

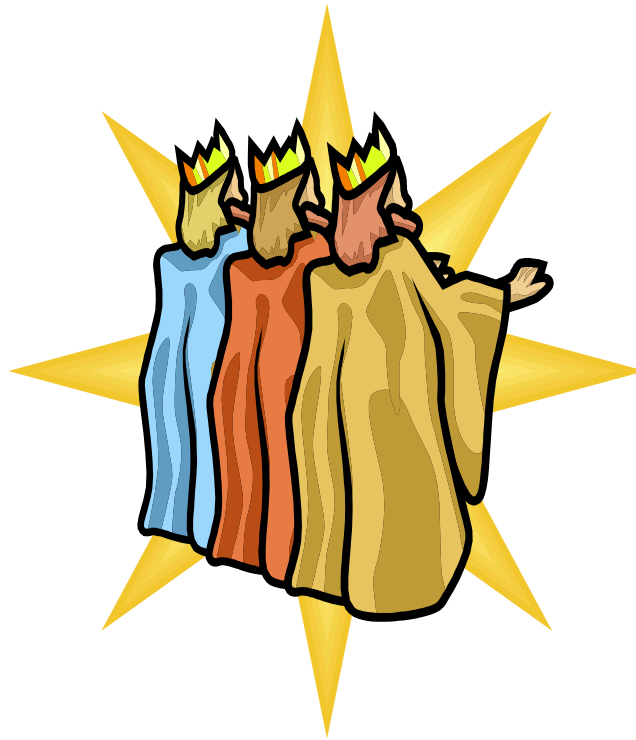
# NORTH EAST HAMPSHIRE PASTORAL AREA

## ADVENT HOME GROUPS 2009

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O Lord that lends me life,  
lend me a heart replete with thankfulness!

(William Shakespeare)



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### SESSION 1

### GRATITUDE

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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 I CAN I GIVE HIM: GIVE MY HEART

From In the Bleak Midwinter by Rosetti & Holst

## **SESSION 1 – GRATITUDE**

Resources: Notebook and pen for each participant

Crib and Straw (Can be provided by the house group coordinating team)

Words for an Advent Hymn

10 Mins – Sing Advent Hymns or listen to Audio and short time of reflection as the crib is placed on a table.

Welcome

- Ground rules Confidentiality and respect through listening
- Purpose of sessions – to grow in daily discipleship, allowing us to offer up our hearts to Jesus at Christmas

The leader invites people to introduce themselves and perhaps to share expectations for these sessions – whilst others listen respectfully.

10 Mins - Prayer

**As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together in one body. Always be thankful.**

**Let the Word of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God; and whatever you say or do, let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus, in thanksgiving to God the Father through him.**

(Colossians 3: 12-17)

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

Individual Reflection:

- What do the words “thankful” and “gratitude” mean to me?
- What difference does it make to say thank you? Are our expectations for Christmas balanced with our gratitude?

- How am I going to let the Word of Christ find a home with me this Christmas?
- If I had to name one thing I am grateful for at the moment, what would it be?

5 Mins

Three people to read the following passages aloud with a few minutes of silence in between each one.

**If the only prayer you say in your entire life is ‘thank you’, that is enough.**  
(Meister Eckhardt)

**Gratitude is the foundation for authentic Christian living. When we acknowledge God as the source of all life – of all that we have and all that we are, the most natural and appropriate response is to give thanks. This fundamental orientation or disposition of thankfulness colours everything in our lives. It opens us up to the goodness of all God’s creation, and to the gift of other persons in our midst. It helps us appreciate in new ways the gift of life itself and all the blessings that we have received.**

**When we are grateful, we don’t lose sight of the pain and suffering in human life. We don’t deny, or attempt to conceal, the sorrows and frustrations of daily living, and the enormous suffering in the wider world. We do not turn our backs on the hurts and injustices that must be faced as we live in a broken and sinful world. But being grateful does allow us to see the challenges of life from the perspective of God’s gift constantly being offered, even and especially amidst pain and suffering, grief and anxiety.**

(Cardinal Roger Mahoney, For This You Were Called: Be Thankful – Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, 2007)

**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)

30 Mins

Group Sharing

- What phrases/sentences have struck me in these passages? Why?

- What do we as Christians have to be grateful for about Christmas?
- How I am I going to allow the coming of Jesus this Christmas to change my attitude to gratitude?
- What will be the challenges this Christmas to living gratefully and how can I overcome these challenges?

15 Min

Living from a grateful heart this Christmas



**If we were to keep a diary of daily living, and record all that happens each day of our lives, we would be pleasantly surprised with all our blessings, and the results at the end of the day might even amaze us. St Paul tells us that we walk by faith, not by sight, and he reminds us to give thanks, whatever happens. ... Even on the darkest day, being aware of the blessings of our lives can be spiritually and psychologically uplifting – and at times even vital. 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)

Individual Reflection:

Looking back on today what five things am I thankful for (this could be as small as noticing the sun shining on a spider's web...)

Record these in your notebook.

*You are strongly encouraged to carry out this exercise towards the end of each day for the season of Advent and Christmastide and on an ongoing basis.*

*You may also like to use this exercise to reflect on blessings received in Christmas seasons past.*

10 Mins

Prayer

Reader

**O Divine Gift-giver,  
I stand beneath the endless waterfall  
of your abundant gifts to me.  
I thank you especially for the blessing of life,  
the most precious of all your gifts to me.  
I thank you, Ever-generous One,  
for clothing to wear,  
for food and drink to nourish my body,  
for all the talents and skills  
that you have bestowed upon me.  
I thank you for the many joys of my life,  
for family and friends,  
for work that gives to me a sense of purpose  
and invests my life with meaning.  
I thank you as well  
for the sufferings and trials of my life  
which are also gifts  
and which together with my mistakes  
are among my most important teachers.  
Grant that I may never greet a new day  
without the awareness of some gift  
for which to give you thanks.  
And may constant thanksgiving  
Be my song of perpetual praise to you.**

Time of silence

**Reader: Let us pray to our benevolent God a litany of thanks for all the blessings and goodness in our lives.**

All: *With heartfelt thanks we bless you O Lord.*

**Leader: For knowing love in our lives, for the security and joy and confidence it brings; and for the capacity to love that we are forever discovering in ourselves...**

All: *With heartfelt thanks we bless you O Lord.*

**Leader: For the knowledge of you, O God, whom we discover in so many ways throughout our lives; and for the passion for your truth that you have kindled within us...**

All: *With heartfelt thanks we bless you O Lord.*

**Leader:** For the experiences of life, those that strengthen and those that stretch us, for in all of them we are learning to see you working for the good...

All: *With heartfelt thanks we bless you O Lord*

**Leader:** For this season of Advent, for the opportunity to appreciate how much more blessed we are by your gifts to us than any material gift...

All: *With heartfelt thanks we bless you O Lord*

(adapted from Donal Harrington and Julie Kavanagh, Prayer for Parish Groups, Columba Press, 1998)



The leader invites people to name one of the blessings in their lives as they place straw bedding in Jesus' crib, followed by the same response...

*With heartfelt thanks we bless you O Lord*  
Then end with the Glory be...

Reminder of date and time of next meeting

### **BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION:**

Try to identify things, amongst the hurley burly of season preparations, you are grateful for each day. Thank God for each of these and for helping you to see them.

How does my life reflect that I am a co-worker with God? Do I believe this?

### **Food for thought:**

As stewards, Christian disciples must embrace the fact that we are no less than God's co-workers (1 Cor 3;9). We have each been given a particular and unique share in God's work of creation, redemption and sanctification. It is our gift and our task to be grateful, responsible, generous and willing to pass on to others what we have received with increase, for the sake of the reign of God.

All too often when summoned to give generously, we are inclined to think of paying God back, or settling the score. But the one who has received the gift of God's love, given without measure or calculation, knows that we can never repay the Lord for all the good that comes our way. But that same love that gives and keeps on giving – Life for the life of the world – stirs up in us a desire to live freely and responsibly with what we have been given to us – and then pass on to others from a grateful heart the gifts we have received.

(Cardinal Roger Mahoney, For This You Were Called: Be Thankful – Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, 2007)

As with all things pertaining to the Gospel, stewardship is fundamentally the work of the Spirit in our lives. When we accept our lives as sheer gifts, the Spirit can use us as apt instruments for spreading the Gospel. Wherever the Spirit works, there is joy. Good stewards are always the joyful bearers of the Good News of Salvation.

(Cardinal Roger Mahoney, For This You Were Called: Be Thankful – Pastoral Letter on Stewardship, 2007)