Partakers
of
Divine Nature

Theosis Group
Leader’s Guide

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Partakers of Divine Nature

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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, following your text, Partakers of Divine Nature, as outlined 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 the 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 merely 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, as session four of this series points out, 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 text and the accompanying workbook. Participants should be instructed to follow the directions of their Study Guide when reading Partakers. 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 the 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. A Scripture reading, 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 workbook. Here the spiritual advisor summarizes the main points of the Church's teaching as found in the study text.

3) Participants' Vision, in which we discuss some of the personal reflection questions from the workbook and 'contract' with ourselves to apply one of these points to our personal lives in a specific way.

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 (e.g. once a month), as both the continuity of the study and the depth of fellowship will suffer.

**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

Further readings on the subject of theosis may help you to clarify questions which arise in your group. There are articles on the subject in any creditable survey of Eastern Christian spirituality. The following books are somewhat more concentrated in their treatment of the theme. You may wish to study them with the help of your group’s spiritual advisor.

On Theosis:


On the Holy Mysteries:


On Prayer:

Session One: Our Call to Theosis

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 a psalm-refrain). Choose one or both of the following readings connected with the lesson theme:

Gal 4: 4-7  
Psalm 8

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 share if and how the Theosis Weekend has affected their life. Give the first example from your own experience. Stress that this discussion is not meant to be an evaluation of how the weekend was organized, etc. but on what it meant for the participants' personal spiritual lives. 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 know any optimists or pessimists and to describe their attitudes. Make sure everyone understands the difference. Note that these stances reflect a particular worldview (eg that everything is basically good or lousy).

Elaborate on this point by asking people to identify the worldview behind popular sayings such as "Today is the first day of the rest of your life", "You can't win for losing", "I love mankind: its people I can’t stand" or any others you might choose.

Connect this exercise to next point by pointing out that, as individuals have their own personal worldviews, so does the Church: the idea of Theosis which we are going to be discussing.

2. Church’s Story & Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their book especially struck them and why.

When all who wish have answered, ask which of the five 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 4 and 5).
This section should conclude by you or the group’s spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* The human condition in the original creation;
* Loss of the likeness at the fall;
* The incarnation in God’s plan to restore the likeness;
* Where we stand today in the process of *theosis*.

3. Participant's Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (Study Guide, pages 5 and 6). 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 question 2 and 3.

Be especially certain that everyone has made a specific commitment in terms of question 4 so that they have something to work on during the week or two ahead.

Conclude the entire study section with your own personal witness as to what commitment you have decided to make and asking people’s prayers for your success. This will help set a tone for future sharing of this aspect.

(You 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 the 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 term of the concrete steps they have contracted to take before the next meeting;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #2, Baptism, ("The Service of Birth in God"; pages 43 to 48), for the next meeting.
Session Two: Baptism

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 *All of you who have been baptized*). Choose one or both of the following readings connected with the lesson theme:

    Rom 6:3-11  Eph 2:1-10

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 Session One’s reflection question #4 and the study on Session Two.

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

Invite the participants to share what they did since the last meeting to help themselves believe deeply that they are called to *theosis* and realize that others are made in the image of God. Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

When this question has been adequately dealt with, you may invite sharing on other ways people may have found God touching their lives since the last meeting. Note: often people want to share anything and this time becomes ‘show and tell’ ("I found this beautiful poem", etc.). This can be turned to good by asking why the person is impressed by this item, this experience. In that way they are encouraged to share of their own inner selves, not just a neat bible verse or holy card.

E - The Study (50 minutes):

1. Participant’s Story: Begin by inviting participants to reflect on their experiences of baptism over the years, and describe the most meaningful celebration of this mystery in which they had participated.

   Ask how they may have noticed the Church’s practice in celebrating this mystery change in the past few years (e.g., more public celebration, often at the Liturgy; preparatory instructions; three mysteries of initiation together again).

   Note that these heightenings of the celebration point to our renewed understanding the baptism is our new birth unto eternal life, not just a Christian ‘duty’.

2. Church’s Story and Vision:

   Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their book 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 7 and 8).

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

* Baptism is our new birth, bringing us into the process of theosis;
* Being divinized, we are freed from the ultimate power of sin and death;
* Our sharing in the divine life is communal: we are one with all others who are in the Lord.

3. Participants’ Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (Study Guide, pages 8 and 9). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 and 3. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 and 3. Be especially certain that everyone has made a specific commitment in terms of question 4 so that they have something to work on during the week or two ahead. Ask the group to support one another in prayer for a fruitful working out of their commitment. If some members have no clear idea, make that a subject for prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten them as to what God’s will for them in this area could be.

(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 concrete steps they have contracted to take before the next meeting;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #3, Repentance (The Gate of Grace, pages 49 to 56) for the next meeting.
Session Three: Repentance

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)*. Choose one or both of the following readings connected with the lesson theme:

Mt 5:21-24 Psalm 32 ("Happy is he...")

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 application of the fourth reflection question on baptism *(workbook, page 9)* and the study will be on session three, repentance.

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

Invite the participants to share their experiences in implementing some aspect of the ‘new style of living’ we are called to in baptism. Begin by giving the first example yourself.

Allow other sharings if time permits, but try to see that they are on ways in which people have sensed (or found it hard to sense) the Lord’s presence in their lives.

E - The Study *(50 minutes)*:

1. Participants’ Story: Begin by asking the participants to recall times when they may have been hurt by others or hurt others in turn. Did anyone seek forgiveness of the other? Why or why not? How would you describe your feelings about the seeking of forgiveness?

Does the same attitude apply to asking the forgiveness of God in the mystery of confession? Are our feelings on repentance or confession generally negative of positive?

Connect this section with the next by noting that often we look at repentance negatively because we see it as a negative: ‘giving up’ something, when actually it is a positive: coming deeper into the life of Christ.

2. Church’s Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their book 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 10 and 11)*.

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

* Repentance or conversion is the conscious beginning of the Christian life: a kind of ‘second baptism’.
* Repentance is the continuing process of 'reorienting' our life Godward.
* The Church's climactic experience of repentance is the mystery of confession.

3. Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (Study Guide, pages 11 and 12). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 and 3. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 and 3.

   Be especially certain that everyone has made a specific commitment in terms of question 4 so that they have something to work on during the week or two ahead. Discuss ways in which people can keep their commitment in mind (note on the refrigerator, dresser mirror, etc.). Ask the group to support one another in prayer for a fruitful working out of their commitment.

   (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 the 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 have a clear and concrete action which they have contracted to take before the next meeting;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #4, ("Enflamed and Divinized, pages 56-66) for next time.
Session Four: The Eucharist

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 or a psalm-refrain). Choose one or both of the following readings connected with the lesson theme:

1 Cor 11:23-30
Jn 6:52-58

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 baptism as the beginning of theosis and repentance as the second impetus to this life. Today you will reflect on the Eucharist as our chief nourishment for this journey.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on our application of Session Three’s reflection question #4 and that the study section will look at Session Four.

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 asking forgiveness. Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body. Note that asking forgiveness should not be an isolated act, but part of a renewed commitment to deepening a relationship with the person involved.

When this question has been adequately dealt with, you may invite sharing on other ways people may have found God touching their lives since the last meeting. 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 their experience of the Divine Liturgy over the years: what has it meant to you; what factors in your life encouraged or discouraged regular participation? How much has your belief in the Eucharist influenced your church attendance?

Connect this section with the next by showing how your appreciation and perception of the Eucharist has grown over the years. Use this to point out the many levels of meaning and depth in this mystery which is given to us as nourishment in our Christian life.

2. Church’s Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their book 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 13 and 14).
This section should conclude by you or the group’s spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* The Eucharist is a concrete realization of our union with God in Christ as well as with the members of His Body;
* The Eucharist is a reliving of the incarnation: Christ coming among us to unite us to Himself;
* The Eucharist draws together those who partake in the one loaf and the one cup and make of them one Body.

3 - Participants’ Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (Study Guide, pages 14 and 15). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 and 3. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 and 3.

Be especially certain that everyone has made a specific commitment in terms of question 4 so that they have something to work on during the week or two ahead. Ask the group to support one another in prayer for a fruitful working out of their commitment.

(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 concrete steps they have contracted to take before the next meeting;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #5, Prayer ("The Divinizing Virtue", pages 66 to 79), for the next meeting.
Session Five: Prayer

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). Choose one or both of the following readings connected with the lesson theme:

Mt 6: 5-13  
1 Thess 5: 16-17

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: the mysteries and today's topic, prayer, are seen as elements of the process of *theosis* taking place in us.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on our application of Session Four's reflection question #4 and that the study will cover Session Five.

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

Invite the participants to share what they did since the last meeting to 'intentionally' join themselves to their fellow-communicants. Give the first witness yourself and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

When this question has 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 Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by inviting participants to reflect on their experience of prayer over the years, with questions such as:

   What are some memorable experiences (positive or negative) involving prayer or instruction about prayer in your life? What styles of prayer are you most/least comfortable with? Why? How has your application of prayer changed over the years?

   Connect this section with the next by noting that, just as we can learn better ways of communicating with others, we can and indeed are called to grow in our prayer life.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their book 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 16 and 17).

   This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:
* The Christian life of prayer is meant to include both specific times of prayer and also 'continual' prayer;

* Our formal prayer is meant to grow from petition to praise, moving from our own needs to recognition of the glory of God;

* Our continual prayer (often associated with the Jesus Prayer) is meant to lead us to hesychia or quietness of spirit, which comes from the continual recognition of the presence of God.

3 - Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (Study Guide, pages 17 and 18). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 and 3. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 and 3.

Be especially certain that everyone has made a specific commitment in terms of question 4 so that they have something to work on during the week or two ahead. Ask the group to support one another in prayer for a fruitful working out of their commitment.

(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 the 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 have a specific and concrete action which they have contracted to take before the next meeting;
2. Set the date, time and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #6, Love (pages 79 to 95), for the next meeting.
Session Six: Love

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). Choose one or both of the following readings connected with the lesson theme:

1 Jn 4: 7-12        Psalm 23 ("The Lord is my shepherd...")

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: we are called to theosis as a way of life. This begins with baptism, becomes conscious in repentance, is nourished in prayer and the Eucharist. Today we see its fruit: love.

Note that the sharing in this meeting will focus on our application of Session Five's reflection question #4 and the study on Session Six.

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

Invite the participants to share what they did since the last meeting to deepen their own prayer life. Give the first witness yourself, and encourage others to do the same for the building up of the Body.

When this question has 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 Study (50 minutes):

1. Participants' Story: Begin by noting that in our services we often refer to Christ as "the Lover of mankind". Invite the participants to share how they may have experienced the love of God in their lives.

Note that as the Body of Christ, the Lover of mankind, the Church is meant to be first and foremost a community of love. What is the most dynamic expression of love you have experienced in the Church? What would it take to make this parish a visible community of love?

Connect this section with the next by noting that love is at the heart of the process of theosis, because the God who calls us to theosis is Love, calling us out of love.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their book 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 19 and 20).
This section should conclude by you or the group's spiritual advisor summarizing the main points in the section being covered, namely:

* All things begin in God's limitless love: our creation and redemption and all that has ever been or will be.
* If there be any selfless love in us, it is the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work within us;
* Love of neighbor is the sign which reveals whether a person has true love for God;
* The closer our relationship to God, the more we are moved to reach out in love to others.

3. Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (Study Guide, pages 20 and 21). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 then return to question 2 and then to question 3. 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 question 3.

Be especially certain that everyone has made a specific commitment in terms of question 4 so that they have something to work on during the week or two ahead. Ask the group to support one another in prayer for a fruitful working out of their commitment.

(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 concrete steps they have contracted to take before the next meeting;
2. Discuss the form you Evaluation Meeting should take (see the options mentioned in the next section);
3. Set the time, date and place for that meeting; and
4. Ask everyone to reflect on the evaluation questions on page 22 of their workbooks for sharing at the next meeting.
Session Seven: Evaluation

The last gathering in this series should afford an opportunity for participants to share their feelings about the previous six meetings and to share in a festive closure to the series. It should also present them with a taste of the next segment 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 six, as indicated in the steps below.

Note: You will need copies of the Study Guide for the Epistle to the Ephesians for examination and possible distribution during this meeting.

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

When this question has 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 Study Guide. 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 last series we have examined the concept of theosis which was introduced to us on the weekend. There are a number of images in the Scriptures which express the same concept in other ways. The next series introduces us to one of these.*

*The next series is a Bible study of the Epistle to the Ephesians, one of the most beautiful of St. Paul’s writings. Like all epistles, it begins with a teaching section which speaks about theosis as "a place in the heavens". It goes on to talk about how this should affect our relationships in the Church and in family life as well as introduce us to the idea of spiritual warfare.*

*Our text is, of course, the epistle itself. We have a Study Guide to guide us in our reading as we did in this series so that we can come to the sharing with some appreciation of the text already.*

*The format of the meetings will be basically the same, with this exception. During the meeting we will try to share with you some aspects of our own Byzantine tradition which express liturgically the points St. Paul is making in the epistle.*

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, distribute copies of the Study Guide, explain its use and assign the first section.

(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.