

Encountering

JESUS

How People Come to Faith
and Discover Discipleship

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A Study Guide prepared by
the adult education task Group
of the Christian Formation Council
of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland

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Dear Diocesan Friends,

The Rev. Joe Russell, retired educator in the Diocese of Ohio, used to say we need to tell the Gospel story as if we believe it is Good News! But to tell the story with the passion he implies, means we need to first know the story by heart and make it integral to how we live our lives. Many people in the church today are biblically illiterate, or have an understanding of scripture that was last nurtured in their youth. This leaves us woefully unprepared to witness to the Good News. You can't proclaim that which you do not know. Yet we are in a world that is in desperate need of hearing the good news. If we do not live our Story and tell it with integrity, the Word will not be easily heard, let alone be transformative. Just teaching the Bible to our children in Sunday School is not sufficient.

The Adult Education Task Group of the Christian Formation Council (CFC) of our diocese believes that scripture study must become more central to our educational ministry. In that spirit, we recommend the book Encountering Jesus to you this Lent, and have prepared a basic study guide to help you use it. We do this in an effort to bring the study of scripture to a more central place in the life of our churches and the diocese.

Each congregation can borrow one copy of the book and one hard copy of the study guide from the diocesan Resource Center. The study guide will also be posted on the CFC portion of the web site. Additional copies of the book, and optional supplemental material, can be ordered through our bookstore, St. Bede's. We urge you to use at least part of the book and guide this Lent, or sometime later in the year.

Imagine what might happen if everyone in the diocese studied the same book and scripture passages. We could have a great conversation! We have contacted the author and hope to have him join us to lead two retreats on the book (one each in the east and west areas of the diocese). It will be a chance to gather and share our experiences and learn more about the theme of discipleship. Perhaps we will also set up a web address so we can at share experiences electronically! Won't you will join us in this adventure?

Faithfully,
The Adult Education Task Group

The Rev. Ann Copp
Nancy Hagner
The Rev. Joel Hill
The Rev. Eleanor Holland
Menalcus Lankford
Martha Montgomery
Patricia Robinson
The Rev. Lee Anne Tolzeman

Kay Barnes, Sherry McCall Ross and Klara Tammany

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY GUIDE FOR ENCOUNTERING JESUS

The book Encountering Jesus is a wonderful collection of short reflections on 17 stories of Jesus. Each story has something to do with a person's life being changed by an encounter with Jesus. The author attempts to glean from each story, things we might learn about being a disciple. Based in solid biblical and theological scholarship, it is accessible and fresh in its approach.

This study guide was compiled by the Adult Education Task Group, of the diocesan Christian Formation Council (CFC). Several members each volunteered to take 2 or 3 chapters and prepared the outlines you find here. As a result, you will find some flexibility in style and approach. We trust this will add a richness that will encourage creative use of the book. Keep in mind that what is contained in each 1-2 page outline, is offered only to help you get started. Each section offers some combination of an opening and closing prayer, a psalm and/or song, some conversation starters, and ideas for reflection at home. A few chapters also suggest resources for those who might want to "Read More About It."

Here are some basic things to keep in mind:

Keep group size to no more than 10-12 people. You can of course have multiple groups meeting in a church. If so, you might gather all participants together for prayer, or perhaps meet before hand for a light meal together.

Arrange for one or two facilitators for each group that meets. The job of a facilitator is to convene the group (start and end on time), keep conversations on track, and prepare the space in which the group will meet. Try to make the gathering a conversational, cooperative learning experience. Facilitators do not take the role of teacher or lecturer. Strive to meet the different learning styles of participants.

The facilitator should be sure to create a safe and hospitable and sacred space for groups to meet. Here are some ways to do that:

- Arrive early to shape the space. Arrange chairs. A circular setting is best for an experience of conversation.
- Create space that invites the sacred. Provide a visual focus, perhaps a Bible and lit candle in the center or front of the group. And place an image or icon of Jesus there, or perhaps a different Christ image each session, some of which are intercultural or modern images (see the resource Inviting Word.) Some of the chapter guides suggest objects to use, specific to the content of the chapter, and a list of more options is attached at the end.
- Decide on ways to incorporate some ritual in each gathering, for example, you might ring a bell to begin and end prayer times, or stand in a circle for prayer. Light a candle as you begin each session and extinguish it at the closing prayer.
- Welcome each person as they arrive. Perhaps provide coffee/tea and a simple snack.
- At the first gathering, be sure to have a conversation around norms for the group (privacy, shared discussion, expectations for attendance and reading etc.) and post them. The norms should be briefly noted at the beginning of each gathering.

If you need some help with facilitation skills, contact Klara Tammany. She can assist you with some basic information, training and resources.

Here are some general questions for each chapter that you can use in addition to the chapter specific ones found in the study guide:

- With whom do you identify most in the scripture story? Why?
- What word or phrase jumped out at you in the scripture story or the author's reflections?
- What is the gospel story calling you to be or do?
- Do you have a new thought or awareness from reading the story and reflection?
- What was affirmed for you by the chapter?
- How are you being challenged?

At each gathering, proclaim the pertinent Gospel story. Do try to proclaim it (not just read it) in creative ways that involve the participants and their imaginations. Some suggestions are given in the study guide. If you have a storyteller in your midst, arrange for them to tell some of the stories. Following are some resources to help you with this. First, it is helpful to use a variety of biblical translations. We recommend at least the following:

- The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- The New Jerusalem Bible
- The Message
- The Contemporary English Version (CEV)

There are two sources for dramatized versions of scripture:

- The Dramatised Bible (Marshall Pickering Bible Society, England. Harper Collins, 1989). This is an expensive but worthwhile resource. Every part of the Bible that can be, is offered in dialogue format. Call St. Bede's to get it.
- A CD Rom from Church Publishing called "Sharing Biblical Dialogues" lectionary readings for groups using the Common Lectionary and Book of Common Prayer.

If you want to delve more deeply into the chapters, we recommend these books that you might on hand, all of which can be obtained from St. Bede's:

- Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching from John Knox Press (one volume for each book of the Bible).
- Doubleday Pocket Bible Guide by Linda Grenz (Doubleday, 1997)
- The "Books of the Bible" series from Forward Movement Publications (one for each book of the Bible).
- The Bible from Scratch: The New Testament for Beginners by Donald Griggs (Westminster John Knox, 2003)
- Imaging the Word 3 volumes, covering the 3 cycles of the common lectionary. From United Church Press. The best source for poetry and art, matched to the lectionary.
- Story Journey by Tom Boomershine (Abingdon Press, 1988)
- Rabbi Jesus by Stephen D. Jones ((Peake Road, 1997).
- Sensing God: Reading Scripture With All Our Senses by Roger Ferlo (a Cowley Publication Cloister Book, 2002)
- Two volumes of "The New Church's Teaching Series: Engaging the Word by Michael Johnston and Opening the Word by Roger Ferlo (Cowley Publications)

Also helpful is, One To Watch, One to Pray: A Devotional Guide to the Gospels by Minka Sprague (Morehouse Barlow, 1987). This useful little book is unfortunately out of print, but a photocopy is available through the Resource Center.

Again, remember that what we provide here is only offered to grease your wheel. You can fill in the blanks and feel free to adapt, change or add to the process and questions as best fits your community. Take note of your ideas. Then, please tell us if you use Encountering Jesus and our study guide. Let us know how your group does. Feel free to suggest other resources for study. We would like to improve this guide, and perhaps compile others. Your input would be much appreciated. And be sure to contact us know if you would like to help us on future projects.

You can send your comments to Kay Barnes in the Diocesan Resource Center, resource@ang-md.org.