GROWING IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

LEADER’S GUIDE
INTRODUCTION: FORMING YOUR GROUP

The formation of an ongoing group in the parish for prayer, sharing and guided reading is the desired lasting outcome of the THEOSIS weekend. Without follow-up, retreat experiences tend to be highs which remain in the memory, but do not carry over into affecting our personal Christian lives or the life of the parish. And so every effort must be taken to insure the formation and continuance of a group involving the weekend participants.

The group has chosen you as its leader, and so has placed on your shoulders a two-fold responsibility. One is to lead the meetings. This assumes that you will prepare the study material as the other members do, reading the text and doing the reflections in the participant's study guide. It also expects that you will do more to familiarize yourself as deeply as possible with the material to be discussed. The easiest way to do this is to meet with your parish priest or deacon in advance of each group meeting and discuss the content of the session. If this is not possible, at least a phone call will help. Besides the local clergy, other Theosis leaders whom you may have met, the weekend team or the Office of Educational Services would also be available to you as resource persons. With this support you will be able to prepare the meeting adequately.

In addition to preparing meetings, the function of leader carries with it another task, that of building up and supporting the members of the group. This is at least as important as conveying specific points of content, and in some circumstances may be more important. It involves developing and deepening a personal relationship with the other group members, making them feel personally essential to the functioning of the group and missed when they are absent. Your ability to form personal relationships comes into play here to a great degree. There are also some techniques which you may want to employ in the meeting to insure that people are recognized as individuals in the group.

One such technique involves conveying a sense that people's presence is important. You may wish to highlight this by placing the exact number of chairs needed by the members of your group. Those absent would be 'represented' by the empty chairs. Special prayer could be offered for the absent members during the coming week. In this way people will come to know that their presence is noticed and valued. Those whose absence is expected on a given day could be asked to pray for the group wherever they may be at the time of the meeting. Your attentiveness to such things will be noticed and help firm up the participants' sense of commitment to the group.

Another way of building up the group is connected with the way discussions are conducted. The sharing envisioned in this program will require a greater degree of openness among the participants, a greater degree of trust for one another, than a purely intellectual discussion. Each participant must be willing to contribute something
from his or her own experience to make the discussion worthwhile.

For this to happen, a sense of structure is necessary. This is why a specific dynamic is suggested, as outlined below. If the meeting becomes unstructured conversation, many will not participate, feeling that they can get conversation anywhere. On the other hand, no one should feel put on the spot or forced to try and contribute to the discussion of a given point when they really have nothing to say. Some may only be ready to listen.

In time the members will know one another well enough to feel free to express themselves and to listen deeply to one another in the course of the discussion. The main thing is that the participants should come to feel that they are helping one another and are being helped, at least to some degree, "to grow up together in Him who is the Head, Christ".

CONDUCTING THE MEETING

The meeting format, though somewhat flexible, should involve three aspects: worship, study and fellowship. The worship element will vary according to the circumstances of your meeting time or place. If you are meeting at church, a service may begin the session. Vespers, the paraclisis service or other occasional offices such as the blessing of water or the artoklasia service are well suited to begin the meeting because of their nature and also their moderate length. You may, of course, be meeting after a regular parish Liturgy, but if your gathering is on an 'off night', it would not be appropriate to request a special Divine Liturgy for your group. The Eucharist is for the entire community as a unifier and to have it for what may seem an 'exclusive' group would be counterproductive.

If your group is not meeting at church, it may not be appropriate to have even an occasional service. Check with your parish priest on this before you make plans with the group. In place of a service you may wish to begin with certain prayers from the prayerbook, such as the Trisagion Prayers, followed by the specific readings and chants suggested at the beginning of each session. Take your time with these prayers, allowing people to hear with their hearts the words that are being said.

The fellowship aspect of the group should include two dimensions. The most obvious is the atmosphere of welcome. Time should be allotted, preferably at the beginning or after the service, for refreshments and small talk. However, if fellowship stops with the coffee klatch, the group has lost its purpose. It must progress to a deeper fellowship where people can learn to share their experiences and feelings with one another and thus develop the ability to rely on one another as the Body of Christ. This is why the 'sharing' section of the meeting is so important. It enables people to bring their personal concerns forward as well as to let others know where they sense God acting in their lives. Most particularly, it is a time when people can share the results of their weekly 'contract' with the Lord and thus build one another up in their application of what they are studying in their books.

The study aspect is, of course, tied up with the material in the accompanying study guide. Participants should be instructed to follow the directions in the guide both for the reading and the reflective meditations. One quotation should be chosen each week and reflected upon each day of that week. When you meet, their home study
is to be incorporated into a wider schema including presentation and commitment. You may make the presentation yourself, or ask one of the parish clergy to do it. The commitment should be made by each person and attempts to lead the participants beyond study to action: but an action directly related to their study. This should be a highpoint in the session, one that leads beyond the meeting to everyday life.

The meeting should conclude with prayer. Two forms are suggested: the Jesus Prayer and the Akathist to our Victorious Lord Jesus. Prayer in the name of Jesus was introduced to you on the Theosis weekend as an ancient aspect of our prayer tradition. Some time of quiet (at least five minutes) should be used in praying the Jesus Prayer to allow the participants to lay aside cares and enter into the spirit of the Prayer. If you are using the akathist, one or two odes at most should be used in each meeting. One person could read it reflectively while the others listen. This seems to foster attentiveness in prayer better than having everyone read it together.

A MEETING SCHEMA

The following schema utilizes all the elements described above. This is the outline employed on the following pages as a format for each meeting. While the meeting may be open ended, an hour and a half time frame is suggested, in addition to any service that might be held. If your group prefers an open ended format, you should not feel constrained to keep to a rigid time schedule. You should, however, see that each meeting includes the three basic elements of prayer, sharing and study.

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

A certain period of time should be allotted for coming together. Informal conversation and refreshments are appropriate until the whole group has gathered.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes or longer, if no service):

A chant is useful for calling the group to order, especially a brief refrain such as a prokimenon, the trisagion or the like. The Scripture reading and a psalm or hymn appropriate to the theme of the meeting are given for each session.

C - The Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

It is helpful for the leader to outline, at least for the first few times, the format of the meeting and the topic for reflection.

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

The 'business' of the meeting begins with the participants reporting on the results of the previous meeting's contract and/or other aspects of their Christian life.

E - The Study (50 minutes), divided as follows:

1) Participants' Story, which enables participants to share their personal experiences of the topic in question.
2) Church's Story and Vision, in which we reflect on at least three of the content questions from the study guide. Here the spiritual advisor summarizes the main points of the Church's teaching on the topic discussed.

3) Participants' Vision, in which we discuss some of the personal reflection questions from the study guide and resolve to integrate one of the session's points into our personal prayer lives.

F - Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

Either the Jesus Prayer or a section of the Akathist as indicated, followed by intercessory prayer for one another's needs as you may be led.

ROLE OF THE CLERGY

Every group should be led by a lay leader, who grows through the experience to an even greater facility at leading. This does not eliminate the need for the pastor or an assistant to have a direct role in the group. The spiritual advisor's role is largely 'invisible', however, the better to promote confidence in the group that they too have something to say in expressing their faith. His principal duties are as follows:

1. Before the Session - The spiritual advisor should consider the preparation of the lay leader his direct responsibility. It is suggested that they meet together in advance of each group session to discuss the content of the book as well as ways of enhancing the upcoming session.

2. During the Session - The spiritual advisor should participate in the sharing segment of the meeting like the others. He too has a life in Christ and it the sharing of significant moments in that life which will perhaps best encourage the others to strive for a more committed Christian life themselves.

In the study segment he serves as a resource person, ready to answer questions or offer correctives if needed. He should be prepared to summarize the study material as indicated in this guide under section 2 (Church's Story and Vision) in each meeting.

3. After the Session - He should spend a few moments with the leader after the group has dispersed to discuss the way the session went and address any situations which may need attention at that time. Do not postpone this debriefing to another time as the freshness of the moment will be lost.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD YOU MEET?

The answer to this question will vary with the individual group. Some groups meet weekly, others every two weeks. The time commitments of your members will help determine this, as well as when to meet. Meetings should not be scheduled too far apart (eg. once a month), as both the continuity of the study and the depth of fellowship will suffer.
Since this study contains a larger amount of content than the two earlier programs in this series, you may wish to vary the schedule in one of the following ways. You may choose to leave each discussion open ended, without adhering to a strict cycle of meetings. In such a case you would progress solely at the group's own pace, exploring each session topic for as long as the group's interest continued. Alternatively, you may decide to move quickly through the program once, then repeat it devoting as much time as desired the second time through for those who are interested. In any case, allow the group to develop a consensus of how it wants to proceed.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR HOLDING A FRUITFUL DISCUSSION**

Before the group meets, each member should have read the assigned material and reflected on the contents. To start the discussion, one member might be asked to give a brief summary of the material and his reactions to it. After the discussion arising from this summary, the group could go on to consider any prepared discussion questions that may have been prepared.

The members of the group should be quite clear as to the purpose of the discussion - to share their insights with one another and to grow together into new insights: to help and to be helped to clarify their thinking and to widen their horizons. A good discussion is a kind of festive banquet in which ideas, rather than food, are shared. But a discussion of Christian attitudes on any subject, to be really fruitful, will require a greater degree of openness among the participants, a greater degree of trust for one another, than a purely intellectual discussion - say of politics or business - would call for. Each participant must be willing to contribute something from his own experience to make the discussion worthwhile.

The next necessity is that of not feeling in any way under pressure. No one should ever feel "put on the spot" or forced to try and contribute to the discussion of a given point when he really has nothing to say. Everyone should also feel free to digress or say something light and amusingly off-hand; there is no reason for a deadly seriousness. Naturally the tendency to digress can be dangerous and should be curbed - but primarily by the participants, not by any one person in authority. Anyone who has nothing to say should feel perfectly free to pass the topic on to the next participant easily and comfortably. Certainly no one should ever give the effect of trying to be brilliant or epigrammatic - or, for that matter, anything else.

In time the members will know one another well enough to feel free to express themselves and to offer truly creative listening, as well as verbal contributions to the progress of the discussion. The main thing is that the members come to feel that, through their discussions, they are helping one another and are being helped, at least to some degree, "to grow up together in him who is the Head - Christ".

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

This course relies heavily on a number of sources. The general framework and much of the direction of the text is drawn from the leader's guide to *Basic Christian Maturity*, developed by the Word of God Community (Servant Publications, Ann Arbor,
MI, 1975). The reflective quotes are drawn from a variety of Eastern Christian spiritual writers. The leader may wish to become familiar with some of these (especially the general introductions) to develop a background in the area.

General Introductions:

Anthony Bloom, Beginning to Pray (Paulist Press, Ramsey, NJ 1970)


Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, The Orthodox Way (SVS Press, Crestwood NY, 1979)

Patristic and Ascetic Sources:


Basil the Great, The Long Rules (Daughters of St. Paul, Boston, MA, 1950)


Gregory Palamas, The Triads (Paulist Press, New York, 1983)


John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent and To the Shepherd (Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, MA 1978)


Maximos the Confessor, Selected Writings (Paulist Press, New York, 1985)


Seraphim of Sarov, Spiritual Instructions (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, Platina CA, 1978)

Simeon the New Theologian, Chapters and Discourses (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, MI, 1982)

Various other texts quoted are taken from the following anthologies:


John Vranos, Illustrated Sayings of the Holy Fathers (St. Xenia Skete, Redding CA,
Other Sources:

Elias Chacour, Blood Brothers (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI. 1984)

Archimandrite Sophrony, Monk of Mount Athos; Wisdom from Mount Athos: the Writings of Staretz Silouan (SVS Press, Crestwood, NY, 1974, 1975)

Dumitru Staniloae, Prayer and Holiness (SLG Press, Fairacres, Oxford, 1982)
SESSION ONE: LOVING GOD

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greeting and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. "O Heavenly King" or the Troparion of the Third Hour). Have someone reflectively read Mt 13:44-46. Follow with a moment of silence and the Kondakion "For the Increase of Love" in the study guide, page 6.

If there has not been a service, augment your opening prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C - The Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Point out the three dimensions of the meeting (prayer, fellowship, study) and show how these fit necessarily into the life of a Christian.

Outline the direction the meeting will take (sharing, study and then prayer).

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Since this is the first meeting, you will need to explain what this part of the meeting is meant to be. Stress that we need to share where we see the hand of God moving in our lives to build one another up in faith. Give a personal example of how you have been edified by another's faith sharing.

Invite the participants to reflect upon and share their responses to the following questions. Note that you will use these same questions at every session as the basis of this sharing time and invite the participants to write them in the cover of their study guide. Encourage them to use them daily as a personal, end-of-day reflection guide:

"1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?

2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?"

Give the first answers from your own experience. Give everyone a chance to participate without obliging people to speak out.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1 - Participants's Story: Begin by asking the participants if they have ever had an
experience that made them love God more. Invite them to describe this experience.

Elaborate this point by asking people how the various forms of prayer (liturgical worship, the Jesus Prayer, Scripture reading, use of the prayerbook) have been helpful in committing their lives to the Lord.

Connect this exercise to the next point by noting the value of any experience for believers is greatest when it draws us to reaffirm, deepen or repair the relationship we have with God. The experiences may be good or bad in themselves (e.g., tragedy, sickness), but if they draw us closer to God, they have been of inestimable worth.

2- Church's Story & Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in the study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, page 13).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* Loving God is the first and most basic way of growing along the path to maturity in the process of theosis.
* Love is a matter of commitment to our relationship with God, rather than a question of feelings or emotions.
* This commitment of love is meant to touch every area of our lives, involving prayer, the way we use our resources, the way we make decisions, etc.
* God Himself enables us to grow in this way because His Spirit is dwelling in us.

3- Participant's Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 14). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 then return to have each person answer question 2 and so on. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have a second person answer questions 2, 3 and 4.

Be especially certain that people understand that they are to choose only one Scripture or patristic quote, either from the body of the text or the list at the end of the chapter, and reflect on it in prayer every day until the next meeting.

(Your may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F- Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

   Explain the idea of intercession for the needs of the participants, the diocese, and others about whom we may be concerned, and invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group.

   Pray a section from the Akathist to our Victorious Lord Jesus and conclude
with prayer for the intentions requested by the participants and final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

G- Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful Reading" section;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #2, "Loving One Another", as indicated in the study guide, pages 16 to 26, for the next meeting.
SESSION TWO: LOVING ONE ANOTHER

A- The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B- The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. O heavenly King or the Troparion of the Third Hour). Have someone reflectively read Lk 6:32-36, followed by a moment of silence and the Troparion "For the Increase of Love" in the study guide, page 16.

If there has not been a service, augment your Opening Prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C- Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Restate the three dimensions of the meeting (prayer, fellowship, study). Note that sharing in this meeting will focus on our application of the two questions dictated at the last session.

D- The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their responses to the two questions below in terms of the time since the last meeting. The questions are:

1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?
2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?

Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

E- The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participant's Story: Begin by inviting participants to reflect on how their involvement in a deeper Christian experience may be enabling them to love others in new ways.

   Ask what may have made them notice this reality or if others have shown that they are aware of it as well.

2- Church's Story and Vision:
Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their bible or in the commentary especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, page 23).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered namely:

* Love of others is essential to the life of theosis for by it we grow in the likeness of the Lover of mankind;
* Love for others, like love for God, is primarily a matter of commitment, not feeling;
* While we should not restrict the love expressed in almsgiving to any particular class or group, "agape" love is directed toward the brethren (fellow Christians) because of the special relationship we have with them through baptism.
* Christian love for others includes being concerned about both their spiritual and material well-being.

3- Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 23 and 24). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2, 3 and 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2, 3 and 4.

Be especially certain to discuss the suggestion to reflect daily on one of the Scriptural or patristic quotes in the guide ("For Prayerful Reading"). Ask people whether they acted on this suggestion and encourage them to continue during the days ahead.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F- Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'parish of the day' among them.

Spend five minutes in quiet reflection with the Jesus Prayer. Conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord".

G- Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful Reading" section;
SESSION THREE: GROWING IN FAITH

A- The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B- The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (e.g., "O Heavenly King" or the psalm in the study guide). Have someone reflectively read Col 2:6-7. Follow with a moment of silence and the troparion for the Sunday of the Genealogy in the study guide, page 27.

If there has not been a service, augment your Opening Prayer with the Trisagion Prayers and/or other prayers from the prayerbook.

C- The Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Restate the three dynamics of the meeting and point out that the sharing session will focus on your reflections on the questions dictated in the first session and the study will be on session three in the study guide.

D- The sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their responses to the following questions which had been dictated the first session:

1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?

2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?

Begin by giving the first answers yourself.

If time permits, introduce the following question: "Have I fulfilled my responsibilities to the Lord without complaining?"

E- The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by asking the participants to reflect on how the Lord may have worked to increase their faith at one or another time in their lives. Point out
that, despite what we may have thought as a child, faith is not something we receive full blown. We can expect to grow in it as our Christian life grows.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in the study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, pages 36 and 37).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* Our growth in the life of theosis depends on the deepening of our faith, our love, and our participation in the holy mysteries as one single process;
* True faith is not simply mental assent to certain propositions, but action upon what is believed;
* Christian faith, then, is the process of personally trusting God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present among us and within us;
* Faith as trust involves accepting that theosis is a reality, that God is present to us in every circumstance of life, and that God wants to lead us to greater maturity in Him.

3. Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 37 and 38). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 – 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 – 4.

Be especially certain that everyone has understood the sense of the "For Prayerful Reading" section on page 38 and, as far as possible, is able to integrate it into their regular prayer life.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F- Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'Parish of the Day' among them.

Pray a section from the Akathist to Our Victorious Lord Jesus and conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by the participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the Name of the Lord".

G- Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful
Reading" section;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #4, "Following the Spirit's Lead", as indicated in the study guide, pages 39-52, for next time.
SESSION FOUR: FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT'S LEAD

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

    Spent a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

    Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. "O Heavenly King"). Have someone reflectively read Jn 14:16-17, 26-27 aloud.

If there has not been a service, augment your opening prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C - Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

    Recall that so far you have looked at Christian growth as involving the deepening of our love for God and others as well as the increase of our personal faith or trust in the God whom we profess in the Creed. Today we will reflect on some particular ways of determining what steps are appropriate for us at any particular stage in our spiritual life.

    Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on the questions dictated in previous meetings and that the study section will look at Session Four, pages 39 to 52 in the study guide.

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

    Invite the participants to share their responses to the following questions:

    1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer.
    2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?
    3. Have I fulfilled my responsibilities to the Lord without complaining?

    Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body. Support and encourage participation, but at the same time see that the sharing is focused on God's presence and activity in our lives.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by inviting the participants to reflect on any problems they have, or have had, in knowing God's will for them and how they handled them.

    Connect this section with the next by noting that, while there are no recipes for instantly learning God's will for our lives, the Tradition does suggest several steps which can lead us to greater awareness of where the Lord might be directing us.
2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in the study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, pages 49 and 50).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* The Holy Spirit dwells both in the Church and in each believer as our "Paraclete" (guide);
* The Spirit provides general direction through the forms of Tradition, especially the Scriptures;
* The Spirit provides the believer with more specific guidance through the help of a spiritual guide (elder), confessor, or group of supportive fellow Christians;
* An individual is usually manifested as a spiritual guide by his or her lifestyle, gift of insight or discernment, love for others, and reliance on the Spirit's working in the Tradition.

3 - Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 50 and 51). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 to 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 to 4.

Be especially certain that everyone understands the concept expressed in the "For Prayerful Reading" section and encourage them to incorporate it into their personal prayer life.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F - Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'parish of the day' among them.

Spend five minutes in quiet reflection with the Jesus Prayer. Conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord".

G - Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:
1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful Reading" section;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; anu
3. Assign study #5, "Spiritual Warfare and the World", pages 53 to 66 in the study guide, for the next meeting.

SESSION FIVE: SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND THE WORLD

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. "O Heavenly King"). Have someone reflectively read Col 3:1-5.

If there has not been a service, augment your opening prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C - Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Restate the development of themes in the book: growth in love of God and others, growth in faith with the help of spiritual guidance.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on the questions we have been using since the first session and that the study will cover Session Five, pages 53 to 66 in their study guides.

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their responses to the following questions as given earlier in the series:

1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?
2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?
3. Have I fulfilled my responsibilities to the Lord without complaining?

Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by inviting participants to reflect on how they see the world affecting them as they live their Christian life.

Connect this section with the next by noting that, once we step out of the environment of the Church, our viewpoints are more often provided by the culture.
around us rather than by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Today's session will try to put that in perspective.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their bible or study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, page 63).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* Our progress in theosis is often challenged by the assaults of the enemy (spiritual warfare);
* The world (a secularized value system) is one of the chief arenas in which this warfare is waged;
* The challenges of the world include both antireligious values and the restriction of religion to a minor place in people's lives;
* Christians are called to transform the world into a new environment ("interiorized monasticism") rather than yield to it or flee from it.

3. Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 64). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2, 3 and 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 to 4.

Be especially certain that everyone understands the "For Prayerful Reading" section and can incorporate its message in their personal prayer life.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F. Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'parish of the day' among them.

Pray a section from the Akathist to our Victorious Lord Jesus and conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by the participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord".

G. Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful Reading" section;
2. Set the date, time and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #5, "Spiritual Warfare and the Flesh", pages 67 to 80 in the study guide, for the next meeting.
SENNION SIX: SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND THE FLESH

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. "O Heavenly King" or a psalm refrain). Have someone prayerfully read Rom 7: 14-25.

If there has not been a service, augment your opening prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C - The Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Summarize the main lines of the studies so far: growing in theosis includes deepening our love for God and one another as well as our faith with the help of the Spirit's guidance. This growth is often challenged, however, by the enemy who wages war against us using the values of a secular worldview. Today we will see another arena of our spiritual combat: the flesh.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on the same questions we have been examining in earlier sessions and the study on Session Six, pages 67 to 80 in the study guide.

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their responses to the following questions:

1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?
2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?
3. Have I fulfilled my responsibilities to the Lord without complaining?

Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by asking the participants to compare St. Paul's evaluation of man's inner turmoil in the above reading with their own experience. Does Paul's description reflect their experience? Does knowing what we ought to do guarantee that we will do it? How effective is the Law in our own lives?

Connect this section with the next by noting that the Scripture sees some of the forces of evil as external to us, but others as working within us. This is what we call
"the flesh".

2. **Church's Story and Vision:** Begin by asking people if **any of the things they underlined** in the study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, page 78).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* In speaking of "the flesh" the Tradition is referring to the totality of our human nature which has been marred by the effects of sin.
* The Fathers used the term "the passions" to designate those manifestations of our flesh, whether of the body or the soul, which witness to this brokenness within us.
* Just as we are to transform the world rather than flee from it, so too we are called to redirect our passions rather than suppress them.
* Christian asceticism consists in relying on the power of God in us to discern the movements of the passions, and then undertaking specific actions to redirect them.

3. **Participants' Vision:** Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 79). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 then return to question 2 and then to questions 3 and 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have a second person answer question 2 and a third answer questions 3 and 4.

Be especially certain that everyone understands the prayer commitment in the "For Prayerful Reading" section and is able to see it in light of their regular prayer life.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F - **Communal Prayer** (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'parish of the day' among them.

Spend five minutes in quiet reflection with the Jesus Prayer. Conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord".

G - **Closing Moments:**

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful
2. Set the time, date, and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #7, "Spiritual Warfare and the Devil", pages 81 to 93 in the study guide, for the next meeting.
SESSION SEVEN: SPIRITUAL WARFARE AND THE DEVIL

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. "O Heavenly King"). Have someone reflectively read Heb 2:14-15

If there has not been a service, augment your opening prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C - Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Restate the development of themes in the book: growth in love of God and others, growth in faith with the help of spiritual guidance; spiritual warfare in the world and in the flesh.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on the questions we have been using since the first session and that the study will cover Session Seven, pages 81 to 93 in their study guides.

D' - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their responses to the following questions as given earlier in the series:

1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?
2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?
3. Have I fulfilled my responsibilities to the Lord without complaining?

Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by inviting participants to reflect on experiences or areas in their life where evil spirits may have been at work. Did you sense demonic activity as it was happening or by reflection in the light of what you have been reading?

Connect this section with the next by noting that the fact that we may never have made such a connection in our own experience may be an example of the text's
assertion that Christians today do not take the demonic seriously.

2. **Church's Story and Vision:** Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, page 91).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* According to Christ's word, satan and evil spirits are spiritual beings, created good by God, but completely fallen and seeking our ruin as well;
* The ultimate power of satan has been made void in Christ, yet this spirit continues to assault humanity;
* Satan's work is to weaken us through slander (e.g., causing us to condemn ourselves, be plagued with irrational fears, become insensitive to the reality of sin or presume on our salvation) or delusion (e.g., encouraging self-righteousness, distorting the meaning of religious practices, leading us to trust in false powers);
* We combat satan by reaffirming our relationship with God and discerning the overt workings of evil spirits through the ministry of a spiritual guide.

3 - **Participants' Vision:** Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 92). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2, 3 and 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 to 4.

Be especially certain that everyone understands the "For Prayerful Reading" section and can incorporate its message in their personal prayer life.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

**F - Communal Prayer** (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'parish of the day' among them.

Pray a section from the Akathist to our Victorious Lord Jesus and conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by the participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord".

**G - Closing Moments:**

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer
commitment suggested in the "For Prayerful Reading" section;
2. Set the date, time and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #8, "Dealing with Wrongdoing", pages 94 to 107 in the study guide, for the next meeting.

SESSION EIGHT: DEALING WITH WRONGDOING

A - The Gathering (10 minutes):

Spend a few minutes in greetings and small talk. Refreshments can be made available.

B - The Opening Prayer (3 minutes plus):

Call the group to order and begin with an opening chant (eg. "O Heavenly King" or a psalm refrain). Have someone prayerfully read 1 Jn 1:6-10.

If there has not been a service, augment your opening prayer with prayers from the prayerbook.

C - The Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Summarize the main lines of the studies so far: growing in theosis includes deepening our love for God and one another as well as our faith with the help of the Spirit's guidance. This growth is often challenged, however, by the enemy who wages war against us using the values of a secular worldview, our inner brokenness, the flesh, and the direct action of evil spirits.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on the same questions we have been examining in earlier sessions and the study on Session Eight, pages 94 to 107 in the study guide.

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their responses to the following questions:

1. Have I come before the Lord faithfully in personal prayer?
2. Have I discerned the Lord's presence working in my life?
3. Have I fulfilled my responsibilities to the Lord without complaining?

Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by asking the participants to reflect on any experiences they have had in trying to repair wrongdoing and set relationships in order. Were there any difficult situations involving wrongdoing that you did not know how to set right?
Connect this section with the next by noting that while every such situation is unique, still the Tradition offers guidelines for righting wrongs, a process we will discuss today.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in the study guide especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the four content questions was the most difficult to answer and why. Discuss each of the ones they propose, making sure they understand the Church's teaching on the subject. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, page 105).

This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* The forces of evil in the world, the flesh, and the demonic may lead us into wrongdoing. Righting such wrongs demands both reconciliation and repentance;
* Reconciliation involves looking backward to acknowledge the wrongdoing, ask forgiveness both of God and those we had wronged, and do whatever is necessary to make up for the wrong we have done;
* Repentance involves looking ahead to renounce that tendency to wrongdoing, changing whatever behavior may be necessary, and seeking healing of our tendencies to wrongdoing.

3. Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 105). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 then return to question 2 and then to questions 3 and 4. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have a second person answer question 2 and a third answer questions 3 and 4.

Be especially certain that everyone understands the prayer commitment in the "For Prayerful Reading" section and is able to see it in light of their regular prayer life.

(You may wish to call a break here and have refills on your refreshments.)

F - Communal Prayer (10 minutes):

Invite the participants to share their prayer intentions with the group. Be sure to include your parish and the Society of Publicans' 'parish of the day' among them.

Spend five minutes in quiet reflection with the Jesus Prayer. Conclude with prayer for the intentions requested by participants and a final chant, such as "Blessed be the name of the Lord".

G - Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment commitment sugested in the "For Prayerful
Reading" section;
2. Discuss the form your Evaluation Meeting should take (see the options mentioned in the next section);
3. Set the time, date, and place for that meeting; and
3. Ask everyone to reflect on the evaluation questions on pages 108 and 109 of their study guides for sharing at the next meeting.
SESSION NINE: EVALUATION

The last gathering in this series should afford an opportunity for participants to share their feelings about the previous eight meetings and to share in a festive closure to the series. It should also present them with options for the next course in the series and enable them to decide if and when they wish to proceed with it. The format for this meeting will vary slightly from the other eight, as indicated in the steps below.

A - The Gathering (30 minutes):

If you customarily begin with a service, consider deferring it to the end of the meeting so that it will climax the entire gathering. As you come together now, you may wish to enhance your fellowship time with special extra refreshments, music, etc. to reinforce the group's joy in one another.

B - The Opening Prayer (10 minutes):

Call the group to order and begin with the following prayers (page numbers refer to "A Book for Prayer", Newton MA, Sophia Press, 1984):

* The Trisagion Prayers (pages 15-17)
* Prayers before the icons of Christ and the Theotokos (pages 58, 59)
* Phil 1: 3-11 (you may wish to follow this reading with your personal appreciation of the series)
* The Prayer of Intercession (page 33).

C - The Statement of Purpose (2 minutes):

Explain the differences in the format of this meeting.

D - The Sharing of Our Life in Christ (15 minutes):

Invite the participants to share what they did since the last meeting in terms of the same questions you have been using in the earlier sessions. Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

When these questions have been adequately dealt with, you may invite sharing on other ways people may have found God touching their lives since the last meeting.

E - The Evaluation (30 minutes):

Conduct a sharing on the first three evaluation questions in the workbook. Be sure that each person has an opportunity to be heard. To do this it is best to have a rather strict go-round for this sharing, with everyone speaking in turn. As each speaks, you should take notes of any significant observations they may make, both for further discussion and also to help you in leading further meetings. After each has spoken, you can take comments on the more significant observations made during the sharing and
discuss each in greater detail.

Conclude by thanking everyone for their participation.

F  Presentation (15 minutes):

Before discussing the last evaluation question, present the following information concerning the next course in the series:

In the first series we examined the concept of theosis which was introduced to us on the weekend. The next series studied the Epistle to the Ephesians, introducing us to St. Paul's description of theosis as living "in the heavenly realm". The last series expanded upon several of the themes in Ephesians (relationships, service in the community, spiritual warfare) in the light of other aspects of our Tradition such as the lives and writings of the Eastern saints as well as the Scriptures.

These three courses gave us a good overview of the principal elements in the spiritual life. During this time we may have become interested in one or another aspect of the spiritual journey. We would like to consider your interests in planning the next course. This is the purpose of the last question in the evaluation page. If you wish to make a commitment to the next unit in this program (question four), please also indicate which of the topics listed in question five would most interest you. The format of the meetings will be basically the same as in the previous courses.

Conclude by discussing future participation on the part of the group. If they seem interested in going on with the next segment, set a time, date and place for the next meeting with sufficient interval to get the materials needed and distribute them to the participants.

(You may wish to call a break at this time and have refills on your refreshments.)

G  Communal Prayer (30 minutes):

Even if you have not been doing so, you should include a liturgical service in the format of this meeting. An artoklasia service might be especially appropriate, affording the opportunity as it does of sharing in the blessed foods. Consult with your parish clergy on this topic.

If your group has made a commitment to continue meeting, you may wish to include the idea of this commitment in the service by including special petitions asking God's blessing on the group and by ending with the exchange of the holy kiss by the participants.

SPECIAL NOTE

At this point in your group's development, you will want to tailor the studies in a more individual way. This is why several topics are proposed and a number of resources are available on various readership levels for the next courses. Once the group has expressed its preference, contact the Office of Educational Services to determine the appropriate resources for your group.