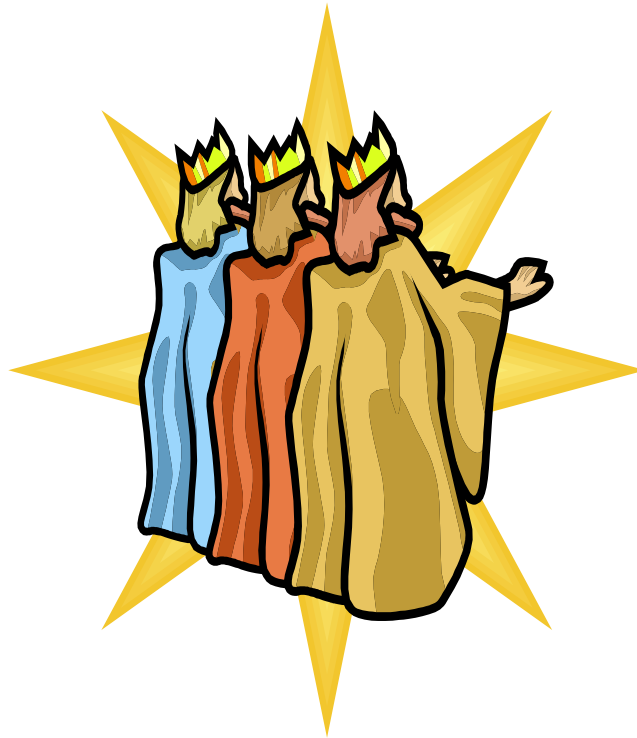


NORTH EAST HAMPSHIRE PASTORAL AREA

ADVENT HOME GROUPS 2009

WHAT I CAN I GIVE HIM: GIVE MY HEART



HOUSE GROUP LEADER'S GUIDELINES

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

Introduction

How to use this material

Having decided to take on the leadership of a House Group, you may be feeling somewhat apprehensive about doing so, especially if this is your first time.

These guidelines are offered to House Group leaders to assist in the running of such groups. They are not meant to be prescriptive, rather simple thoughts and ideas based around what has worked in previous years.

Being a House Group Leader

Being a House Group leader is a special blessing. You will be given special help, support and advice by the Pastoral Area House Group team whenever you need it, so you don't need to feel alone. And most importantly, you will be graced by God for the role you are undertaking, provided you ask God of course!

Most House Groups tend to be highly successful, because of the people God attracts into them. Remember, this is the work of the Holy Spirit in which you are engaged and offer all that you and the group do, to God.

You are simply a tool in God's hands. So don't panic or be concerned, just trust that God will accomplish His purposes and enjoy the experience.

How to lead

As leader you should seek to foster an atmosphere of openness, love, encouragement and fun.

Your members will take their cues from you. So, it's important for you to be enthusiastic about the possibilities that lie ahead for your group. They're more likely to get excited themselves.

Some groups run themselves, once they get going. Other groups take a little more facilitating – that's where you come in. With a few well prepared thoughts and ideas you will help the group members come up with thoughts they may never have considered before. This is just one way in which the Holy Spirit works.

Smile. Be enthusiastic. (Hide your nervousness.)

One thing to remember – **silence** is OK. Don't feel obliged to jump into every period of quiet. Allow God to work through the silence as God chooses. Remember you are not in charge! Some people may need a little reflective time to assimilate information or revelation before composing their thoughts and words.

Timing – should be planned but flexible within the plan. It is a good idea to develop a plan of timings for the group session, in order to give yourself and the group the best opportunity for covering all of the material and issues which surface.

Start and end the meeting with **prayer**. This is fundamental, because it places us in correct awareness of God all around us and gives God ‘permission’ to take control of the proceedings.

It is also important to pray for your group members on a regular basis throughout the whole programme. This has a two-fold outcome (if not more), one of heaping blessings on each member and one of bringing you closer to each one of them spiritually. It doesn’t need to be long prayers for each one; just holding that person before God is a delightful gift to that person.

Encourage group members to **listen** to whoever is sharing at the time. Explain that this means not interrupting the person who is speaking, and also showing an interest in what they have to say. The leader should lead by example; he/she should have good eye contact with any group member who is sharing, and then invite others to share in the discussion afterwards.

Whilst everybody’s view is valid, if the leader believes a member to be incorrect in their response to something that is being discussed or misunderstanding of the issue, they should mention this sensitively, without criticising the person: e.g. ‘I’m not sure that’s what is meant. I read it as meaning this’ Did anyone have any other interpretation? Has anyone got anything to add to that?’

Keep your ears open during your meetings. You may discover things about your members that give you a connecting point later. Even insignificant details may signal important issues in their lives.

Guide people to answer from their own personal lives and experience. Ask for specific ways they will apply the Scriptures.

Don’t allow anyone to attack or confront people in the group.

Confidentiality is crucial. You should set a few guidelines at the start of the first meeting and if necessary, remind everyone of these guidelines at each meeting. This is especially so in the area of confidentiality. Everyone needs to know that whatever they share with other group members will remain confidential and private within group members only.

What to do

Arrive at the venue early in order to set up the places, including yours. You may want to have space to lay out your bible, pen & paper and session material.

It also gives you time to talk to the hosts before other group members arrive. This may be helpful in calming any nerves or anxieties you or your host may have for the meeting.

When everyone arrives allow the host to meet and greet the members, bringing them into the meeting room. Greet each person warmly and make them feel at home. Introduce people who don’t know each other.

Give people a chance to chat to each other for a few minutes before suggesting that the group gets going.

Food and drinks distract people from the discomfort they may initially feel when they arrive for your first few meetings. Work with the host to offer a drink when they arrive; light refreshments later on in the meeting or at the end, if you and the host feel it appropriate.

If this is the first meeting, suggest that each member introduces themselves briefly. They should state their first name, a little bit about themselves (e.g. married/single/family, been in the parish/area for X years, work situation) and why they joined the group.

Start with a prayer, as mentioned above. You could either make up a spontaneous prayer or use a formal prayer such as the Our Father. We would recommend trying to use your own words in prayer to God, as this always comes over as more intimate and personal and sets a powerful example to the others around how to relate to God personally.

Better still might be the opportunity of asking somebody else to open the meeting with a spontaneous prayer of their own, but only if they feel comfortable to. Do not pressurise anybody into doing anything they don't feel comfortable with.

During the meeting the group should be encouraged to have a period of silent reflection following the reading of some material or scripture, or any questions which follow. This will give the members a chance to reflect and should avoid the same people always jumping in with their ideas.

If you find the conversation drying up at some stage, don't be too concerned. Just offer a quiet prayer to God asking Him/Her to lead and hand it over. You will find that something comes up either in your mind or someone else's, but sometimes after a period of silence. Again, as mentioned before, do not be anxious about periods of silence. God will be at work.

When time is drawing close to the end, if the group has not managed to progress through all of the suggested material, suggest that members go through the remainder during the week ahead. This allows them to keep the momentum going during the week ahead.

We would recommend a short time for prayer before ending the meeting. This time could be used for spontaneous intercessory prayers for the group members, their families, friends, community or anything else people need to pray for.

End the prayer session, after an appropriate length of time with a final 'closing' prayer, thanking God for the time spent together, the revelations which you have received and asking for God's blessing in the intervening period until the next time you meet.

Thank everyone for coming and that you look forward to seeing them again the following week. Suggest that house group members may like to pray for the group during the week, especially if someone has a specific need for prayer.

Where

The House Group meeting venue might already be determined. But if not, we would recommend meeting in someone's home. This makes the whole experience much more personal and intimate – and we know that God is a very personal, intimate God.

You could move the meeting venue each time you meet, in order to spread the blessing and practicalities of hosting the meeting.

Wherever it is held, it is always more in keeping with a warm informal atmosphere if drinks can be served, either before or after, depending on the group's wishes.

Who

Often you will have people in your House Group who have different understandings of God, church, community, prayer, scripture etc. Sometimes these differences can be significant.

It is important to remember that all views are valid and all group members should be encouraged to participate. This is an area in which the leader needs to maintain balance i.e. ensuring each person has the same opportunity to share with the group. Do not allow one or two people to dominate the discussions.

Some people may feel less able to comment, pray or participate than others. As leader, you need to encourage these people to participate as fully as possible, always being mindful of that person's right to refuse.

Summary – What makes a good house group

The Atmosphere	relaxed, warm, friendly, welcoming, purposeful
The People	feel at home, accepted, free to be themselves, unpressurised know what the purpose of the group is and feel involved
The Conversation	is open – anyone can join in. All are encouraged to contribute
Listening	is important people show interest in each other's views respect for all; no-one afraid to speak out
Disagreements	members feel able to differ without causing or taking hurt members are ready to accept and look at different viewpoints