Small Group Leader Guide
CT672
How God Speaks to Us
A basic understanding of Revelation
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A. This theme consists of 6 small group sessions with 1 supplemental handout:
1 Revelation in Scripture & Tradition
2 Learning to Hear God Speaking
3 Trusting the Word of God
3a (supplement) Interpreting Scripture

B. In addition, there is some supplemental material within these notes.

C. You should have on hand the following three resources as references:

(1) A Bible. Lectionary readings are taken from the New American Bible, but any translation you have will work just fine. You may want to lay it open, alongside a lit candle or other symbols of faith.

(2) The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and (3) the *Growing Faith* booklet set (which presents the whole *Catechism* in plain English or Spanish). The *Index* provided with *Growing Faith* will help you find topics in these resources quickly.

To get the *Growing Faith Index* of topics (which also connects you to the *Catechism*), click the link below and it will open on your computer screen. If you’re reading this off line, cut and paste this link into your browser to open the *Index*. The *Index* is free.

The *Growing Faith* booklets for this theme include, in particular:

You can get copies of *Growing Faith* from the web site that supports this program: PastoralPlanning.com. Here’s a link to the *Growing Faith* Center. If the link is not live for you, cut and paste it into your browser. [http://store.pastoralplanning.com/pua/bgrfahe.html](http://store.pastoralplanning.com/pua/bgrfahe.html)

D. Before each small group meeting, spend a little time setting up your space to be as welcoming and safe as possible for participants.

► Always begin on time.
► Gather folks and welcome them warmly.
► It’s a good idea to have sacred music playing quietly as folks arrive.
► Offer a bit of coffee, wine, or a light snack.
► Keep the lights reasonably low to make the space more sacred.

E. Prepare:

► Read through the entire participant worksheet for this session.
► Read through the entire portion of the guide marked for this session. If there is a supplemental handout, we will guide you on how to use it in these notes.
► Plan what form of prayer you will use for this session. You need not use the same form each time your group meets. See our notes below.
► Use your reference books to check any details on which you feel unclear. Use the *Growing Faith Index* to find topics quickly. We caution you, however, from adding too much material to what is already in the participant worksheets. Each session is designed to last about one hour. You don’t want to swamp the boat.
  o Note that you can always give us a call for support, 8 AM to 5 PM, central time, weekdays.

F.

Review the Principles
Pause to recall the small group method
Let these principles guide you

1. **Our goal** is to grow together into a deeper intimacy with Christ and a greater love for the Church. Keeping this goal in mind will help you get there!
2. **Confidentiality.** What’s said at group stays at group.
3. **Start on time—and end on time.** It will be up to you as the leader to guide the group in sticking with this commitment.
4. **Discussion involves everyone.** Invite all – even those who are naturally more quiet – to take part.

5. **Remember your manners.** Avoid dismissing the thoughts of others, don’t laugh at others when they’ve shared (unless they’ve just told a joke), and no putdowns of any kind.

6. **It’s OK to agree to disagree.** It’s just a fact of life that everyone has different opinions. If the group has differing thoughts on an issue, there’s no requirement that everyone agree.

7. **Turn off mobile phones before the group begins!** Ask folks to put their electronic lives on hold for this short time.

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**G. Pray Before you Begin**

*Invite the light of the Spirit into your heart*  
*Open yourself to the work of God*

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Pause quietly and turn your heart toward the divine Light  
I open my heart to you, O God of all goodness.  
Let my thoughts and words be guided  
by your loving hand  
as I lead this group to know and love you more.  
May I be an earthen vessel through whom you work  
to touch the lives of those in our group.  
By the light of your Spirit  
may I be earnest in my own search for truth  
and fair in how I treat others.  
Through Christ, the Light of the World. Amen.

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Congratulations! You’re ready to welcome the guests and begin your session. Remember that we are keeping you in prayer throughout your season of **Come to the Table. Be an earthen vessel in the hand of God. Trust that God will give you the words and gestures you most need.**  

-- Bill and the Team
Prayer Options

Option one: We encourage you to spend 10 minutes or so, at the beginning of each session, breaking open the word which was proclaimed in last Sunday’s Masses. As Catholics, nothing is more central to our lives than our Liturgy. This prayer brings that Liturgy into your group and connects you to all the People of God. Use our annual resource as a starting point for this process. You can find it here, and it’s always free: http://pastoralplanning.com/QuestionoftheWeek.html.

1. The Call to Prayer
   Leader: My friends, let’s pause to spend a few moments in prayer and conversation with each other. [Lead all in the Sign of the Cross] + In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

2. The Word of God
   Leader: May the Lord be in our hearts as we recall and re-listen to a reading from last Sunday’s Liturgy of the Word.
   [Re-read all or part of one of the readings from the previous Sunday’s Liturgy. If the readings are long, select a few verses to read.]

3. The Two Faith Sharing Questions
   Leader: As we consider this Sacred Scripture, I invite you to think about it in two dimensions. [You may wish to work in small groups if your number is large.]
   - First, ask about the text itself, to draw attention to the Scripture.
     - What word or phrase in this text caught your ear?
     - What story did you hear, or what image did you get?
     - What touched you as you heard this reading?
   - Second, when the first sharing is complete, ask about the people’s lives.
     - How does this reading affect your daily life?
     - What lesson do you draw from it for your Christian journey of faith?
     - Use our “Question of the Week” (the link to them is above).

4. The Prayer. At the end of the sharing period, invite folks to pray together the prayer which is on this week’s Small Group Worksheet.

Option two: Simply use steps 1 & 4 above as your opening prayer.
Session 1: Revelation in Scripture and Tradition

1. To introduce this conversation mention the overall theme of this series: **how God reveals himself to us humans**. We Catholics have a unique understanding of this because we believe that, while divine revelation is complete in Jesus Christ and comes to us through the Scriptures (a belief we share with other Christians), what the Gospel demands of us in our day and age is still being revealed to us. God is still speaking. We are coming to understand the

Scriptures more and more fully in each age. The Church helps us understand this by passing on a shared, common belief which is known as Tradition.

In the second part of the conversation, we invite everyone to share about a time when they felt the presence of God very near to them. For example, I am a farmer and we raise much of our own food. It always amazes me to see the seeds sprout, the young plants grow, and the harvest begin. Often when I’m working away at tasks on the farm I have the strongest sense of the presence of God. The energy of creation was implanted by God. Last fall I was cutting firewood on a hill overlooking a large meadow. For whatever reason, I paused at one point, gazed out over the meadow to the southwest, and was in awe of the gorgeous landscape I saw there. God’s presence, indeed!
2. Once you have brought this conversation to a close, turn to the study portion of this session. We want to give serious thought to the idea of “revelation.” Here we are asking for a definition. You might say it is God communicating a divine truth to us. These truths are ones that, without God’s help, we cannot understand very well. They are mysteries. But the mystery is not due to unknowing, or to a dark force covering our ability to see. It’s a mystery because we cannot plumb the depths of God. No one can know the mind and heart of God.

3. Using the usual method (rotate readers for each bullet), invite participants to read these faith statements aloud, slowly allowing them to sink in. Pause before the conversation and invite people to summarize in their own words what they have just heard or read.

4. To make this all more personal, invite each member of the group to share one story or teaching of Jesus that is meaningful to him or her. God is revealed through Christ in this way.

Ask a further question here: What do we learn about God by knowing Jesus? What is God like, based on the life and teachings of Christ? In other words, what does God reveal to us about himself by giving us Christ, his Son? Responses might include: that God wants to heal us; that God loves each of us very much; that God travels in community.
with us; that God suffers with us, bearing suffering and allowing it to have meaning.

5. Continue now reading the faith statements, using the usual method. Pause again here before the conversation and invite folks to summarize what they learned in it.

6. Now spend time with this conversation. Have handy a copy of the Catechism in order to consider the articles cited here. You should pay most attention to #1776.

Here is the core point: The Church is the People of God, living and working together to fulfill the mission given it by Christ himself. We are to build the Reign of God.

We do not need to relearn every lesson in life. Others have gone before us, experiencing what we have, and over time the Church has developed an understanding of what God wants. The Church is the depository of God’s ongoing revelation to us and it helps us sort out what God desires of us in given situations. So we must listen to the Church carefully.

An excellent way to make sure everyone understands this is to enter into this conversation as a group. You may want to begin this in 2s and 3s before drawing all together in the large group.
7. Continue reading the faith statements, reading all the way to the end.

8. As you enter into this conversation, be aware that prayer is a very personal experience and everyone will have a slightly different experience of it. For most people, God speaks in their intuitions, in the depths of their hearts. One way to help folks talk about this is to ask how people are conscious of God as they go through the humdrum of daily life. How are they aware of God’s abiding presence?

And how does that consciousness, that awareness, translate into their on-going dialogue with God? In that dialogue, how do they hear God communicating with them? God communicates God’s own very Self to us. God, in other words, gives us himself when we are open to him in prayer.

9. On the next two pages is an optional handout, taken from the Constitution on Divine Revelation at Vatican II. You may wish to use it to help deepen the understanding about how we know God speaks with us. You may decide to read this aloud, using our usual method, and then simply pause and invite folks to summarize what they hear in this section of the document.
7 We believe that God has made it possible
for the revealed truths about our lives
to be fully and faithfully handed on forever.
Jesus, therefore, sent his followers
to announce this Good News
which they did in two ways:
First, they preached and taught orally
and observed a way of life
based on Christ’s teaching.
Second, they eventually wrote down the message,
under the guidance of the Spirit.
Then they handed on the authority to teach
to the first bishops who took their place.
The role of those early bishops
was to keep the entire message of Christ
together,
complete,
and intact
for all generations to know and understand.
8 We believe it is God’s plan then,
that succeeding generations
would have access to the Word of God
through an unending succession of preaching
and witnessing
until the end of time.
The message passed along in this way
contains everything needed to live a holy life.
This way of passing on the faith
is like passing on an inheritance
from one generation to the next.
That which is most precious to the Church
is lovingly guarded and, at the same time,
generously and freely given
to the daughters and sons of God.

Indeed this "deposit of faith," this Tradition,
the Good News given by God.
develops in the Church through the Holy Spirit. Our faith is not a static reality, lifeless and dead. Rather, over time, there is growth in understanding and development in doctrine. This growth and development occur through contemplation, study, and putting belief into action, producing a penetrating insight into faith. Even the Scriptures themselves are more fully understood over time, each age hearing it as a living voice for that particular time. 

9 Hence, there is a very close connection between Scripture, on one hand, and Church Tradition, on the other.
Session 2: Learning to Hear God Speaking

1. Begin with the first conversation, and invite people to share. The first question is a key one: why has God provided us with the Bible? Answers might include things like: to let us know he loves us; to help us share the story of salvation; to communicate God’s own self to us. “God’s own self” is how we define grace. Grace is God giving himself to us, personally and immediately.

2. Also pay close attention to the second and third questions. Catholics have been slow to do Scripture study and reading. Ask people to discuss why it’s important to do that.
3. Using the usual method (readers from the group, rotating on each bullet), read these faith statements aloud. Pause before the conversation and invite folks to summarize what they heard and learned.

4. We believe God wants us to know him for the simple reason that God is love and God wants us to live in that love. The Blessed Trinity is a community of love which is revealed to us principally through Scripture and the life and death of Christ, which is then handed on to us down through the years by the Church.

The second question here is an important one. For example, when I was a child growing up in the 1950s, we thought that conversion was what every Protestant had to do in order to gain entry into heaven. But when I was in my mid 20s, I made a TEC retreat weekend and on it, I came to realize that conversion was meant for me as a Catholic. I was invited to turn my own heart more fully to Christ. And such conversion would go on for the rest of my life. It’s ongoing and continual. I’m constantly called to turn ever more toward the heart of God.

5. Read these faith statements aloud. Ask members of the group to note anything that strikes them as they read and listen. Invite any questions or comments when you’re finished reading them, and ask members of the group to summarize what they have learned.
6. The group will now experience **Lectio Divina**. We’re actually going to read a Scripture story together, and use Lectio Divina to help it sink into our hearts and minds. Begin by reading through the steps of Lectio Divina on the worksheet, all the way to the end on page 4.

We’ve chosen the story of Jesus calming a storm because it’s rich in meaning. This should lead people to see how Jesus calms the storms in our own lives, by standing with us, giving us the power of his love and his grace, and letting human life unfold as it should.

7. Here is a summary of the steps for this exercise.
   ▶ (We’re working with the text in Mark 4:35-41)
   ▶ Read this section aloud
   ▶ Pause and allow a little silence to rise up in the room – about a 2-minute pause
   ▶ Ask group members to pay attention to any words that catch their ear, to any images that come up in their imagination
   ▶ Then read the section again
   ▶ Hold a conversation in which members speak about what items did come to their attention and the meaning of these things for them – ask “What did you hear in this reading? What word caught your ear? What lingers in your imagination?”
> Invite members of the group to speak with God from their hearts, in their own words, about this story and to listen to what God is saying to them through it
> You may want to play a lovely, quiet, sacred instrumental hymn
> Suggest that they get into the boat, meet Jesus, experience the storm
> Talk with Jesus about storms and about his desire to keep us from them
> Invite them to write down a few lines of prayer
> You might want to have paper on hand to give folks to write these prayers on.

This need not be long. We simply want to help people move from meditating on the text to actually talking to God in their own words about the meaning of it all.

Before leaving this exercise, invite people to share their experience of it. How did they feel? How did they come into contact with this text? With Christ? With their own longing and desire?

8. As you move to the final conversation, remember that the first question is a tough and personal question. You may wish to begin sharing in 2s or 3s before drawing everyone together in the large group.

9. Close with a group prayer, inviting members to share what they wrote during Lectio Divina. End with hospitality as always.
1. In this session, we’re going to focus on Scripture itself, how it was inspired & written, and how it is studied & applied to our lives. We begin with a conversation about our own way of communicating love to one another. Ask group members to compose a “love letter” to someone near to them. Scripture is a love letter to us from God.

2. What follows now is a long section regarding how Catholics read and study Scripture. It lays out the method for examining the texts in order to see what they really mean in light of the purposes of the authors and editors, and also the historical situation in which they were first written.
3. Read these faith statements aloud, using the usual method (readers from the group, rotating with each bullet). Invite members of the group to note any questions or confusing statements, and pause to allow folks to ask questions or make comments. At the end, invite folks to summarize in their own words what they have heard or read.

4. Begin a conversation now, using these questions as your starting point.

   The main point here for us to think about is that God works through us humans, despite our weaknesses and sins. God calls us to work for what is right and good, and to avoid what is evil. In this way, we believe God called those who wrote the actual words of Scripture and inspired them – as he inspires us when we’re called to a task – to write what is true.

When all have spoken, continue reading the faith statements, reading up to the next conversation point. This will include the long section about the Beatitudes.
5. At this point, the conversation turns to a very personal question: How much wealth are we allowed to keep, and how much are we called to give away, as part of our Christian commitment? You can point out that Jesus is not blessing material poverty when he says, “blessed are the poor.” As the conversation starter points out, the opposite is true. The gospels are quite clear that money can be the great obstacle to faith.

Using money as the example, ask members of the group to speak about how they figure this out for themselves.

6. The answer about how to know what is demanded of us by the Gospel is provided as we continue reading the faith statements. We learn that we must continually pray and ask for guidance, and seek the advice and direction of the official Church.

Point out that in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, published in 1994, the chief source is Scripture. One way to understand what the Church teaches about Scripture is to become familiar with our teachings.
7. Invite now a **conversation** about how to increase their understanding of the Bible. It isn’t necessary to push folks to sit and study Scripture every day. That may be right for some, but for many people in today’s world, that just won’t happen. Instead, encourage people to allow the readings from Sunday Mass to go with them all week. This is a much more manageable amount of Scripture. And it might only be one of the three Sunday readings, if three seems like too much.

Encourage each to speak about a time that Scripture did change his or her life. For example, I often speak in front of crowds, coach pastoral leaders, and work in the public life of the Church. One time, as I was preparing for this in a diocese in the western part of the nation, I came by accident upon the verse in 2 Corinthians 4:7 where it says that we have this treasure in fragile earthen vessels to show that our great power is from God. I read and re-read this verse. This was my call to let go of myself, my talents, and my own so-called power, and allow God to work through me. I was a vessel made of clay, but my power was from God.

8. This **set of questions** continues the conversation. The purpose here is to surface that and help them appreciate the place of Scripture in our lives. We want folks to be able to name favorite stories, find them in the Bible, and share them with others, as I have just done above.

Supplement on Catholic Scriptural Interpretation

10. You may choose simply to send this supplement home with your group. Time may not allow you to treat it at length in the group process.

If you do choose to treat it in group, simply read slowly through all the faith statements, noting those around which questions or comments arise. It follows the same format we have been using in the group. There is a group of discussion questions near the end to help the group review and consolidate what members have learned.

More supplemental material

We’re providing you with a small bit of supplemental material. You may either copy this and distribute it, or simply use it to make some closing points. If you use copies in the group, read it aloud in the usual manner.

How do we know a teaching is authentic?

► The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us: “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone” (CCC, 85).

► Vincent of Lerins (c. 434) gave three criteria by which to judge the teaching of the Tradition. In other words, the early Church understood three ways to discern whether a teaching of the Church (Tradition) was authentic:
  ♦ Ecumenicity: Was the teaching believed everywhere? In other words, does this teaching enjoy universal acceptance?
  ♦ Antiquity: Has this teaching always been believed and accepted? In other words, can this teaching be traced back to our earliest origins?
  ♦ Consent: Has this teaching been believed and given consent by all the people? In other words, is this teaching embraced by the people?
Review
► Important distinction: As stated earlier, what sets our understanding of the Bible apart from many of our Protestant brothers and sisters is that we regard Tradition, the teaching authority of the Church, on the same level as sacred Scripture.
► Many Protestant traditions understand Scripture alone (sola Scriptura) as the only authority, the only valid Revelation from God. The Catholic Church teaches, on the other hand, that God reveals himself to us through Scripture and through the Tradition of the Church.

How do we know?
► The pastors of the Church help interpret the Scriptures for us.
► Every week, in parishes all over the world people gather to reflect on the Scriptures in dialogue with approved biblical interpretation of them.
► Scriptural interpretation comes to us from recognized biblical scholars whose work constitutes part of the teaching authority of the Church. The bishops commission scholars to study the Scriptures and to help us interpret them.
► Sacred Tradition (the teaching authority of the Church) teaches us about sacred Scripture, but it also speaks the mind and heart of God.
► The Second Vatican Council document on Revelation, called Dei Verbum (Word of God), teaches us about how God has revealed himself and his plan of salvation to us.

Thus, the Church teaches:
► Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are closely connected; they form one unity. (In other words, they are equally important.)
► Sacred Scripture is the word of God, written under the inspiration of the divine Spirit.
► Sacred Tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ and the Spirit, given to the apostles, and hands it on to their successors (bishops).
► Led by the Spirit, the bishops proclaim it, preserve it, explain it, and make it widely known.
► The Church does not draw its certainty about everything that has been revealed from sacred Scripture alone. The Holy Spirit has revealed it to the Church.
► Both sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence (Dei Verbum, #9).
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The themes and topics of
Come to the Table

CT632 Catholic Beliefs that Guide You
A basic understanding of Faith

CT672 How God Speaks to Us
A basic understanding of Revelation

CT684 The Mystery of God
Considering Trinity, Creed, and Cross

CT648 Living a Deeply Fulfilled Life
Understanding Catholic Morality

CT620 Discovering how Christ is Present
Catholic Liturgy and Ritual

CT664 The Amazing Gift of Prayer
Talking and Listening with God

CT702 How We Become the People of God
The Story and Promise of Vatican II

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9980 Wildflower Rd
Pine City, MN 55063 612-220-6943