



The Episcopal Tradition

with

Frank Wade

Facilitator's Guide

Tips for Leading Small Groups

Welcome

A Blessed Ministry

So you've been asked to lead the group...

Thank you for taking on the role of facilitator for this course. We hope this class will help you and your small group in your journey of faith. Your role as a small group leader is very important – but it's also something you don't do alone. You have the blessing and privilege of working alongside the Holy Spirit to help people grow. This is not to be underestimated. You will find that the Spirit wants us to draw near to God more than we do – and in taking on the responsibility to lead, you open yourself up to growth as well, often in unexpected ways.

And you don't have to be an expert. It doesn't take an advanced degree or an ordination certificate to run a successful small group. Willingness to lead and learn is all that's required.

We at ChurchNext are delighted to share this Facilitator's Guide with you; we've designed it for clergy and laypeople. We've written it to help familiarize you with the topic and to give you some ideas as to how you would like your small group to gather.

In the pages that follow we will offer you some pointers regarding group facilitation and conversation-starting. Feel free to make them your own. These are suggestions and are meant to be molded, adapted, or tossed out, depending on your context.

Thanks for learning with us,

The ChurchNext Team

Facilitating

Begin your meeting by welcoming participants. Try to create an environment of warmth and hospitality. Successful small groups offer safe spaces for authenticity and depth, where people are not uncomfortable exploring personal convictions and intimate ideas. After all, we all long for genuine connection and camaraderie in our spiritual journeys. The entire group benefits when honesty and candor are welcome.

You may want to approach your meeting by dividing your time together into three equal or unequal segments. The first should be spent connecting – greeting, catching up. You may want to offer refreshments. The second segment should be devoted to covering the material in the course, and the third should include a time of prayer.

Lead the class as a sojourner, not an expert. Facilitators lead by example. So when you are open, enthusiastic, and interested in learning, your group will join you.

A typical meeting outline may include: Welcoming, Music, Prayer, Course Material and Discussion, Closing Prayer. We've included some prayers at the end of this guide.

Depending on the topic, your learning goals, and the comfort level of your group, you may want to make the following materials available:

- Copies of the Participant Guides
- Bibles
- Prayer Books
- Paper or notebooks
- Pens or pencils
- Prayers
- Song sheets, Hymnals, music, and music player
- Refreshments

Asking Questions

Perhaps the most important role a facilitator plays is in posing questions and facilitating conversations. Here are some tips:

The key role in leading your small group is to help members engage in meaningful dialogue with one another. It will allow them to uncover deeper truths for themselves and others.

You can use a variety of questions to spark discussion (we've included some at the end of this guide), but we can't encourage you enough to come up with your own. Open-ended questions are best, but yes/no questions followed up with a simple "Why" can yield great reflection. Questions can be categorized like this:

Launching Questions – These are designed to get the discussion going by focusing on the topic. Launching Questions should allow everyone in the group to share personal experiences and connect them with the topic, i.e., *What one thing was the instructor trying to get across? Name an experience that came to mind as you heard the lecture.*

Observation Questions – These are questions which arise from consideration of the subject – how, why, and what do you think? They seek to make meaning of the lesson, i.e., *Why do you think this point is important? What did the lecturer mean by raising that point?*

Reflection Questions – These are transition questions that take us from the information presented to our own lives, i.e., *What does this have to do with me? How does the lecturer's main point resonate with me?*

Application Questions – These are questions that ask us to consider the course material in light of our day-to-day lives, i.e., *What is this new material asking of me? In what ways is my life changed because of what I'm learning?*

The Episcopal Tradition

Religion begins with the capacity to wonder and we are the only creatures who wonder. We are the only ones who can raise questions of meaning. When we wonder, what we find is something reaching back. Wonder meeting revelation is the origin of all religion – and of our church.

The first moment of our history is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. We are a part of the Judeo-Christian tradition and begin with the story of Abraham. We incorporate the creation stories of Scripture, Moses, and the Law. We are Christians and our church has been shaped by a number of people meaning we do not have just one founder. When the Protestant Reformation took place in England, the Church of England was born out of that movement. Henry the VIII did not start the church but was the political umbrella under which it was formed. He was not interested in the Protestant Reformation, but he needed the support of the church. The Church of England is a part of English History, taking part in the production of the King James version of the Bible. We are particularly informed by the growth of the Book of Common Prayer. We followed the British Empire and as the British Empire expanded, our English church expanded around the world. As it contracted, it left behind indigenous local churches who are a part of the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church in the United States began when the United States broke from England and the Church of England. We are still connected with the Church of England and the Anglican Communion.

What Episcopalians Believe - Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the revelation of God. We are a mainline Christian church; therefore on a basic level, what Christians believe, we believe. The Creeds give us shape and formation. We are a sacramental church: Eucharist and Baptism are moments where we find great power and connectivity with God and experience God in a new way.

One of the things that makes us unique is the use of Scripture, Tradition, and Reason as a baseline for our belief. This distinguishes us from other denominations that focused mainly on Sola Scriptura or by scripture alone. Scripture is important and is where we began, and we believe that our Tradition and our Reason play a part. In Tradition we look to our wider community that has taught us, 'our spiritual ancestors,' who inform who we are as a church. Reason makes us players in theology - our understanding, and our learning in science, psychology, archeology, etc. all play a part in our thinking and belief. Our Ecclesiology, or what we believe about the church, is that it holds us up, guides us, and informs us. We believe in the church's role to empower and enable a Christian life.

Because the Episcopal Church encourages people to make responsible decisions inside the Christian framework, we have a lot of diversity. We think that truth is a big thing, that each of us have but a piece of the truth, and that the greater truth emerges when we put those truths together. Given that, we try to create harmony out of differences that we have. We have a lot of diversity in the Anglican Communion and that produces a lot of tension sometimes. The church is an instrument by which we know God and serve God. It is where our wonder and God's revelation come together. Sometimes it is difficult to understand that we value differences because we are a liturgical church and we conform in worship. We take all of our diversity and bring it before God at the altar.

The Episcopal Church continues to work as a place where wonder and revelation come together because it uses scripture, tradition, and challenges our reason. We are a community of faith and we believe that the community holds us together. By ourselves, we begin to worship ourselves and God begins to become our highest creation instead of the other way around. In community, we hear things that are formative and challenging that we don't find anywhere else. God doesn't need the church; we need the church – a place where wonder can be brought into God's revelation and grace.

Discussion Questions

Lesson One: Episcopal Origins

Since we are a part of a faith tradition that begins with the story of Abraham, we are tied to other faith traditions that also begin with the story of Abraham, such as Judaism and Islam. How does this tie strengthen your faith? How might it challenge your faith? Our host, Frank Wade said, “religion begins with the capacity to wonder.” What do you wonder about God?

Lesson Two: What Episcopalians Believe

In the Episcopal Church, we do not tell you what to believe, but give you a foundation to guide and inform your faith and decisions. How might that be life-giving? How might that be difficult? Reflect on how you might have used Scripture, Tradition, and Reason to inform a decision you have made or need to make. Each Sunday in the Episcopal Church, we say the Nicene Creed as a gathered community. The Creed invites us to say what we believe as a community. What part of the Creed is important to you? What part is challenging?

Lesson Three: Episcopal Diversity

In what ways has the Episcopal Church created or found harmony within discord? How do scripture, tradition, and reason both cause and remedy this? Dr. Wade says that church is merely an instrument through which we know and serve God. How is this true in your experience? Dr. Wade argues that if you are going to value diversity, you are also going to experience discord. How is this true in the secular world, and how is it different or the same within the Church?

Lesson Four: Why I'm an Episcopalian

Is your church a place where wonder and revelation meet? How so? How do you feel when someone claims that she does not need to go to church to worship God? Consider this quote: “You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor demand it.” What does it mean to you?

Prayers

Finally, you will find that opening and closing your time together in prayer is an effective way of inviting the Holy Spirit into your midst, as well as building connection and an atmosphere of openness. While spontaneous prayers are often the most touching and effective, written prayers offer a richness of their own. Here are some from *The Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church:

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; and then use us, we pray, as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. (For Self-Dedication, pg 832)

O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (For the Human Family, pg 815)

O God, by whom the meek are guided in judgment, and light rises up in darkness for the godly: Grant us, in all our doubts and uncertainties, the grace to ask what you would have us to do, that the Spirit of wisdom may save us from all false choices, and that in your light we may see light, and in your straight path may not stumble; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (For Guidance, pg 832)

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength: By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (For Quiet Confidence, pg 832)

O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in your mercy, grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen. (In the Evening, pg 833)