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# Who is Jesus Christ? How can his life help me to lead mine? What is the Bible? Why do Catholics do the things they do?

WHO ... WHAT ... WHY ... HOW ... WHEN

**THE BOOK YOU HAVE IN YOUR HANDS** has been a helpful guide for more than 35,000 people who have had similar questions. For over thirty years *At Home with God's People* has met the needs of individuals and groups. It has now been revised and adapted to best meet those needs in changing times. Like all tools it is important to use this resource in an appropriate manner for the task at hand. *Please read the section below that best describes your situation.*

## Are you interested in Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church?

This book explores both the life of Jesus, who lived and breathed as a person just like us, and the tradition which continues in his name. Jesus, sent by God the Father to save us, offers the world hope through his life, death and resurrection. Jesus remains a living presence among us through the Holy Spirit and empowers us for Christian discipleship.

Through these pages you will uncover how the early Christian community grew and responded to the problems and issues of the world. Today the Catholic Church provides a community of faith for its members to worship God and equips them for Christian mission in the world.

## Do you want a deeper understanding of your faith?

*At Home with God's People* presents a concise overview of the teachings of the Catholic Church. The material provides an excellent resource for personal reflection, reading and praying. It may be used in a variety of ways to assist you to: deepen your understanding of your faith; grow

in your relationship with God; and be informed and transformed for ministry and mission.

It may also be the foundation for a small group study program. A group could plan to work through topics appropriate to their specific learning needs, e.g. a sacramental preparation team might focus on the topics relating to sacraments. Be aware of the limits and demands on the participants' time – plan for a five session program with the option of negotiating the next 'program' at the last meeting.

For the group leader a book such as *Facilitating for Growth* by Barbara Fleischer (Liturgical Press) is an excellent guide to equip leaders for their role. Effective leadership enables a group to come together to help one another integrate the Christian story and its vision with their own stories and ideals (p22).

## Are you a catechumen in the RCIA?

This resource may be of assistance to you in the Catechumenate phase of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. It is important to remember however that this is only one resource for this phase of your faith journey. This resource is *not* the 'program to become a Catholic'! There is much wisdom in an old adage: 'faith is caught, not taught'. Central

to your journey during this period is your active participation in the local worshipping community and reflection on the Sunday scriptures.

The Catechumenate period is sometimes seen as an 'apprenticeship' into the Christian life during which you will: *learn to turn more readily to God in prayer; to bear witness to the faith ... to keep [your] hopes set on Christ ... and to practise love of neighbour* (RCIA no 75 adapted). One objective of this period is to provide you with an appropriate acquaintance ... with the precepts and teachings of the Catholic Church (RCIA no 75). *At Home with God's People* is one means, or tool, to do that. While the topics in the book are presented in a logical order, please do not feel restricted by this sequence. If a topic is of interest to you, or addresses a specific question or need you have, then go to that section of the book.

## Are you are a catechist?

This book provides useful reference material on the teachings of the Catholic Church. To supplement this book please visit the *At Home with God's People* web site: [www.ahwgp.com](http://www.ahwgp.com). The site provides useful background material ('Resources' tab) for the topics in the book, e.g. web sites and further reading. The site also contains an outline of a 'Catechist role description' for this very significant phase on the journey of faith.

However the best guide is the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. In Australia the Rites have been published by St Paul's Publications and are available in hardback

and a study edition. Paragraphs 75-80 cover the Period of the Catechumenate (the period when *At Home with God's People* may be a useful resource). Paragraph 78 is very pertinent to your role: *The instruction that the catechumens receive during this period should be of a kind that while presenting Catholic teaching in its entirety also enlightens faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ.*

*At Home with God's People* provides participants with suggested questions for reflection and discussion. While these may be helpful in the early stages of the group to generate sharing, they are no substitute for the catechumens' own questions, enquiries and concerns.

One of your key roles in the group is to be a facilitator – one who 'makes easy' the work of the group. As a facilitator you will always be adapting the content and process to suit the needs and requirements of the participants. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

The primary purpose of the Catechumenate phase is formation in the Christian life, not information about Christianity. Use whatever resources are appropriate and available. Check out if your parish or diocese has audio-visual resources you can borrow. Inform the catechumens about any adult faith education presentations in the parish or diocese that may be helpful for

their on-going faith formation. Encourage participants to experience various aspects of the mission and social action of the parish, e.g. Care and Concern group, St Vincent de Paul Society, Social Justice group.

### Are you a member of the parish RCIA team?

The analogy of a railway may be helpful. It is tempting to think of the role of the RCIA team as the 'Controller' – efficiently directing traffic, making sure timetables are printed, ensuring trains run on time and that platforms are tidy. However this is to deny the truth that we are in fact a pilgrim church and we take the 'conversion journey' together. Perhaps a better analogy is that of the 'Conductor'. He or she makes the same trip as the passengers and shares with them the same steep climbs, deep gorges, long tunnels and glorious vistas.

With open hands and hearts the team – along with catechists, sponsors and the whole parish community – approach this period not with a 'subject' to be transmitted, but with a deep humility and openness to the encounter of mutual conversion.

As 'Conductor' we allow ourselves to be a channel for God's grace, transforming love, peace and reconciliation. Paragraph 1 of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* outlines a vision that *after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, Catechumens seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their heart.*

As members of the team it is essential that you are clear about vision, purpose, intention and process. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is your 'guidebook'. For example when you are clear about the purpose of each period of the Catechumenate it will be obvious that a catechesis resource such as *At Home with God's People* will not be appropriate for Lent or Mystagoga.

Books such as *The RCIA Team Book* (Evangelisation Brisbane) can be beneficial resources to provide practical information about specific roles, pastoral principles, planning outlines and practical strategies for each period of the Catechumenate.

The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* is intended for those who are unbaptised. Part II of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* provides pastoral guidelines for those people already baptised who express interest in becoming Catholic. Paragraph 391 directs that: *The baptised Christian is to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church.*

The key phrase here is 'adapted to individual pastoral requirements'. For example a candidate who has been a regular church-goer may already be very familiar with the Creed and the Bible. In a situation such as this the team, with the catechist, and in dialogue with the candidate, would determine a process of formation that respects the candidate's journey of faith and current needs. In this way, *The rite is arranged so that no greater burden than necessary (see Acts 15:28) is required for the establishment of communion and unity (387).*

### How will this resource help me?

The material in this resource has been prepared to help you and the group do some important things.

It gives you an opportunity to pause and reflect on your life – on who you are, where you've come from and where you'd like to go. Our culture doesn't seem to encourage this kind of reflection, but it's very necessary if we are to grow in our lives.

It also gives you opportunities to share your reflections in a group of like-minded people, and to listen to their own thoughtful reflections.

This reflecting and sharing, together with the teaching that's given, will be a great help to you as you strive to:

- deepen your awareness of God,
- grow in faith, and
- learn from one another about the richness of that faith.

It also gives you many opportunities to pray.

Take all of these opportunities with open arms; prayer deepens our faith as we become more and more aware of God's loving presence and activity in our lives.

### What can I do to prepare for each session?

To help you do all this you are invited to:

1. Spend some time in preparation in the days before each meeting. (If you can find a regular time and place to do this, so much the better, though that may be difficult at times.)
  - Spend time on the *Reflect* points (e.g. p9) and *Share* questions (e.g. p16) that are suggested for the topic. When reflecting on your own experience write down any ideas or questions that come to you.
  - In the *Listen* part, be sure to take time to look up in your Bible the Scripture references given and reflect prayerfully on them. Being 'at home with God's word' is a key element of being 'at home with God's people'.
  - Spend time, too, on the *Pray* suggestions that are given. (If you have other ways of praying that are not mentioned here, use them too).
  - As you read the chapter, pause if an image, phrase or idea resonates with you. Underline or highlight words or sections that evoke a reaction or emotion or echo in your heart. You may choose to mark the text with symbols such as:

- ✓ 'This is good ... I like this'
- ? 'This is a new insight, it is quite challenging'
- ... 'I need to give this some thought'
- ! 'This is similar to my experience'

2. Bring your reflections, questions and prayers to the group and share them, then be attentive to the ideas and insights that others have to share.

Two suggested 'rules':

- only share what you're prepared to share;
- treat what others share in the group with strict confidentiality.

3. After the insights are shared, tune in to any further teaching (or catechesis) that the leader may see is helpful.





## What is my part in the group?

During the meeting it will help you (and the group) if you are:

### Open.

Your questions and insights are worthwhile, so don't keep them bottled up. The only 'dumb' question is the unspoken one!

### Attentive.

Your contributions are important, but so are those of the others in the group.

If you are attentive to the wisdom in the group, you won't be taking up too much of the 'air-time'.

### Respectful.

One of the strengths of the group is the differences that exist among its members. There will be different stories, different opinions, different basic attitudes to issues.

If you have a respectful love for each of the others, you will be better able to 'hear' what they are saying, even if you may disagree.

### Careful.

It is vital to respect the confidentiality of the group.

### Prayerful.

Prayer is not so much our talking to God to remind God of our needs, as it is our becoming more aware of the fact that God is always present to us and active in our lives.

This awareness of God's loving presence can also be a great help in our becoming more loving to others. (God is present and active in their lives, too. God dwells in each of us.)

### Punctual!

Each member of the group has left something important behind to be with the group. It's a sign of your regard for them and what they've left behind to be there on time.

It also helps people to organise things 'back home' if they know that the group meetings will finish on time.

The Canadian Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan – one of the best thinkers of our time – once said:

*To fulfil the demands of the human spirit, we need to be:*

*attentive,  
intelligent,  
reasonable,  
responsible,  
and in love.*

That is a useful guide for your being a part of the group.

Finally, as you use this resource on your journey may the Spirit comfort and inspire you, and may your learning, sharing and praying be a source of healing and strengthening for you on your way to becoming *at home with God's people*.



For additional resources visit the *At Home with God's People* web site: [www.ahwgp.com](http://www.ahwgp.com)

## REFLECT

Part of being human is to be always searching for happiness – for what may be good or true or beautiful for us.

The name we give to that dream of ultimate happiness or goodness or beauty is 'God'. Your own search for God has brought you to where you are now, reading these words.

As part of the searching, spend some time reflecting on these questions.

- Can you recall something that was a real help to you in your search for God? Perhaps a particular event ... a conversation ... a book ... a person ... a thought that struck you. Remember it. Remember what a difference it made to you.
- Part of the Catholic belief is that God is always present and lovingly active in our lives, whether we're aware of it or not. Do you think God was present in the times you remembered in the previous reflection? Where do you think God is present in your life now? What do you think God is calling you to, right now?

## LISTEN

You may use one of these readings for several days; you may choose a different one each day.

Open your heart to the Spirit of God. Read. Listen. Pray.

- Psalm 8. A song in praise of God the Creator.
- Psalm 13. A confident appeal to God.
- Psalm 19:1-6. *The heavens are telling the glory of God.*
- Psalm 103. God is love and compassion. And John 1:35-39. *Come and see.*



## PRAY

- Find a place, and make some time when you can be still. Relax and gently follow your breathing for a little while. Become still. Let your thoughts return to one of the times when you felt you had 'found' God in your life. Talk to God in your heart about that time and what it meant to you. Say 'thank you, God' as often as you like.
- If you find yourself thinking about some of the others in your group, you might imagine yourself placing them in God's loving hands, and say 'God bless ...' You can do this as often as you like. Don't forget to put yourself there, too. 'God bless me'.

## WORSHIP

Notice the variety of people gathered for Mass in your parish this Sunday. Each one is on his or her own journey of faith, of growing closer to God.

Ask your sponsor to share some of his or her journey with you.