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 Epistle and 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 read one of the Scriptural commentaries indicated in the bibliography and 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, as session three 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 study guide. Participants should be instructed to follow the directions in the guide when reading the Epistle. 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.

Which translation of the Epistle should you use? There are a considerable number of versions available. Some, such as the New American Bible, the Jerusalem Bible or the Revised Standard Version, aim for both accuracy and intelligibility. Others, such as the Today's English Version (Good News for Modern Man) take more liberties with the original in the interest of popular appeal. Still others, like the Living Bible or the Amplified Bible are paraphrases or adaptations rather than translations. A good method to follow would be to have everyone use the same translation if possible (preferably one of the first group mentioned) with other versions available for comparison. In that way you have both a common text and the opportunity for comparing that text with others.

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 and liturgical questions from the study guide. Here the spiritual advisor summarizes the main points of the Church's teaching as found in the epistle.

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
freseness 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.

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 this Epistle may help you to clarify
questions which arise in your group. You can find good introductory articles to each Scriptural book in any good edition of the bible. The following books are somewhat more concentrated in their treatment. You may wish to study them with the help of your group's spiritual advisor.

On Prayerful Reading of Scripture:

George Martin, *Reading Scripture as the Word of God* (Ann Arbor MI, Servant Press, 1975)

Modern Commentaries:


Patristic Commentaries:

SESSION ONE: THE GLORIFICATION OF CHRIST

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). Have someone reflectively read the first chapter of Ephesians aloud.

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 received
letters of support or encouragement from a teacher, guide or significant friend or written such a letter themselves. Invite them to describe how such a letter was received.

Elaborate this point by asking people how they might feel if they received such a letter thanking God for them when you knew that, like the Ephesians, you were not living up to God's call for you.

Connect this exercise to next point by pointing out that this epistle is thought to have been just such a letter, written by Paul when he was in prison to one of the Churches for which he was responsible. The Ephesian Church was having difficult times relating their day-to-day life with the doctrines they professed as Christians. This is clearly not a new phenomenon.

2- Church's Story & Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their bible or in the study guide 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 or liturgical questions as well (study guide, pages 13-15).

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

* God has brought us to new life through the saving work of Christ (vv. 3-8);
* His purpose is to bring all things together in a new creation in Christ (vv. 9-12);
* Our share in the Holy Spirit is the pledge or token of this fulness of life which we await (vv. 13-14);
* He seeks to work in us just as He is working in the cosmos (vv. 18-23).

3- Participant's Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 15 and 16). 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 to identify Paul's prayer as indicated in the "Resolve" section. Ask people whether they acted on this suggestion and encourage them to continue during the days ahead.

(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 term of the prayer commitment 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, "The Glorification of Human Nature with Christ", as indicated in the study guide, pages 17 to 23, for the next meeting.
SESSION TWO: THE GLORIFICATION OF HUMAN NATURE WITH CHRIST

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 Troparion of the Third Hour). Have someone reflectively read chapters two and three of Ephesians aloud.

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 when they first became conscious of the truth of God's giftedness to them. Alternatively, people may reflect on the most recent time that this truth broke into their consciousness.

   Ask what may have made them notice this reality: what caused this awareness, and to reflect on why, if this truth was present throughout their lives, this way the first time they became aware of it.
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, pages 20 and 21).

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

* This new life in Christ was given to us without our earning it in any way (vv. 1-10);
* In this new creation both Jews and Gentiles are brought together in a new building, with Christ as the only cornerstone (vv. 11-22);
* Proclaiming this mystery of God's plan of recapitulation is Paul's specific ministry in the Church (Eph 3: 1-13).

3- Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 21, 22). 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 identify Paul's prayer as indicated in the "Resolve" section. 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 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, "The Unity of the Church in Church in Christ" as indicated in the study guide, pages 24 to 32, for the next meeting.
SESSION THREE: THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN CHRIST

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 psalm in the study guide). Have someone reflectively read Eph 4: 1-16.

   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 groups they have belonged to in their lives. Ask to which of them they felt the closest and why. Then ask whether they see such closeness as desirable and/or possible within the parish community, in the light of what this session's readings said about the unity of the Spirit.
Discuss what might be needed to realize a deeper sense of oneness in the parish family and whether the participants see the amount of work needed as justified in the light of the reading.

Connect this section with the next by noting that Paul sees this maintainance of the unity in the Spirit as one of the local Church's principal tasks, the first area of relationships to be discussed when applying the doctrine of the heavenly realm to our daily life.

2. **Church's Story and Vision:** Begin by asking people if **any of the things they underlined** in their bible or 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. Repeat the same process with the liturgical questions. If there is time, discuss any of the other content questions as well (study guide, pages 29 to 31).

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

* A Christian's behavior toward others is meant to be a reflection of the special calling (adoption, theosis) they have received (v. 1 ff);
* Working to maintain unity in the Church is the first great way of responding to that calling (vv. 2-6);
* We insure that unity by respecting the diversity of gifts which the Spirit has given and by taking up the gifts we ourselves have received. This helps the Church mature into a working Body (vv. 7-16).

3. **Participants' Vision:** Conduct a sharing of the five personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 31 and 32). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 – 5. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 – 5.

Be especially certain that everyone has understood the sense of the "Resolve" section on page 32 and, as far has possbile, 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".

15
G - Closing Moments:

Before anyone leaves, you should:

1. Be sure all participants understand the terms of the prayer commitment they have agreed to make until the next meeting.
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
SESSION FOUR: THE CALL TO PUT ON THE NEW NATURE

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 (e.g. "O Heavenly King" and/or the apostichon in the study guide, page 33). Have someone reflectively read Eph 4:17 - 5:21 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 the Christian life as being drawn into the heavenly realm in Christ and at the way we maintain the unity of the Church as the chief way we live out that calling. Today we will reflect on some particular ways of relating that will help us to maintain unity.

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 33 to 39 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 which, if any, of the following figures St. Paul reminds you of in this section:

* the disciplinarian in a Catholic boys' school;
* the coach in a locker room before the big game;
a police officer in a TV comedy;
a marine sargeant in boot camp;
a homeroom teacher;
a school principal on opening day;
a Dutch uncle.

Connect this section with the next by noting that morality for many people is a question of one of these figures "watching over" them. But the vision of St. Paul is very different: of course we act in a certain way because we are holy as the Holy Spirit dwells in us.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their bible or 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 (workbook, pages 37 and 38).

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

* The believer's way of life must be different from that of the unbelieving society which surrounds us (vv. 17-24);
* These differences must be evident by the respect we have for one another as shown in all our ways of relating (conversation, sexuality, justice, forgiveness, etc. - vv. 4:25 to 5:14);
* The believer's way of relating is rather to be one that builds one another up in the faith (vv. 15 to 20).

3 - Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the five personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 38 and 39). If there is time, have each person answer question 1 in turn, then start over with questions 2 to 5. Another method would be to have one person answer question 1 and invite comments, then have different people answer questions 2 to 5.

Be especially certain that everyone understands the concept expressed in the "Resolve" 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 "resolve" section;
2. Set the time, date and place of the next meeting; and
3. Assign study #5, "The New Nature in Family Life", pages 40 to 49 in the study guide, for the next meeting.
SESSION FIVE: THE NEW NATURE IN FAMILY LIFE

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, page 40). Have someone reflectively read Eph 5:21 - 6:4.

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 glorification of Christ and of us with Him which is the reason why Christians should expect to have a lifestyle different from those around them.

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 40 to 49 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 their experience of marriage over the years, with questions such as:

   What is the best marriage you have ever seen? What made it so good?

   What TV program portrays family life like it is in your family?
Connect this section with the next by noting that people's visions of marriage are often provided by the culture around us rather than by the Word of God. 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, pages 46 and 47).

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

* The chief principle of Christian marriage is mutual deference (vv. 20-33);
* This is lived out in an ordered relationship (same verses);
* Christian children should be raised the Lord's way, with positive formation and negative restraints (v 6:4).

3 - Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, pages 47 to 49). 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 "Response" 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 have a specific and concrete prayer resolve 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, "Spiritual Warfare", pages 50 to 61 in the study guide, for the next meeting.
SESSION SIX: SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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 Eph 6: 10-24.

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 live in the heavenly realm with and in Christ. Thus our way of life should reflect this holy calling, particularly in terms of our relationships in the Church and in our family life. Today we will look at the final section on how this affects our "relationship" with satan.

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 50 to 61 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 noting that in Paul's day the occult was quite popular. People trusted in sorcery, omens and the like. Does Paul laugh off the demonic or does he take it seriously? What about us today?

Connect this section with the next by noting that the Scripture sees the forces of evil as very real and calls on us to do the same.

2. Church's Story and Vision: Begin by asking people if any of the things they underlined in their bible or 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 58 and 59).

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

* We are engaged in a spiritual warfare against the powers of this age (vv. 10-12);
* Our "armor" in this struggle is righteous living and trust in God (vv. 13-17);
* Relating to the indwelling Spirit is what makes this stance possible (v. 18).

3. Participants' Vision: Conduct a sharing of the four personal reflection questions (study guide, page 60). 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 "Resolve" 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 "Resolve" 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
4. Ask everyone to reflect on the evaluation questions on page 62 of their study guides 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 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 six, as indicated in the steps below.

Note: You will need copies of the workbook for "Building Christian Maturity" 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 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".

In the epistle St. Paul discussed theosis from a doctrinal standpoint (chapters
one to three) and then applied it to specific areas of life: our relationships in the
Church, in the home, and in the spiritual warfare we are engaged in. The next series
expands upon several of these themes (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.

Our study guide will be the text for this series. Besides its own comments, it
will include selections from the Church Fathers for our reflection as well as suggest
various Scripture readings to use in conjunction with the workbook. We should do the
assigned readings and answer the study guide questions 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 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, distribute copies of the workbook, 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.