

# Leadership Training Manual

for

## Christian Resurgence Circles

Dec. 2010

The CRC meetings are designed to allow those attending to look honestly at our lives in order to mature spiritually. As leaders, we help facilitate that happening by our regular attendance, thoughtful planning, listening well to people's responses, and sharing personal life struggles when appropriate. We see taking a role of leadership as an experience of serving the group, not as a symbol of status. The current design for CRC meetings involves three leadership roles: the Meeting Guide, the Leader of the Bible Conversation, and the Study Leader.

### Meeting Guide

As Meeting Guide your role is to facilitate the session for the group. This requires an artful style of taking charge with a firm but light hand. People need to know that someone is thinking of the group as a whole, seeing to it that beginnings and endings are timely and encouraging participation without getting in the way of the group's experience by drawing undue attention to him/herself. There are two CRC Manuals (I and II) which can be used by anyone new to the role of Meeting Guide. Each of these manuals outlines the format for a full quarter of meetings.

First, you **Light Three Candles** during the singing of an opening song. (See Songs of Resurgence Songbook). An appropriate song is the second verse of Ascription on page 20. The words of this verse describe the three parts of the Christian Trinity of which the candles are a symbol. To light the candles is to sum up the self-understanding of the group. An option is to say something like the following phrases as you light each candle: (1) the Final Mystery of Life, (2) the Jesus demonstration of trust of that Mystery, and (3) the Spirit of essential humanness which emanates from living a life of trust.

A period of free-form dance (about 3 minutes) can follow this opening. As Guide, you select the music.

Then you give a brief context for a period of **Silence**. This period (no more than five minutes) allows members to settle into the reality of the moment, a step in trusting that moment, that reality. (See examples of silence contexts in the *Possible Silence Contexts* and in the *Practice of Prayer* manual in CRC Notebook.)

Next, announce the song. **Singing** is an important part of the meeting, an experience when all speak and listen at the same time, as it were. The concern is not to perform, but to celebrate together, experiencing unity of purpose, the link to past and future. If you are not skilled at setting the pitch, someone else can be asked to start the songs.

The **Go-Round Conversation** follows the song. It is a form of prayer, a confession of where we are in our lives, an "owning up." The question can come from a line of the song (see manuals I and II for examples) or can be something like, "What are you grateful for this week?" or "What has been a struggle for you?" Think of the group as a whole, not just the individual people, when deciding on the question. Make sure that it is a question you can answer yourself. Allow each person to answer the question. Encourage personal life sharing, not abstract ideas about life. It is important to create a safe space for honest sharing. On one hand, people need to be listened to without interruption. On the other, they need to be encouraged to share personally. If someone tends to be abstract and hold the topic at arm's length, you might ask, "How have you experienced that personally?" A new group may need a context for the importance of listening well

to each other, giving full attention to the person talking, looking at the one talking, not interrupting, not commenting on what someone else said, but sharing one's own life. This kind of listening will do more than anything to create a sense of safety that will serve the group well. You, as Guide, can participate in this conversation. Usually, at the end or middle is best. However, if the group is slow responding to the question, it might be useful to respond first in order to "prime the pump." An **Absolution** is given at the end of this conversation of confession. The Absolution is simply proclaiming that the THE WAY LIFE IS (the cosmos, Reality) accepts our lives just as they are and holds no grudges against us. Forgiveness is the way life operates. (See examples of go-round questions and absolutions in the *Possible Spirit Go-Round Questions and Absolutions* in CRC Notebook.)

The **Celebration** period is an opportunity to join together in our significant life events: birthdays, deaths, weddings or other anniversaries, new jobs, graduation – whatever people want to celebrate. Ask for celebrations and when someone mentions one, create a way for the group to signify the event or ask someone else to do so.

Here are some possible celebrative forms:

**Birthday.** Ask the person what year it is, and about the highlights of the past year. Give each person an opportunity to express an appreciation for the person. Sing an improvised, playful "Happy Birthday" to any tune the celebrant chooses. (i.e., it can be sung to tunes as diverse as Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" or the Beatles' "Yellow Submarine.") If it is a birthday of someone not a member of the group (someone known personally or a famous person important to the group), just acknowledge it and say a few appropriate words.

**Death.** Ask about the deceased and the relationship to the group member. Allow the member to say what they wish in remembrance and acknowledge the person's completed life.

**Couple anniversaries:** If only one partner is present, do a fairly simple acknowledgment. If both are there, ask each partner two questions: (1) What was the highlight of your past year as a couple? (2) What do you most cherish about your partner? Sing to them a celebration song of their choice.

Then announce the **Bible Conversation**. Watch the time in case the person leading the conversation needs a reminder. After the Bible Conversation, you might want to announce a short **Break** for tea or bathroom. After the break, lead a short **Song**. Then announce the **Study**.

At the end of the study, sing the prayer song (page 64 of Songbook). Set the context for **Prayer**. Here the emphasis is on petitionary and intercessory prayer – our needs and the needs of the world. Make it clear that we are asking what concerns are arising for the group, not trying to create concerns out of a sense of guilt. This is a way of clarifying our commitments. You can simply ask, "What are your commitments for the coming week?" or "Will each person hold up a concern?"

Close the meeting with the same song or ceremony you used as an opening and put out the **Candles**.

## Bible Conversation Leader

The point of this conversation is to learn to hear the scripture as metaphor that speaks to our lives now, to translate the ancient wisdom from the Bible into contact with our lives today. Suggestions for this part of the meeting are the books of Mark, Luke, or the Psalms. You might also use Proverbs, the book of Job, or the epistles.

**Mark** is a good place to start since a commentary is available that does a metaphorical translation of each passage of Mark and suggests discussion questions. As the leader, you read the piece of Mark just as you would read any novel or story. It helps to use a modern translation such as J.B. Phillips because it avoids language that is pious. Then ask the group what they noticed, what stood out, what they heard. Here you want “popcorn” responses (anyone speaks, rather than going around the room) for a few quick impressions – words or images that they noticed. You aren’t asking for interpretations at this point. These initial responses are important because they get the actual words in people’s minds before going on to the commentary. Next read the commentary which will help explain the context and the possible meaning of the metaphors. Then ask the question(s) in the manual, allowing whoever wishes to comment. If you find the questions difficult to answer, create some that work better for you. It isn’t necessary for each person to answer each question, but note if some are not participating and, if appropriate, ask them if they have comments. If responses become abstract, ask for personal examples, i.e., “How do you experience that in your life?” Such push questions are appropriate to get clarity on how what is said relates to the speaker’s own life and to the passage read. Allow the conversation to flow freely, but avoid letting it bog down in long impersonal orations.

**Psalms:** Read the psalm as you would a secular poem, thinking of yourself as the psalmist. Allow yourself to experience the psalmist’s experience. Don’t dramatize, simply let yourself experience it. Then pause a moment before asking these questions: “What did you hear?” or, “What lines hang in your memory?” Then, “What did you see? What images came up for you?” Then, “What did you feel?” “What feelings happened in your body?” Keep the group to actual reporting, not abstract thoughts. Once these lines and images and feelings are out, ask them to: “Describe the state of being of the psalmist. What is it like? Give a two-word name for it.” Next have them compose a short story of the psalmist’s life preceding the writing of this psalm. It can be modern or ancient. Have one or two people play with this. The point of this conversation is to allow the group to experience the state of being which is expressed by the psalmist and to become more conscious of their own depth experiences.

**Luke:** This method can also be used for Matthew or Mark. Read a fairly long piece, at least half a chapter, using an everyday voice. Just let the story tell itself. Pause a moment. Then ask: “Where in the story did you find yourself getting caught up? Where did you stop listening and drop into your own being?” When different ones respond, select one who was really captured (use your intuition to discern this). Ask her to tell about the passage, to describe the scene. One at a time ask, “What is going on? Who is there? What look do you see on their faces? How did they feel?” After a clear picture is created, ask her where she is in the scene. “Who do you identify with?” Next ask, “What experience in your life do you associate with this scene?” Then ask the group, “What truth about life have we been dealing with here?”

A short reading from the **Gospels or Epistles** can be read followed by these questions:

1. What surprised you?
2. What did it say to you?
3. What did it ask you to do?

Or this series of questions could be used:

1. What words stood out?
2. What is the message the author wants to convey?
3. How are you personally challenged by this passage?

**Proverbs:** Read a Proverb and ask these questions:

1. Try putting that in your own words.
2. Where have you seen examples of this in the world at large or in those about you?
3. How does this proverb challenge you personally?

**Job:** Read a section of Job. Lead the following discussion:

1. Someone please summarize the reading.
2. Who are the characters?
3. Which character do you identify with? How?
4. What is to be learned from this passage?

## Study Leader

As Study Leader, you are responsible for leading a discussion on a work of spiritual, ethical, or social significance in such a way that the group can understand it rationally and then apply it to their lives personally. Choose a method according to what is appropriate to you and your relationship to the study material.

Here are some of the options for leading a study session:

- A. Read a book and report on it to the group.
- B. No reading is done beforehand, but the group reads each paragraph of the material together and you probe with appropriate questions.
- C. There is no study material. You come with a topic (or help the group select a topic) that is discussed.
- D. The study material is read by all in advance. List the key points (or have the group get out a list of key points) and lead a discussion on them.
- E. The study material is read by all beforehand. Use the charting and lesson planning method. (See Lesson Planning Outline, Example Chart and *Charting As A Life Method* in CRC Notebook.)

**Charting** allows you to get the whole picture of the piece to be studied and how it subdivides. It allows you to discern what parts are important and need more time. Number the paragraphs in the chapter. Put them on a line with a mark for each paragraph. Divide the line where the topic changes. Name each section. If you put the chart on a board in front of the group it has the advantage of focussing the group's attention together as a group. In the beginning of the study, ask for something about the piece that interested each of them. (If they haven't read it in advance, give them time before starting.) Then get the overall picture out with your chart. Then you can short-course (tell briefly) the parts that you need to get through quickly and have them read aloud sections that are important, stopping to discuss them by sharing how they understand it and how they ground it in their own life experience by giving personal examples. Be ready to use your own personal examples if needed to get the group started.

**Lesson Planning:** Preparing to teach a piece of written material requires a decision about which parts of the paper to emphasize, in what order to teach these chosen parts, and how much time to spend on each part. Time management is one of the keys to good teaching. The attached sheet on lesson planning provides a model for how time might be managed in a fifty minute period of time. The sheet diagrams five sections to the time plan, the introduction, three movements, and the conclusion. The metaphor of a symphony with three movements is being used here. A single chapter or essay is usually about one basic thing; but in the course of the document, it is developed in several ways. Choose three of those ways, those parts of the paper, and write a title for them in the blanks at the top of the sheet in the order that you want to teach them. Then decide how to begin or introduce the study, perhaps with a chart of the paper, either your chart or a chart constructed by one or several members of the group. The introduction might also include an opening question that focuses the interest of the group. A conclusion also needs to be planned. It can be very brief like reading aloud the concluding words of the paper. Or it can be something longer, a summary or a concluding conversation.

Once these five parts of the lesson plan have been chosen, the next step is to choose the amount of time you want to spend on each part. It is good practice to select the number of minutes for each part and then calculate the time on the clock when you want to shift from one part to the next. Write those times in LARGE NUMBERS on the notes you take with you to teach this lesson. As you teach the paper, your time plan will almost never work out exactly as you plan it, but if you have these turning points in mind, you will be aware of how you are managing your time and be able to make the adjustments needed to emphasize what you decided to emphasize and to finish on time.

The third basic step in this mode of lesson planning is to choose the questions you want to ask the group in order to: (1) dig out the main points, (2) ground those points in the experience of those in the group, and (3) discuss the points you feel need discussion. In other words: first, hear what the author is verbally saying; second, push to understand the author's words in terms of life experiences we may have had or can have; and third, talk further in dialogue with this author.

These simple practices, flexibly used, enable very competent teaching of written material.