

Opening Prayer

God of Love

Through our baptism you have called each one of us into the Church in the Diocese of Christchurch.

You have endowed us with new life.

You have enriched us with the joy of life in your Son Jesus Christ.

You have poured out the Holy Spirit upon us.

As we build new buildings and strengthen old ones, may we also experience the deeper renewal of ourselves as the Body of Christ.

Strengthen us in faith; renew us in your love; give us an unbreakable hope in your promise of eternal life.

Help us to reach out to those in every kind of need and treat them with compassion, dignity and justice.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Introduction to the Spiritual Renewal Programme

The Programme

As the fundraising campaign for the repair and rebuild of our churches has ramped up over the last few months, a group gathered to think about strategy in some way that would be helpful to the new bishop. It became apparent that a spiritual renewal programme alongside the rebuilding programme was at the heart of any vision for the diocese into the future. As we wait for a new bishop, this is a great opportunity to offer him the fruit of our thoughts and prayers by beginning this process.

A theme has been chosen following these discussions that will influence the way the diocese looks at itself during this programme of spiritual renewal. The theme chosen is:

The Catholic Diocese of Christchurch is a community of missionary disciples who love God, love each other, and go out to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all the World.

It is hoped that this will be a time of spiritual renewal so that we may grow in our relationship with Jesus in faith, hope and love. My hope is that all of us will be more missionary and look outwards to those in the community who have drifted from their faith or do not know the Lord.

What:

Every group in the Diocese, between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday, is invited to have two extended sessions of prayer (30-60 minutes) based on the lectio divina model (see below) using resources produced by the Diocesan Pastoral Office. This can happen at either a normal or special meeting. Other groups may also form within parish or school communities to enable everybody to take part who wishes to.

Why?

These sessions of prayer are designed:

- To encourage people to think and pray about Spiritual Renewal in the Diocese, particularly focusing on the theme below.

- To enable people, through the reflection on scripture, to focus on the mission of the church.
- To encourage groups to view all their activities through the lens of our theme.
- To invite people to focus on what it means for them in their circumstances of parish, work and home to be missionary disciples proclaiming the Good News of Jesus to the world.
- To keep people praying for our new bishop.

How?

The prayer sessions will be based on the lectio divina model of prayer. Lectio divina “is a Latin term meaning ‘reading with God’” and is a form of prayer which is based on reading and reflecting on passages of scripture. It can be done individually or in groups. This form of prayer “gently leads us into a deeper relationship with Christ”¹.

Pope Francis Lenten Message

It is also great that we are able to start this in the Lenten season and finish it in the Easter season. Lent is a time of conversion, of turning back to the Lord, through prayer, fasting and almsgiving. This programme is a beautiful way to journey with the Lord in prayer during the Lenten season. Recently Pope Francis, in his message for Lent, said that the Lenten season

“urgently calls us to conversion. Christians are asked to return to God “with all their hearts” (*Joel* 2:12), to refuse to settle for mediocrity and to grow in friendship with the Lord ... Lent is a favourable season for deepening our spiritual life through the means of sanctification offered us by the Church: fasting, prayer and almsgiving”

As he notes in his message, “At the basis of everything is the word of God, which during this season we are invited to hear and ponder more deeply”.

Introduction to Lectio Divina

The last three Popes have all recommended the Practice of Lectio Divina.

Pope Benedict XVI - ... the “diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart . If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church ... a new spiritual springtime”.

The Importance of the Word of God

In His book *The way of Trust and Love*, Fr Jacque Philippe talks about St Therese of Lisieux’s great love of the bible. He notes that “all her great spiritual intuitions she found in scripture”.

In the world we live in today, Fr Jacques notes that we “absolutely must be nourished on scripture”. “Only God’s Word ... has the necessary depth, clarity and authority to help us find our way ... only scripture enables us to discover the truth”.

Fr Jacques insists that we should regularly “take some time to meditate and pray with the bible. If we do so, it will speak to our hearts; “this faithfulness will be amply rewarded; from time to

time we will have a wonderful experience". A word or verse will suddenly speak to us – bring us new light – we will say "These words were written just for me".

Remaining Close to the Holy Spirit

In 2008, Pope Benedict, in an answer to a question by a seminarian, described how to remain close to the Holy Spirit. He said that one way we do this is by meditating on his Word. Through his Word we speak with God, not only seeking the past in it but truly the Lord who is present and speaks to us. It is as if we were strolling in the garden of the Holy Spirit; talking and listening to him.

A Definition

Lectio Divina, in its simplest form, it is a prayerful reading of Scripture – Divine or Sacred reading.

Lectio Divina is ***truly "capable of opening up to the faithful the treasures of God's word, (and) also of bringing about an encounter with Christ, the living word of God"***. That is what we want from this programme (Pope Benedict)

The steps of Lectio Divina

1. The first step opens with the Lectio - reading (and rereading) of a text, which leads to a desire to understand its true content: what does the biblical text say in itself? Without this, there is always a risk that the text will become a pretext for never moving beyond our own ideas. So it is important if you are leading a group to do some research – there are lots of aids out there including the CCC.
2. Next comes meditation (*meditation*) - a moment of interior reflection in which the soul turns to God and tries to understand what is the Biblical text saying to us today. Here, each person, individually but also as a member of the group / community, must let themselves be moved and challenged.
3. Following this comes prayer or oratio – (in which we linger to talk with God directly), which asks the question: what do we say to the Lord in response to his word? Prayer, as petition, intercession, thanksgiving and praise, is the primary way by which the word transforms us.
4. Finally, lectio divina concludes with contemplation (*contemplatio*), during which we take up, as a gift from God, his own way of seeing and judging reality, and ask ourselves what conversion of mind, heart and life is the Lord asking of us? Contemplation aims at creating within us a truly wise and discerning vision of reality, as God sees it, and at forming within us "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16).
5. The Pope adds a 5th step - the process of lectio divina is not concluded until it arrives at action (*actio*), which moves the believer to make his or her life a gift for others in charity.

Running a Lectio Divina Session for the Spiritual Renewal Programme

1. We always begin in Prayer by inviting the Holy Spirit to come and help us clear away anything that will hinder us from hearing the Word, the courage to open our hearts, to listen to the word and to respond. We often invoke the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary in whom the Holy Spirit was able to work fully. In the Spiritual Renewal programme we can also pray the prayer that Fr Rick has written.
2. We choose and read one of the three Scriptures out loud, and we encourage people to simply listen rather than follow along in their bible / sheet - the word is meant to be listened to.
3. We then have 5 minutes silence – is there a word or phrase that stands out to you? *Fr John Joliffe SM says this beautifully - gently allow a single word or phrase that speaks to me most to emerge. Humbly trust the Holy Spirit, who helps us to hear, to do this work within me.*
4. We then go round the group and share the word or phrase amongst the group with no further discussion. *What touched our hearts?*
5. We read the same scripture again out loud with another reader of a different gender if possible.
6. We then have 5 minutes further silence – why has this word touched my heart? *Fr John comments “Let the word or phrase penetrate my heart, feelings, conscience or life experience”* What is the Lord saying to you? What is he asking of you?
7. We now take an opportunity to share our word or phrase again in the group. Sometimes people get a different word or phrase, that’s fine – let them share it.
8. Now comes the faith sharing part of the group – invite people to share why the particular word or phrase touched their heart. This is an invitation only, no one is to be forced to share. This is a fundamental part of the programme but it is a very sensitive part too. Leaders should carefully not ‘coerce’ sharing and this should be verbally expressed at the beginning of the Reflections that they are leading. Especially for new comer, sharing can be a bit daunting and for some they come to it gradually.

During this time don’t go round the group but simply invite people to comment. There is no problem with silence. Give everyone the chance to share and don’t let people dominate. Because it is peoples lived experience everything is valid. Often times this sparks some great faith sharing. An amazing part of Lectio is people’s different insights and their experiences. I always felt that I learnt so much about people and about the faith from people sharing.
9. Sometimes it is good to go first as the leader, to break the ice and share. Also during the session, you can draw people out and ask them questions, but without forcing.

10. At the right time you insert the reflection questions into the conversation. Questions one and two are simply what is already happened in the faith sharing. Pose the rest of the questions.

11. We close with a time of contemplation and prayer. Give me the chance to rest peacefully in the presence of the Lord. Again Fr John provides us with some beautiful words to ponder which are in the reflection sheet.

Prayer Reflection

During this time of Lectio – we make a personal heartfelt response to God speaking the Word to us.

If we experience our weakness and need, respond by asking his help.

If we experience the word as a promise, respond with joyful trust

If we experience our sinfulness, respond with repentance

If we experience being called to action, respond with willing generosity

If we experience the word as a challenge, ask for courage to accept it.

9. So during this closing prayer, I make sure there is some time for silence and for the people to reflect on the above quotes. I then ask the group to form their word or phrase into a direct prayer to our Lord. You might like to include a time for intercessions and petitions which is a good time to encourage the members to share a prayer out loud in your group if they wish. Thank the Lord for the personal word spoken to me and my heart.

10. Close the prayer session by praying together the prayer on page 4 of the reflection sheet.

11. As you leave remind the group that the final step is *Actio* – the Word should (and will) transform your life. Go out and live the Word!