NOOMA Advent Study, Year C

Small Group Planning Guide

Meeting Overview

A description of each of the components of a weekly meeting.

Before the Meeting

Meeting Preview

A brief message, which can be emailed before your weekly meeting, introduces the theme for the upcoming meeting. This encourages members to prepare for the meeting by reviewing the upcoming Sunday readings and background information.

Just For You

Each session begins with a memory verse and the biblical concept for the week.

> *Memory Verse*
>
> Memorizing Scripture, just like memorizing prayers, contributes to a strong faith foundation. The memory verses are based on the week's theme and may or may not draw from that week's readings. Look for opportunities to say or refer to this verse throughout the meeting.

Setting Up the Environment

One way to establish a prayerful atmosphere is by setting up a prayer table. To do this, you will need:

- Advent wreath, 3 purple candles and 1 pink candle.
- Purple cloth (for the Advent season)
- Small crucifix or cross
- Bible for enthronement
- Bookmark aid for proclaiming the readings: http://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/PROCLAIMING-THE-WORD-Bookmark.doc
- Bible stand (optional)
- Bowl of holy water (optional)

- Meditation chime (optional) to mark the beginning of prayer (like this one: Woodstock Percussion ZENERGY Zenergy Chime - Solo Percussion Instrument https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0000775G0/ref=cm_sw_r_awd_Y3JrwbZTZTWY3)

More details can be found here:
http://catechistsjourney.loyolapress.com/2014/08/purchasing-objects-for-your-prayer-table/

Meeting Outline

1. Welcome (5 min.)

Greet each person with enthusiasm and gentleness. Allow them to be how they are—shy, happy, apprehensive, excited, etc.

Make nametags ahead of time. Nametags can be as simple or as special as you choose. Collect these at the end of each meeting to reuse the next time.

2. Icebreaker (15 min.)

Start the meeting with some easy, icebreaking questions.

3. Opening Prayer Ritual (10 min.)

Optional song.

I have listed a suggested song to begin with. Feel free to add or choose songs that are more familiar to your group.

Lead-in remarks.

Some introductory remarks about the Sunday readings and how they connect to one of the central themes of Advent.

4. Read Sunday readings (10 min.)

Ideally, choose your readers ahead of time so that they have a chance to prayerfully look over the readings before the meeting. If you want to add another dimension to your Scripture reading, try reading a paraphrase translation like *The Message: Catholic/Ecumenical Edition* in addition to the translation used in liturgy (New American Bible).

5. Introduce NOOMA film (5 min.)

Some comments that connect one or more of the readings to the selected NOOMA film. For each meeting, suggested pre-viewing questions help focus participants' attention.

6. Watch film (10-15 min.)

7. Reflection questions (20 min.)

A selection of post-viewing reflection questions from the NOOMA study guide are included here, along with the link to the full list of questions. Since you will have a better sense of what types of questions your group will gravitate to, it would be good to also have the NOOMA list on hand. All videos are 11-13 minutes long, with exact running time included to help you plan.

8. Intercessory/Closing Prayer (10 min.)

Prepare for this part of the meeting by setting aside some time beforehand to sit quietly and ask the Holy Spirit to give you guidance on how to best intercede for members of your group. For details, see this post:
https://christlife.org/blog/the-power-of-intercessory-prayer

If you'd like to involve more members in your group, you can write down the petitions that arise from your quiet time on individual index cards and assign members to pray aloud for that intention during the Intercessory Prayer. You can also use these intentions at the end of each meeting:
https://www.renewintl.org/RENEW/eStore.nsf/vFiles/Download+-+Advent+Awakenings+C+-+Prayer+of+the+Faithful.pdf/$FILE/Download+-+Advent+Awakenings+C+-+Prayer+of+the+Faithful.pdf

1st Sunday of Advent | Holy Ground

Before the Meeting

Meeting Preview

This week, we enter into this sacred time of Advent with a reminder of what it means to stand on holy ground. To prepare for our meeting, be sure to read the Sunday readings and the background information found here:

Just For You

> *Memory Verse:*
>
> Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from…the anxieties of daily life… (Luke 21:34).
>
> *Biblical Concept:*
>
> Don’t let daily anxieties rob you of the joyful hope of Advent. Instead, enter into this season knowing that with every breath, we are standing on holy ground.

Setting Up the Environment

Some things to consider when setting up your meeting space:

- Do you have an Advent wreath, candles and matches/lighter for the Opening Prayer ritual?
- Do you have a song chosen for the Opening Prayer and a way to play it?
- Do you have extra Bibles?
- Have you chosen all your readers?
- Is the film set up and ready to go?

Meeting Outline

1. Welcome (5 min.)

After welcoming everyone to the meeting and saying some things about yourself, Invite everyone introduce themselves to the group and share 1) what brings them to the group and 2) what they hope to gain from being part of the group.

2. Icebreaker (15 min.)

1. What does it take to wake you up in the morning?
2. On Monday mornings, what is "business as usual" for you?
3. In taking on new work, do you "bite off more than you can chew?" Do you "chomp at the bit"? Why?

3. Opening Prayer Ritual (10 min.)

For this first week of Advent, light a purple candle. Invite everyone to relax into a posture of prayer, to quiet their thoughts and to recognize God's presence.

Optional Song.

Breathing the Breath by Matt Redman
http://www.worshiptogether.com/songs/breathing-the-breath

Lead-In Remarks

Following a long stretch of Ordinary Time, punctuated with the occasional solemnity and feast, we begin a new liturgical cycle with Advent. This is a time for us to stop and take a collective breath, to re-introduce a familiar melody into the rhythm of our daily lives, so that we can look back at the first time God came to be with us and one of us, and look ahead to when he will come again.

Over the next few weeks, as "we recall two central elements of our faith: 1) the final coming of the Lord in glory and 2) the incarnation of the Lord in the birth of Jesus," we will explore "the key themes of the Advent season...watchful waiting, preparation, and justice."

4. Read Sunday Readings (10 min.)

5. Introduce NOOMA film (5 min.)

In this week's Gospel, Jesus says, in a few different ways, to pay attention:

- Stand erect and raise your heads (v. 28)
- Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy (v. 34)
- Be vigilant at all times (v. 36)

With the holiday season upon us, on top of everything that we've got going on every day, are you finding it hard to pay attention and be present? Can you relate to what the Gospel writer refers to as the drowsiness associated with daily anxieties? Maybe you're like me and you find yourself going into a numb auto-pilot/survival mode whenever you're overwhelmed by too many activities or commitments. Is this really what God intended for us?

This week's NOOMA film, "Breathe," is an invitation to re-calibrate your spiritual life and begin the new liturgical year with a fresh perspective. Before watching, take a moment to reflect on the following questions with your group:

Pre-Viewing Questions:

1. Where have you had your most unusual or significant experience with God?
2. What do you believe it means to be "standing on holy ground"?

6. Watch film (10-15 min.)

7. Post-Viewing Questions (20 min.):

1. If the name of God is the sound of breathing, how does that change the way you view yourself as a living being? How does it change the way you view others?
2. What do you have that you need to let go of – what do you need to breathe out?
3. What can you do in your life to make sure you don't miss that you're "standing on holy ground"?

8. Intercessory/Closing Prayer (10 min.)

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes:
Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7).

As we present our petitions this week, let us keep this promise in mind….

We pray to the Lord...Lord, hear our prayer.

Conclude the meeting with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

2nd Sunday of Advent | Preparation

Before the Meeting

Meeting Preview

This week, we dive deeper into this sacred time of Advent with a look at the role of silence in preparing for the coming of Christ. To get ready for our meeting, be sure to read the Sunday readings and the background information found here:

Just For You

> *Memory Verse:*
>
> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Phil 1:6).

Setting Up the Environment

Some things to consider when setting up your meeting space:

- Do you have an Advent wreath, candles and matches/lighter for the Opening Prayer ritual?
- Do you have a song chosen for the Opening Prayer and a way to play it?
- Do you have extra Bibles?
- Have you chosen all your readers?
- Is the film set up and ready to go?

Meeting Outline

1. Welcome (5 min.)

After welcoming everyone back, use this time to make any housekeeping announcements.

2. Icebreaker (15 min.)

1. What was the longest period of time you spent in the wilderness or away from civilization? What was it like?
2. Where do you go when you need to be alone?

3. Opening Prayer Ritual (10 min.)

For this second week of Advent, light 2 purple candles. Invite everyone to relax into a posture of prayer, to quiet their thoughts and to recognize God's presence.

Optional Song.

"You Speak" by Audrey Assad
http://youtu.be/QFr6dVTVN2w

Lead-In Remarks

John's preaching of the coming of the Lord is a key theme of the Advent season. As John's message prepared the way for Jesus, we too are called to prepare ourselves for Jesus' coming. We respond to John's message by repentance and reform of our lives. We are also called to be prophets of Christ, who announce by our lives the coming of the Lord, as John did.

4. Read Sunday Readings (10 min.)

5. Introduce NOOMA film (5 min.)

In the second reading for this week, Paul writes to the church in Philippi:

> *And this is my prayer:*
> *that your love may increase ever more*
> *and more in knowledge and every kind of perception,*
> *to discern what is of value,*
> *so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ* (Phil 1:9-10).

The Gospel speaks of John, prophet sent to prepare the way for Jesus.

As we draw closer to Christmas, as more things compete and clamor for your attention, how do you sift through the noise and "discern what is of value"? How do you make space in your day so you can steal away to the desert (cf. Mk 1:35-39) and hear the voice crying out?

This week's NOOMA film, "Noise," is an invitation to be silent before God so that you might hear how you are being called to prepare your hearts for the coming of Christ.

Pre-Viewing Questions:

1. What kind of noise do you have in your life?
2. Are you ever alone or do you always need somebody around you?

6. Watch film (10-15 min.)

7. Post-Viewing Questions (20 min.):

1. Why is silence so hard to deal with?
2. Do you ever surround yourself with noise intentionally? If so, why do you think we do this?
3. When was the last time you spent some time in silence?
4. Does my schedule, my time, my life look like that of a person who wants to hear God's voice?
5. What are some things in your daily life you could change to eliminate some of the noise?

8. Intercessory/Closing Prayer (10 min.)

In the First Book of Kings, there's a story of Elijah, feeling overwhelmed and defeated, as he waits to hear from God. As your meeting comes to a close, invite everyone to imagine themselves in Elijah's place as you prayerfully read the passage below:

> *Then the LORD said: Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will pass by.*
>
> *There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains*
> *and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind;*
>
> *after the wind, an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake;*
>
> *after the earthquake, fire—but the LORD was not in the fire;*
>
> *after the fire, a light silent sound.*
>
> *When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave* (1 Kings 19:11-13).

As we present our petitions this week, let us recognize God's holy presence -- sometimes in grand gestures, like Moses' burning bush, but often in a still, small voice, as it was with Elijah.

We pray to the Lord...Lord, hear our prayer.

Conclude the meeting with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

3rd Sunday of Advent (*Gaudete* Sunday) | Justice

Before the Meeting

Meeting Preview

This week, we celebrate the third Sunday of Advent (*Gaudete* Sunday) and reflect on the importance of outward action in expressing our interior faith life. To prepare for our meeting, be sure to read the Sunday readings and the background information found here:

Just For You

> *Memory Verse:*
>
> Rejoice in the Lord always. I shall say it again: rejoice!
> Your kindness should be known to all. The Lord is near. (Phil 4:4-5)

Setting Up the Environment

Some things to consider when setting up your meeting space:

- Do you have an Advent wreath, candles and matches/lighter for the Opening Prayer ritual?
- Do you have a song chosen for the Opening Prayer and a way to play it?
- Do you have extra Bibles?
- Have you chosen all your readers?
- Is the film set up and ready to go?

Meeting Outline

1. Welcome (5 min.)

After welcoming everyone back, use this time to make any housekeeping announcements.

2. Icebreaker (15 min.)

1. What is the best thing that happened to you this week?

3. Opening Prayer Ritual (10 min.)

For this third week of Advent, light 2 purple candles and then the pink one. Invite everyone to relax into a posture of prayer, to quiet their thoughts and to recognize God's presence.

Optional Song.

"By Our Love" by Christy Nockels
http://www.worshiptogether.com/songs/by-our-love

Lead-In Remarks

This Sunday's Gospel continues last week's focus on John the Baptist and his role in preparing the way for Christ. Recall that last week's reading described John's appearance in the desert and established his connection with the prophetic tradition of Israel. If we were to read Luke's Gospel continuously, we would learn about John the Baptist challenging the crowds who came to him and calling upon them to show evidence of their repentance. John tells his listeners that they cannot rely on their lineage as Israelites because children of Abraham can be raised up from stones. Repentance, rather, must be observable in one's actions. Here, Luke is continuing to set up two important themes of his Gospel message: the Christian faith is expressed in one's actions, and the call to salvation is extended to everyone, Jews and Gentiles.

In today's Gospel reading, the crowds ask John the Baptist for specifics. What evidence of repentance is required? John replies by naming concrete actions: crowds should share their food and cloaks; tax collectors should be just; soldiers should act fairly. The concern for justice is a hallmark of Luke's Gospel.

4. Read Sunday Readings (10 min.)

5. Introduce NOOMA film (5 min.)

This week's NOOMA film, "Corner," is an invitation to reflect on your place and role, by virtue of your baptism, in God's plan of salvation.

Pre-Viewing Questions:

1. Was there a time when you expected to give, but ended up receiving?
2. Why is getting what we want so important to us?

6. Watch film (10-15 min.)

7. Post-Viewing Questions (20 min.):

1. How is success dangerous? Is all success dangerous?
2. Why isn't God fair? What does God's unfairness look like?
3. John the Baptist prepared "the way of the Lord" (Lk. 3:4). Who prepared the way of the Lord in your life?
4. What is your corner? What piece of your life do you need to give to someone else? Who do you need to give it to?

8. Intercessory/Closing Prayer (10 min.)

Later, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus says, "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Lk 12:48).

As we present our petitions this week, let us consider what God has entrusted to us as his stewards and pray for the wisdom to know how best to use our gifts to bring about God's reign to the world today:

We pray to the Lord...Lord, hear our prayer.

Conclude the meeting with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

4th Sunday of Advent | Watchful Waiting

Before the Meeting

Meeting Preview

On the fourth Sunday of Advent, the last Sunday before Christmas, we return to the theme of watchful waiting, this time, through the lens of two pregnant mothers joyfully awaiting the birth of their children. To prepare for our meeting, be sure to read the Sunday readings and the background information found here:

Just For You

> *Memory Verse:*
>
> "Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Luke 1:45).

Setting Up the Environment

Some things to consider when setting up your meeting space:

- Do you have an Advent wreath, candles and matches/lighter for the Opening Prayer ritual?
- Do you have a song chosen for the Opening Prayer and a way to play it?
- Do you have extra Bibles?
- Have you chosen all your readers?
- Is the film set up and ready to go?

Meeting Outline

1. Welcome (5 min.)

After welcoming everyone back, use this time to make any housekeeping announcements.

2. Icebreaker (15 min.)

1. Who do you call first when you have good news to share?
2. How do you make visitors feel welcome in your home?

3. Opening Prayer Ritual (10 min.)

For this fourth week of Advent, light 2 purple candles the pink one, and then the final purple candle. Invite everyone to relax into a posture of prayer, to quiet their thoughts and to recognize God's presence.

Optional Song.

"My Soul Rejoices" by Sarah Hart → https://youtu.be/HJhc6axlboY

Lead-In Remarks

On this the last Sunday before Christmas, our Gospel reading prepares us to witness Christ's birth by showing us how Jesus was recognized as Israel's long-awaited Messiah even before his birth. This week's Gospel recalls Mary's actions after the announcement of Jesus' birth by the angel Gabriel. Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, her cousin, who is also with child.

It is appropriate in this season of Advent that we consider the role of Mary in God's plan of salvation. Elizabeth describes Mary as the first disciple, as the one who believed that God's word to her would be fulfilled. Mary's faith enabled her to recognize the work of God in her people's history and in her own life. Her openness to God allowed God to work through her so that salvation might come to everyone. Because of this, Mary is a model and symbol of the Church. May we be like Mary, open and cooperative in God's plan for salvation.

4. Read Sunday Readings (10 min.)

5. Introduce NOOMA film (5 min.)

This week's NOOMA film, "Rhythm," is a final challenge to go forth into this new year just as Mary did over 2,000 years ago -- with hearts wide open, ready to hear and take part in the song that's been playing since the beginning of creation.

Pre-Viewing Questions:

1. What do you believe about God's involvement in our daily lives?
2. "When you think about God, when you hear the word 'God,' what images come to mind?"

6. Watch film (10-15 min.)

7. Post-Viewing Questions (20 min.):

1. What does it mean for you to be in or out of tune with the song? Are you in tune?
2. Can you believe in God and be out of tune with the song? Does it work the other way around?
3. What is more important to Jesus: what we believe or what we do?

8. Intercessory/Closing Prayer (10 min.)

If we were to continue to read the verses that follow this week's reading from Luke's Gospel, we would hear Mary respond to Elizabeth's greeting with her song of praise, the Magnificat (the Canticle of Mary). Both women recall and echo God's history of showing favor upon the people of Israel.Before we present our petitions this week, let us first begin by recalling God's history of showing favor upon us in our own lives, and offering up praise and thanksgiving.

We pray to the Lord...Lord, hear our prayer.

Conclude the meeting with the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.