



*Doing theology:  
DVDs for parish study*

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*Some suggestions for facilitators*

The School of Ministry's production of parish study resources on DVDs represents an effort on our part to stimulate conversation among adult groups in our congregations about various biblical, theological and ecclesiological subjects. As noted in the cover sheet of the "DVDs for Parish Study" notebook provided each congregation, these DVDs are not meant to be definitive on a particular topic. Rather they provide an opportunity for us to hear the voices of others in our diocese (and sometimes elsewhere) as they reflect on the subject, and then to encourage conversations within your group. Our premise is that each of us has some understanding of our faith that the rest of us need to hear, and that each of us needs to hear the voices of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Faithful and respectful discourse is essential as we grow in faith.

Here are some general comments about facilitating our DVD studies:

***DVD on Christian formation:*** In the DVD notebook that each congregation has there is a DVD on "Reflections on Christian Formation." This is not a study resource; rather it contains some thoughts that facilitators and others with adult educational responsibilities in our congregations may find helpful. First there is a brief reflection by the Rt. Rev. Michael Curry, Bishop of North Carolina; then, the Rev. Dr. Leon Spencer, Dean of the School of Ministry, speaks of various approaches to adult education and of the participatory model of Christian education that the School seeks to advance; and finally, Dr. Jane Vella, author of *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*, describes dialogue education and its application to our DVDs.

***Flexibility:*** There are brief facilitation guides for each of our DVD series. While we hope that that guidance will prove helpful to you, we intend for our resources to be flexible and adaptable to your particular needs and wishes. When it seems wise to you to depart from the structure and format we have recommended, you should do so. If you wish to discuss your plans with us, feel free to contact the School.

***Number of sessions:*** Most of our DVDs consist of several programs, and we envision that each will be a separate session. You need not follow that pattern, however. Some of you may wish to show a program, discuss it, and consider it "done," but others may wish to expand the series, watching a DVD on a particular topic one Sunday, do some readings for the following Sunday, and then return to the next program... or you may wish to select only particular programs of interest to you. Our aim was for our DVDs to be adaptable to a variety of needs and wishes, so there is likely to be more flexibility in your arrangements here than there can arguably be with the School's written parish resources.

Whatever your decisions, you should view all programs in advance and decide how you wish to schedule this study.

**Facilitation:** We consider you to be the facilitator of the group, not its leader. Serving as a facilitator can be tricky, often because members of the group perceive you as the leader who has the answers rather than as a peer who is ensuring a good focused conversation among all members. Despite the challenges of this role, it can still be a very satisfying ministry of service to your congregation, and there's no reason you cannot enjoy the task. Just keep in mind that a successful group is one in which there is broad participation (watch for those who don't say much, and try to encourage them to be a part), and one in which the discussion retains its focus (gently bring folk back to the subject when needed). A successful group is not necessarily one that has or seeks consensus; it is one instead that permits members to share their insights of God at work in their lives as those insights relate to the subject at hand. Your leadership will keep the focus; your respect will set the tone for a meaningful encounter among the children of God.

There is considerable literature on the art of facilitation. The School of Ministry has posted a comment on "The Art of Facilitation" on our website ([www.episdioncschool.org/](http://www.episdioncschool.org/)). There is also a copy of it in the facilitation section of the "Resources for Doing Theology in Parishes" notebooks provided each congregation in the Diocese of North Carolina.

**Equipment:** Our DVDs should perform well on a DVD player connected to a television, or on a laptop connected to a projector. Whatever equipment you are using, be sure to familiarize yourself with it prior to the showing.

**Room arrangement:** Given that your group is viewing a DVD, seating arrangements obviously need to ensure that each member of the group can see it! Beyond that, we generally recommend chairs in a semi-circle where possible. Especially since you are the facilitator, not a lecturer, room arrangement makes a lot of difference as to whether you end up with an open discussion or a give-and-take between you and the rest of the group. You want members talking to each other, not to you, and a circle helps to create that phenomenon.

**The DVD format:** Each DVD first shows a list of the various programs available. You may then choose the program you wish to show, which will bring you to a screen listing the sections of that program. Normally you will want simply to "play all." If, however, you wish to examine only one portion, or to return to a particular portion later, you may do so. The program screen also allows you to choose questions for discussion – usually we provide only two – and place them, one at a time, on the screen. Note, however, that there are certainly other questions that might be raised, and you should feel no burden to use these.

**Outline for the sessions:** Here is what each session might look like:

- ❑ *Prayer:* We encourage you to open and close all sessions in prayer. One you might wish to use is adapted from *Good News: A Congregational Resource for Reconciliation*, by the Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston. It is as follows:

### *An Opening Prayer*

*O God, we stand on the border to your Kingdom. We pray that your Holy Spirit will be with us to guide us in our discussions. Grant us an openness to hear you in the words of those around us, and courage to proclaim you in our own words, through the love of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

- ❑ *The plan for the session:* Let the group know what's ahead.
- ❑ *The DVD:* Show the program or segment you have chosen.
- ❑ *Conversations:* As noted above, both the DVDs and facilitators' guides for particular DVDs will contain some questions for reflection and conversation. Use what seems to be most appropriate for you, or don't use them at all! Consider opening with a question to the group about what, from their own experience, particularly interested them, spoke to them, puzzled them... whatever. Your task then, as facilitator, would be to focus the energy of the group into a productive direction, acknowledging varied responses but choosing which way you feel the conversation should go. Or, you might note particular quotes from the DVD when you first view the DVD in preparation for the group, then share a quote with the group and ask them what they think? "Was that helpful?" "Do you agree?" And so on. There is no single "right" way to handle these discussions, and we encourage you to be open and flexible as the conversation evolves.
- ❑ *Summary:* You need not summarize the discussion at the end, but it's good to somehow tie the conversation together, commending the group for their contribution, and suggesting that the group has engaged in faithful reflection together.
- ❑ *Reminder of the program for the next session.*
- ❑ *Prayer:* We encourage you to close all sessions in prayer. One you might wish to use is also adapted from *Good News* by Bishop Charleston. It is as follows:

### *A Closing Prayer*

*Dear God, thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit in this conversation. We ask that the Spirit will go with us as we leave this place to be your ministers. Give us grace to be healers of what hurts us and heralds of what makes us whole. In the blessed name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.*

- ❑ *Evaluation:* An evaluation form is included as part of the facilitators' guide for each series. Please photocopy the evaluation and, at the conclusion of the study, encourage participants to complete it. You may find it beneficial to review the comments yourself. We would be grateful if you would share the results with us as well.

*Blessings to you.*