOLVE

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**WHAT CAN I GIVE HIM, POOR AS I AM**

**IF I WERE A SHEPHERD, I WOULD GIVE A LAMB**

**IF I WERE A WISEMAN, I WOULD DO MY PART**

**YET WHAT CAN I GIVE HIM: GIVE MY HEART**

From In the Bleak Midwinter by Rosetti & Holst

## **SESSION 5 –Remember, Reflect, Review & Resolve**

*Timings are meant as guidelines only*

### **10 mins – Welcome**

Sing hymns or have a short time of reflection.

The leader asks group members to reflect **privately** on how the Christmas season unfolded for them. There will be time throughout the course of this session to share together.

### **Introduction**

In this session after Christmas we take time to:

- **Remember** – what we learned before Christmas
- **Reflect** – on how our Advent journey, deeper into the incarnation of Jesus, affected our Christmas
- **Review** – how useful the Advent House Groups were for you
- **Resolve** – where we go from here

### **20 mins – Remember**

It is said that there are three comings of Jesus. His first coming on earth, His second coming is in our heart and the third is at the end of time.

The previous four Advent House Group sessions were offered in the context of preparing ourselves to receive Jesus again in our heart, over Christmas.

The sessions were about our response to the call to be disciples; about a way of 'being' rather than 'doing'. They offered us a chance to reflect on the prospect of presenting ourselves as a GIFT to the baby Jesus, God who became flesh for us and our salvation.

The word GIFT outlined the core sessions following each week in Advent:

- **Gratitude**
- **Intimacy**
- **Fellowship**
- **Time**

Use the summary notes of each session at the back, to remind yourself of the key issues covered in each week.

## 20 mins – **Reflect**

Having spent time with God and each other contemplating the amazing gift of God becoming human, spend time reflecting on your 'G I F T' journey (individually first, then as a group)

**Gratitude.** How have I lived an 'attitude of gratitude' for what the Lord offered me this Christmas?

**Intimacy.** How have I allowed the Lord to take control of my life this Christmas? Looking ahead, in what areas of my life am I still holding back from complete abandonment to the will of God?

**Fellowship.** How can I offer up my gifts in the service of others? To what extent do I rejoice at the gifts of others and pray for my brothers and sisters?

**Time.** To what extent did I allow the material demands of Christmas to rob me of prioritising God's plan for me over Christmas and responding to His invitation?

## 20 mins – **Review - Feedback on Advent House Groups**

The material offered over the time of Advent was intended to bless you with a deeper experience of being in closer communion with Jesus and with each other, in the more intimate setting of someone's home. It was also designed to offer you a chance to get away from the commercialisation of Christmas.

Please take some time now to consider how much your participation in the group has blessed you through Advent and Christmas; what was helpful, what was not and how such groups could be improved in the future.

Your leader will take notes and report these back (anonymously and in aggregate) to the Stewardship Formation Group, who will then consolidate all feedback and offer this to the Pastoral Area Coordinating Team.

Please feel free to provide all comments, both positive and negative. Please ensure you offer some feedback on the following as a minimum:

- 1) The logistics of the house group (day, timings, accessibility, distance from home etc.) and how well it worked for you:
  - a) If you were a host, would you be prepared to do so again?
  - b) If you were not, would you be prepared to host a house group in the future?
  - c) Would you be prepared to lead a group in the future?
- 2) The materials used:

- a) What was good about the materials? What wasn't so good?
  - b) What was your favourite part of the sessions?
  - c) What did you find the most challenging?
- 3) The fruit (output) and whether or not the small group environment fostered a greater sense of discipleship:
- a) Do you think that you have changed in any way as a result of the house group?
  - b) Do you have a greater sense of Jesus in your life? If so, how?
  - c) Do you have a greater awareness of your gifts?
  - d) Are you more prepared to use your gifts? If so, how?
  - e) Do you feel closer to the parish community?
- 4) What could be done to improve such house groups in the future?
- 5) Are there any other comments you would like to make?
- 6) How would you describe your experience of house groups to others?

Thank you.

## 10 mins – **Resolve**

New Year is a time for making resolutions – to yourself, to others and perhaps, also to God.

Here we invite you to consider whether you would like to continue meeting to share your faith journey with other brothers and sisters.

### **Scripture Reflection**

You may wish to read the following passage aloud twice, with a few minutes' silence between the two readings.

**They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.**

**All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all people.**

**And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

*(Acts 2:42-47)*

Reflection:

**'It seems to me, and I do not think I exaggerate, that most Catholics in the future, apart from their Sunday Mass, will need to belong to some form of small community.... Increasingly there will be people who come together to listen to the Word of God in Scripture, to reflect on their own lives and to pray. I often think these small communities are the secret for the future of the Church'**

*Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor - Keynote address at the national conference of priests 2001 'The State of the Church in England and Wales'.*

Consider the following questions individually, before sharing your response within the group.

- Would you like to continue meeting with fellow brothers and sisters to share your journey of faith? If so, how regularly? And in what format?
- Would you like to participate in the Lent House Groups which will be run across our Pastoral Area commencing mid-February?

### **10 mins      Closing Prayer**

Every person called, is a sign of Jesus: in some way His/our heart and hands continue to embrace the little ones, to cure the sick, to reconcile sinners and to allow Himself/ourself to be nailed to the cross for love of all.

Being for others, with the heart of Christ, is the mature face of every vocation.

Leader:            Lord, we come before you today to ask you to help us to be more generous.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader:            ...so we may fully appreciate all your many gifts to us.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader:            ...so we may give without counting the cost.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader:            ...so we may share without expecting something in return.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader:            ...so we may know the joy that comes from helping others.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader:            ...so we may share all that you have given us.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader:            ...so we may hold all our treasures in an open hand.

**ALL:                Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader: ...so we may recognize the many blessings in each new day.

**ALL: Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader: ...so we may learn the difference between what we need and what we want.

**ALL: Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader: ...so we may ever thank you and serve you.

**ALL: Gracious God, give us generous hearts...**

Leader: Lord, we ask all of this, knowing that you will always give us all that we need. Bless the work we do for you today and always.

**ALL: Amen**

### **Final Session**

**Session 6 – Mass – Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010 – Holy Trinity Church Crookham**

## Session 1 – Gratitude

Participants were invited to reflect on the positive things that God has given us and to practice calling these to mind and recording them in prayer diaries. We were also invited to lay straw in the small crib.

- **What do the words “thankful” and “gratitude” mean to me?**
- **How am I going to let the Word of Christ find a home with me this Christmas?**

To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything He has given us -- and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him. Gratitude therefore takes nothing for granted, is never unresponsive, is constantly awakening to new wonder and to praise of the goodness of God. **For the grateful person knows that God is good, not by hearsay but by experience. And that is what makes all the difference.**

*(Thomas Merton: On Gratitude)*

- **How I am I going to allow the coming of Jesus this Christmas to change my attitude to gratitude?**

If we can go to sleep at night having thought of five things we could be thankful for during that day, however trivial, we will wake up the next day more positive in outlook and more able to face the new day.

*(Tom Ryan, Comfort My People, quoted in ‘The Tablet’ 20.09.08 p21)*

## **Session 2 – Intimacy**

In this session we were invited to go deeper into our individual and personal relationship with the baby Jesus. It was a chance to explore one's calling and one's gifts and talents. It was an opportunity for more reflection time and silence.

### **The Magnificat**

**.... a portrait, so to speak, of Mary's soul — entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God.**

**Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.**

*Deus Caritas Est - Encyclical Letter, Benedict XVI*

- **How I am I going to allow the Word of God to make His home in my heart?**
- **How can we as Christians follow Mary's example of abandonment to the will of God?**
- **Mary merely enquires how this will happen; she does not doubt it will. How do I discern the will of God in my life?**
- **How does Mary's response to her call, change the way I think about my own gifts and calling? Am I waiting on the Lord's will or moving in my own strength and discernment?**

We all have our own unique talents and all of us can offer something, no matter how small. Once you acknowledge the basic premise that everything comes from God, then the next logical step is to ask, "What can I give back?"

*Written by a parishioner in Basingstoke.*

We spent some time inviting the Holy Spirit to be with us individually and to help us recognise that we too are called and that each one of us is gifted. We then invited the Holy Spirit to help us to discern our gifts and talents.

Pope John Paul II said that we need the 'ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and prize it as a gift from God: not only as a gift for the brother or sister who has received it directly, but also as a "gift for me"'.

- **What is the Lord calling you to and with what gifts is He blessing you?**
- **In what ways do you think He is calling you to offer these gifts for the service of others – your brothers and sister or the wider community?**

## Session 3 – Fellowship

The emphasis of this session was on exploring our place as disciples within our church community; that we have both right and the obligation to place our gifts at the discernment and use of that community, as mature disciples.

... Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, "What do you want?" They answered, "Rabbi", which means Teacher, "where do you live?" He replied, "Come and see"; so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him that day.

- In order to understand Jesus, the disciples had to "Come and See" and spend time with him. How much time do I spend in the company of Jesus?
- God calls his disciples by name. What does it mean to me to be personally called by Jesus Christ?

Group sharing

- What / who supports me as I try to live as a follower of Jesus Christ?
- How can I be more generous in sharing myself with others?
- How can I generate a clear and strong sense of community belonging with others?
- Do I count Jesus as my friend?

We silently contemplated a way in which we may share Jesus with others this Christmas.

What came out of this?

- Where and with whom am I most generous?
- In which parts of my life do I need to pray for the grace to be more generous?

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (Jas 2:15-17)

It is indeed an exacting discipline to try to be the Church in a culture such as ours. All the assumptions upon which we could rely, which we could take for granted in other times and places, are missing. It is therefore necessary to demonstrate, in the face of cultural scepticism, what a community of loyal and committed believers is really like. (Robert N. Bellah)

## **Session 4 – Time**

In this session we reflected on how we use the gift of time, culminating in discerning our own personal resolution to offer up to Jesus this Christmas, symbolically placed in the same group crib.

- **What and who do you make time for?**
- **Do you feel in a particular season in this time of your life?**

A true understanding of stewardship begins with taking care of and sharing the gift of time. Stewardship of time involves the realisation that none of us 'owns' time. Each of us is given only so much of it, and planning a careful schedule in order to have the time to work, to rest, to play, and to pray is vital in the stewardship of our physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual lives. In a busy society like ours, time is one of the most precious possessions we have. How we spend our time is perhaps the clearest indication of our progress in a life of Christian discipleship.  
*(Stewardship: A Disciple's Response p66)*

We can't really put our finger on time, but what we can point out is that time is a gift from God and ought to be received as such, honoured as such. Time is perhaps our greatest gift on earth, the measure of a life. ... We tend to find time for our priorities. But we don't always have our priorities straight.  
*(Colleen cSmith, Catholic Stewardship: Sharing Our Gifts, Our Sunday Visitor, 2001, pp18, 21)*

Time is the possibility of participating in a covenant relationship with God; taking part in the eternal dance of the Trinity. Through the gracious gift of time we are able to experience God's presence.

- **How can we make more time for God?**
- **How does Mary's response to her call, change the way I think about my own gifts and calling? Am I waiting on the Lord's will or moving in my own strength and discernment?**
- **Am I happy with the way I spend my time?**
- **In what ways can my time be organised in order to demonstrate my commitment to the priorities and relationships to which God calls me at this time of my life?**

**Every morning you are handed 24 golden hours. They are one of the few things in this world that you get free of charge. If you had all the money in the world, you couldn't buy an extra hour. What will you do with this priceless treasure?**