

Ecclesia Called by Name



Centre for Pastoral

Development

Archdiocese of Cape Town

All materials have been prepared by:

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One

Called by Name to Relationship

This first Ecclesia meeting should be a Parish Meal. The Ecclesia Team will be called upon to gather all the facilitators and their groups, as well as the Youth and Catechetics children to an Ecclesia Parish Meal.

Welcome – Ecclesia Co-ordinator

Personal testimony by the Parish Priest/Deacon

Shared Meal

DVD

Reflection:

Each one of us is created by God. We are precious in His eyes. The Bible tells us in Isaiah 49:16 that He has carved us in the palm of His hands. Each of us has been called into a relationship with God. He has given us Jesus, who became human like each of us, to lead us to Him.

Because of our human nature, each of us has sinned – we want rather to be independent and follow our passions than to be formed by God's will for our lives. When we follow the ways of the world, it becomes more and more difficult to hear God's call to each of us.

As we become aware of our own inadequacies, and realise our need for Him, Jesus is waiting for each of us. He has suffered, died, and been raised to life for each person. His new way of living is a free gift He gives to us – all we have to do is accept and allow Him to lead us.

Baptism, which most of us received as babies, is the beginning of our life in the family of God. The gift of the Holy Spirit received then, has led us to where we make a conscious decision to live as a Christian.

One to one sharing (with the person next to you):

What do I remember as my first awareness of God and His love for me? What did it feel like?

Small group break out session -Scripture Reading:

Read this passage once aloud. Then each read it quietly replacing the words ‘..my Son’ with your own name.

The Baptism of Jesus- Mark 1:9-11

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Small group sharing:

- What are the ways in which I am seeking to respond to God’s love?
- In what ways can I deepen my relationship with Him and so live out my Baptism and calling as a beloved child of God?

Called by Name Ecclesia Prayer:

Loving God, author of grace and mercy

You call us through our Baptism and in the Holy Spirit to continue the mission of your beloved Son, Jesus.

Open us to listen attentively for your invitation

Empower us to respond to your call.

Inspire women and men

to follow the path of Mission, Communion and Witness,

that together we may build up the Church

to be a vibrant sign of your presence in the world.

Through Jesus, your Son

and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Closing Hymn: In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Two

Called by Name to Witness.

This session is held in homes and involves a small group being 'led' by a facilitator. It may be a good idea to have a shared tea to begin the session. This should be 'short and sweet'. Just a cup of tea or coffee. This helps people to relax and re-establish bonds. It should not create stress for the host.

The host should also arrange some sort of focus for the room where the gathering is held. A candle, the Bible, a bowl of water on a white cloth. This is to remind us of our Baptism.

Open the meeting with prayer and a song if possible.

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Inspire women and men
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to be a vibrant sign of your presence in the world.

Through Jesus, your Son
and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Song: A new Commandment

A new commandment

I give unto you

That you love one another

As I have loved you, x2

By this shall all men know that you are My disciples,

If you have love one for another. X2

Make sure that each person is known to each other person in the group. It may be a good idea to get people to introduce one another to the group.

Buzz discussion one to one- (keep it to 10 mins.)

“Conversion is a process not a moment”

A short group discussion may follow. No longer than 10 mins.

Scripture: 1 Peter 1:4,5 (Read aloud slowly)

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Reflection.

Our Baptism and our personal decision to live as a Christian is a call for us to become disciples of Jesus and members of His Church. As we do so we are on the path to becoming fully human, as God intends for each of us. The name given to us in Baptism is the name by which God knows us and calls us each day of our lives, and one day into eternity.

Jesus became a man to reveal God to us – He is the *sacrament* of the Father. By his passion, death and resurrection he came the ultimate High priest and opens the way for us to hear God’s call.

In the Vatican II document on the Church, Lumen Gentium 10, we are told that “*the people of God share in Christ’s priesthood.*”

Christ the High Priest has made the new people a kingdom of priests. Through the power of the Spirit, all the baptised are consecrated as priests so that every action of their lives may be a spiritual sacrifice, a proclamation of God who has called them from darkness into his light.

Therefore all Christ’s followers, faithful in prayer, should stand before

God as living sacrifices.

They must bear witness to Christ in every part of the world and be ready to answer for their Christian hope.

There is an essential difference between the priesthood of the laity and the priesthood of the Church's ministers.

Nevertheless they are inter-related and each in its own way shares in Christ's priesthood.

The ministers teach, rule and offer the Eucharist in the name of all the people.

But the people use their priesthood in joining in that offering, in receiving the sacraments, in prayer and self-denial and in all the witness of a holy life. [Grail Translation]

This is a call for each of us to serve God, draw others to Him and build God's kingdom here on earth in the place where we find ourselves. It is also a call to continual conversion for us, to be actively discerning God's will for ourselves in all we do. Our calling from God is not static, it evolves through the different phases of our lives often in subtle and simple ways. This requires a listening heart, open to the Holy Spirit so that we learn to discern what is of God and what is not.

It is not enough to just hear God's call for ourselves... We live out that call to common priesthood by receiving the sacraments, but we also need to act out that call in the way we live, the way we treat others and the moral choices we make as regards our lifestyle, our profession and our family.

Discussion –

The following Baptismal promises were written by Fr William Reiser SJ.

Each promise should be read out by one person, then 'unpacked' by the group. Depending on how the discussion goes this should last about 30 mins.

Once this is done, close off this part of the session by standing and making the promises together.

- *I accept Jesus as my teacher, as the example whom I will always imitate and as the one in whom the mystery of God's love for the world has been fully revealed.*
- *I dedicate myself to seeking the reign of God and God's justice, to praying daily, to meditating on the Gospels and to celebrating the Eucharist faithfully and devoutly.*
- *I commit myself to that spirit of poverty and detachment that Jesus enjoined on his disciples, and to resisting the spirit of consumerism and materialism that is so strong in our culture.*
- *I accept responsibility for building community, for being a person of compassion and reconciliation, for being mindful of the poor and the oppressed, and for truly forgiving those who have offended me.*
- *I will try to thank and praise God by my works and by my actions, in times of prosperity as well as in moments of suffering, giving loyal witness to the risen Jesus by my faith, by my hope, and by the style of my living.*
- *I surrender my life to God as a disciple and companion of Jesus. I believe that God is the Lord of history, sovereign over nations and peoples, and that God's promise to redeem all of creation from its bondage to death and decay will one day be accomplished.*

Closing Prayer

If the group is comfortable with each other a time of shared prayer could bring the session to a close.

Our Father..... (prayed holding hands)

Three

Called by Name to Mission

Once again the evening could start with a cup of tea, but do not allow this to last longer than 15 mins. A focus table for the group helps to create the correct atmosphere.

Open the time shared with prayer and song.

Called by Name Ecclesia Prayer:

Loving God, author of grace and mercy
You call us through our Baptism and in the Holy Spirit
to continue the mission of your beloved Son, Jesus.

Open us to listen attentively for your invitation
Empower us to respond to your call.

Inspire women and men
to follow the path of Mission, Communion and Witness,
that together we may build up the Church
to be a vibrant sign of your presence in the world.

Through Jesus, your Son
and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Sing Chorus - Here I am Lord.

Here I am Lord

Is it I Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night

I will go Lord

If you lead me

I will hold your people in my heart.

One to one Buzz – keep it to 5 to 10 mins

“How has making the Baptismal promises last week impacted on my life since then?”

A group discussion may follow but should be kept short .

Reflection

As we saw last time, in Baptism we are named and called by God along a journey into eternal life. Our Christian initiation unfolds throughout our lives in Word and Eucharist – into a dynamic living relationship with Jesus.

We also saw that Christ's priesthood is shared in 2 ways

- a. The common priesthood of the baptised
- b. The ministry of the ordained

If we develop that we see that

- a. The role of the *common priesthood* of the baptised is to offer the world back to the Father together with Christ and
- b. The role of the *ordained* is to support that vocation (of the laity) by preaching, presiding and service. The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the Sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry.

So we need priests, they are essential to our lives as Catholics. They are not just a 'nice to have'. Without the priest there is no Eucharist. This call to mission demands self-sacrifice, a life lived in imitation of Christ, loving, giving and sacrificing as Christ does. This call is not an easy one to answer for any young man. A great deal of discernment is required and preparation to hear that call is needed in the Parish. As a whole Church do we value priesthood? All of the faithful need to be fostering vocations to the priesthood. Are we as families open to the possibility of one of our sons or grandsons following the call to priesthood? Are our priests offering the best example of priestly life?

The permanent diaconate is another call within the foundational Baptismal call. Married men who are ordained to service and the Word. Are we as families open to allow our husbands and fathers to

consider this call and to offer them support and encouragement? Are the men of the Parish given opportunity and space to pursue this call? Are priests open to the idea of the permanent diaconate?

As a parish community do we foster the idea of greater and deeper service from our young people? The call to mission demands that we give up so much of what this world has to offer and offer ourselves instead completely to Christ including the chance to marry in some cases.

The challenge to all of us is to 'grow' vocations within our own communities. Identifying those who could follow this call, nurturing them, praying for them and supporting them.

Discussion.

What can we do as a small faith sharing group to foster vocations within our Parish?

How can we support those in the Seminary and the newly ordained deacons and priests?

Scripture Philippians 2:5-11 (Read aloud in chorus)

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited, but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Closing Prayers (adapted from the rite of ordination of deacons and priests)

- Lord, look with favour on our deacons, your servants, who minister at your holy altar.
Lord, send forth upon them the Holy Spirit, that they may be strengthened by the gift of your sevenfold grace to carry out faithfully the work of the ministry.
May they excel in every virtue: in love that is sincere, in concern for the sick and the poor, in unassuming authority, in self-discipline, and in holiness of life.
May their conduct exemplify your commandments and lead your people to imitate their purity of life.
May they remain strong and steadfast in Christ, giving to the world the witness of a pure conscience.
May they in this life imitate your Son, who came, not to be served by to serve, and one day reign with him in heaven.
- Almighty Father, grant to our priests, your servants, the dignity of the priesthood. Renew within them the Spirit of holiness.
As co-workers with the order of bishops may they be faithful to the ministry that they receive from you, Lord God, and be to others a model of right conduct.
May they be faithful in working with the order of bishops, so that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth, and the family of nations, made one in Christ, may become God's one, holy people.
- May the Lord bless us, keep us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life.
Amen.

Four

Called by Name to Communion

This is the last session in this short Ecclesia Season. You may want to have a 'bring and share' gathering to end off the evening.

There is a lot of material to cover in this session. The facilitator should emphasise the issues that best relate to those in the group ie singles/married/consecrated. There is enough material for two sessions and so if necessary it could be stretched over to another time.

We encourage you again to open in prayer and song.

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Through Jesus, your Son
and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Sing Chorus

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love

Reflection

Genesis 1:27. “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.”

This verse tells us three things.

- Both man and woman together image God. Both are like him. To know a man and to know a woman is to know something of God.
- We image him not just in our souls, but also in our bodies. Something about our bodies conveys a supernatural truth. It speaks. It has a language. It expresses the nature of the person.
- There is difference from the very beginning. There is man, and there is woman, and we are made for each other. Like corresponding puzzle pieces, we fit. And when we come together, new life results.

Marriage signifies the spousal nature of humanity: We are meant for communion. But ultimately we are meant for communion with only one Spouse. We are all created for communion with God and with the other people around us. We can only find ourselves through the gift of ourselves.

Called to Communion through the Single Life

Single people, like married couples, religious and priests, are also called to be self-gift.

This reality places a special responsibility on single people to discern why they're still single. They have to look past the cultural counterfeits — careers, commitment-free relationships and the pursuit of their own selfish desires and comforts — and see what God really wants from them. They have to seek healing from the wounds inflicted by past relationships, and maybe death or divorce.

As they move through the discernment process, single people need to heed the call to ongoing conversion, making a gift of their life each

day to God and trusting God even in the darkest times, when no easy answers to their single state present themselves and when the absence of a spouse leaves them struggling with loneliness and unfulfilled desires.

Single people must consent to what they possibly did not choose—divorce, being widowed, or just never meeting the right person to marry. The acceptance of unwanted singlehood is one of the most important ways single people can die to themselves and make a gift of their life to God. Single people need to seek out opportunities to live selflessly.

Through small acts of kindness to strangers, service to friends, and apostolate work among those in need, single people can put their bodies, as well as their souls, in love's service.

Married people put their spouses first, the celibate puts God first. For the single, the next person who crosses their path is the person to put first. That's who Christ is asking single people to give themselves to. That's how they love Jesus.

Questions to discuss

- How does this explanation of the single life affect my way of looking at myself and my situation.

Called to Communion in Marriage

This is a well-known but poorly understood passage of Scripture. Encourage your participants to hear it read without making any judgements and to try not to get stuck on the 'husband is the head' sentence and so fail to really hear the rest of the passage.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:23-33 (Read aloud slowly)

For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendour, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church, because we are members of his body “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Reflection:

St Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, offers a dignifying and practical blueprint for husbands and wives. He is not sanctioning dominance, but calls both husband and wife to mutual self-donation – obedience to Christ means that we seek His will and that is that spouses be united as one body. The husband surrenders to his wife and the wife to her husband. St Paul then quotes Genesis “For this reason...the two become one body” and he declares that the mystery “applies to Christ and the Church” The love between a husband and a wife images and reveals the love between Christ and the Church – that’s why it is a Sacrament.

This mystery is recalled and repeated every day in the Mass. The Eucharist is Christ giving his body and shedding his blood for His bride, the Church. When we take the body and blood of Jesus and consume it, his body and blood mingles with our own and we become one flesh with him. This is what happens in the sexual union of husband and wife, who say with their bodies – “Take, this is my body I give it to you”.

Without the witness of married couples, our understanding of God is more legalistic than relational, more benevolent than intimate. Married couples teach the Church about the total self-donation of Christ, by the way they love each other. Jesus love for us is personal and intimate, it is total, life-giving, faithful and urgent - just like the love of husband and wife.

Questions to discuss

- Is this the image of marriage that we as married couples live out?
- Is this the image of marriage that we teach to our young people?

Called to Communion through Consecration - Consecrated (Religious) Life

Our ultimate relationship with God himself is meant to be spousal. It also, in a sense, is meant to be virginal.

Virginity means to be totally God's, body and soul. In heaven we will all be married, but we also will all be virgins.

The vocation of religious life speaks to both those destinies. On earth, the religious give themselves body and soul to God, as virgins and brides. Christ is their spouse in the here and now, not just in eternity - and they live their life for him. No one else can claim them or call them their own. That is why religious life is not a sacrament. Consecrated people are already living this reality.

Consecrated persons make a gift of themselves to their community, family, friends and the people they serve. It also reminds them, that just as husbands and wives give themselves exclusively, body and soul, to one another, they must make the same gift to Christ.

Celibacy is not just about being freed up to serve it's about being in an exclusive love relationship with Jesus.

This understanding of religious life also helps religious understand that they're not denying their body through a perpetual vow of

chastity. They're not pretending they don't have a body - rather they're giving it to God.

This gift is similar to the "yes" spouses give to each other. Although they, when they marry, in effect say "no" to sexual intimacy with every other person, they're not thinking about the "no." They're thinking about the "yes" and all that entails.

That "yes" to God for the Consecrated is also a "yes" to spiritual parenthood. And that isn't a lesser parenthood or a consolation prize for those who don't have biological children. Rather, spiritual parenthood is real motherhood and fatherhood, because ultimately what gives us life, is life in the Spirit.

Questions to discuss

- Are we offering this vision of the Consecrated life to our Parish?
- Do we see this lived out by the consecrated persons in our Parish?

Going Forward

We strongly recommend that the group arranges a retreat to complete this Ecclesia Season, either just as a small group or as part of a Parish retreat. Continuing to meet to reflect on the Sunday Gospels is an additional option for the group.

Closing Prayer.

Lord help us to answer your call to become a living sign of your love. Make our love for each other as spouses, our love for others as singles, be like your love for us – passionate and permanent, intimate and life-giving, always unconditional.

May we be present to our brothers and sisters, our spouses, as you are to us. Help us to stay close to you and to one another in the Body of Christ – the Church.

Nourish us always through the Sacraments. Amen

