

“Preparing a way for the Lord”



A four week Advent programme
for Young Adults

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INTRODUCTION

ADVENT

Advent represents the beginning of the Church's liturgical year and a time for us as Christians to prepare spiritually for the coming of Jesus. It is therefore, a season of joyful hope and a time of new beginning for all. Just as the expectant parents prepare the nursery for the arrival of their new baby, we too must prepare for the coming of the Lord.

In this Advent programme we are called to look at the many ways we approach the Christmas season. The sessions are laid out in a particular way. Using the method of See-Judge-Act, devised by Joseph Cardijn, founder of the Young Christian Workers Movement (YCW), each session looks at a different theme/issue relating to Advent and Christmas. Over the next four weeks this method will help us look at a particular issue, reflect on it and take action to bring about change in our lives.

As far as possible, each session should be led/guided by a different member of the group each week. If the group is coming together specifically for this programme it would be best if the first session was led by the facilitator or person responsible for bringing the group together. This person will initially take the lead in making sure the group gets off the ground. Once the group gets over the first meeting, responsibility should then be shared amongst the members.

The programme is made up of four sessions.

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| Session 1. | Preparation for Advent |
| Session 2. | The Visitation |
| Session 3. | Céad mile Failte |
| Session 4. | Liturgy of the Word |

GETTING STARTED

A note for the facilitator

It is important that the person, or persons, responsible for the group meet together before each session to familiarise themselves with the programme and go through the particular session for the evening.

If the group is coming together for the first time, it may be best for the facilitator to lead the first session, after this try to encourage someone from the group to take the lead for the following week. This person should then meet with the facilitator beforehand to prepare and plan.

The sessions are laid out in a particular way to help encourage the group to discuss a specific topic related to the Advent season, to reflect on that topic and how it relates to their everyday life and to come up with an action. We call this the See-Judge-Act method.

Hints for successful meetings:

This programme runs over four sessions, that means that for four weeks the group will come together on a weekly basis. It is important therefore when they do meet that things run as smoothly as possible. Preparation is the key to success. Some points to remember;

- Keep the size of the group between 5-12 people, this way everyone gets an opportunity to get involved.
- Keep in mind that you are organising a meeting not an activity. Meet in a comfortable place with a table, chairs and facilities for making tea or coffee after each session.
- Always have a start and finishing time.
- Make sure each person is given the opportunity to participate. Try not let one or two people dominate.
- At the end of each session make sure that there is someone organised to lead the following weeks meeting. This person should meet with the facilitator beforehand in order to prepare.

SESSION 1.

The first meeting should start with a basic introduction. The facilitator should take this opportunity to welcome everybody and introduce the programme, using the general introduction at the beginning of this book. Ask each person to introduce themselves by telling their name, age, where they live etc...

They could also say why/how they came to take part in this programme and what they hope to get out of it.

(Depending on the size of the group, this could be done by getting the group to chat in pairs, with each person reporting back to the group information about their partner).

Once everyone has been introduced, the facilitator introduces the first session entitled "Preparing for Advent".

Introduction: Preparation is an essential part of every day life. We make plans and prepare for the events that are important to us. We prepare to go out, to meet up with friends and in a special way for exams and interviews. Advent is a special time of preparation for Christmas. It is a time of planning and preparing for the coming of the Lord. It is also a time for hurrying around shops, saving for gifts for the ones we love and generally getting caught up in the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season.

This enquiry helps us to look at how we prepare for Christmas.

Enquiry: Preparing for Advent

1. Can we each explain what the season of Advent means to us personally?
2. At what stage during the year did you start thinking or planning for Christmas? What made you think of Christmas at that time?
3. Do you feel it is hard to fight against the secularisation or commercialism of Christmas?
4. Do you feel shops and businesses have a responsibility to keep Christ at the centre of Advent and Christmas?
5. Do you feel your Church does enough to promote the season of Advent as a time of preparation for Christmas?
6. What would you like to see your Parish do/provide to help make Advent a real time of preparation for Christmas?
7. How can we make this season of Advent a special time of preparation for the birth of Jesus and keep the real spirit of Christmas alive in our own lives?



Ideas for Action

- Along with all the Christmas decorations this year, why not put up a religious symbol like a crib or an Advent wreath?
- Why not talk to the parish about organising a special youth retreat?
- Make a conscious decision to include Christ in your Christmas celebrations and not lose sight of the real meaning of Christmas.

Before we finish up this week's session, would someone agree to lead the next session? This involves meeting with the facilitator beforehand in order to prepare.

And Finally...

Christmas is a time for giving and receiving. Can each person write their name on a piece of paper, fold it and place in the centre of the table. (These should then be jumbled up). Invite each member of the group to pick a piece of paper from the table. Without disclosing the name, they should then buy/make a small gift of no more than €5.00 for the person whose name they have chosen. The gift should be something which for them represents the true meaning of Christmas or reflects the personality of the person. These gifts can then be distributed (with an explanation) during the liturgy in our last session.

Tea & Coffee

SESSION 2.

Welcome and introduction of session.

The person responsible for leading tonight's session reads out the following passage and gives the background information provided.

The Visitation. Lk.1:26-38

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. He went and said to her "Rejoice, so highly favoured! The Lord is with you." She was deeply disturbed by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean, but the angel said to her, "Mary do not be afraid; you have won God's favour. Listen! You are to conceive and bear a son, and you must name him Jesus. He will be great and be called Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob forever and his reign will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "But how can this come about, since I am a virgin?" "The Holy Spirit will come upon you" the angel answered "and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so the child will be holy and will be called Son of God. Know this too: your kinswoman Elizabeth has, in her old age, herself conceived a son, and she whom people called barren is now in her sixth month, for nothing is impossible to God." "I am the handmaid of the Lord," said Mary "let what you have said be done to me." And the angel left her.

Background: The angel Gabriel was a messenger of God who was also referred to a number of times in the Old Testament. Mary was a very ordinary girl, yes she was religious, but poor and not very well educated. Perhaps the most striking sentence in the passage comes at the very end, "And the angel left her".

1. Can we each say what our reaction is to this Gospel passage?
2. What do you think Mary's reaction was to Gabriel's news?
3. What insights into Mary as a person do we get from this passage? (In relation to her faith, bravery or commitment).
4. Do you feel Mary had a choice in this situation? Could she really have said no?
5. What does it mean to be a Christian in today society? Is it easy to say "yes" to Christ today?
6. Through Baptism we have all been given a vocation to live as Christians? How do you feel you live up to this call?

7. Do we feel we separate our everyday life from our Faith life? Is there a difference?
8. Mary's "Yes" had many implications, she was rejected by the Jews and had to suffer seeing her son crucified? What are the challenges facing us as young people today living out our Christian faith?



Ideas for Action

- Look at your everyday life and see where you can be more Christian in the way you relate to others at home, in your workplace and social life.
- You could say "Yes" by getting involved in the life of your Church/parish. There are many things to join or why not start something yourself.

Can we have a volunteer to lead next week's session?

Tea & Coffee.

SESSION 3.

Welcome and introduction of session.

The person responsible for this evening's session reads out the following passage, giving the background information provided.

The birth of Jesus. luke 2:1-14

At that time the Emperor Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Roman Empire. When this first census took place, Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Everyone, then, went to register himself, each to his own town.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to the town of Bethlehem in Judaea, the birthplace of King David. Joseph went there because he was a descendant of David. He went to register with Mary, who was promised in marriage to him. She was pregnant, and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, as there was no room for them to stay in the inn.

Background: In order for the census to be carried out each person had to return to his or her own town to be registered. This meant that there were a lot of people on the move, hence the reason why the Inn was full.

Enquiry: "Céad mile Failte"

1. How do you think Joseph and Mary felt having made the journey to Bethlehem to find that there was no place for them to stay at the Inn?
2. Was it right that Mary, about to give birth, should have been given accommodation in a Stable?
3. Because there was no room at the Inn, the Inn Keeper sent Joseph and Mary to the stable. How do you think the Inn keeper acted towards the couple?
4. In today's society people are still on the move, some for very serious reasons such as war, famine or persecution in their own countries. How do you think they feel when they arrive in Ireland, is the welcome they receive any different to that experienced by the Holy Family?
5. Have you ever witnessed people being treated differently because of their skin colour, religion, where they come from or how they dress? (Can we give examples?)
6. How do you think those on the receiving end felt?

7. Is it right to treat people differently because they do not look like or speak like us or even believe in the same things we believe in? How should they be treated?
8. During this Christmas season, how can we extend a warm welcome to those seeking refuge in this country? Is there anything that we can say or do to make people feel more welcome?



Ideas for Action

- We may not be able to change societies attitude towards others but we can change our own. Try not to discriminate against others because they are different.
- Find out more about the reasons why people come to Ireland seeking refuge. Perhaps invite a speaker on the subject to visit your group.

Preparation for next weeks liturgy

Next week is our final session. In celebration of the ending of our programme the session will take the form of a group liturgy.

In preparation for the liturgy the following need to taken into consideration:

The Setting

What kind of setting do we want to create?

Will we use candle light, music, singing?

All of these things help to create an atmosphere that is comfortable and intimate and make for an enjoyable event for all concerned.

Readers

You will need to organise;

A reader (there is a reading given but you may want to choose your own). It would be a good idea for each person to have a copy of the reading in order to prepare any reflections which they may wish to share with the group.

The prayers of the faithful (again these are provided but feel free to make up your own. For this you will need more than one person)

A liturgical leader – this does not have to be a priest or religious, someone from the group could take on to keep things moving from one thing to another. (This is basically the continuity person.)

Don't forget to bring along your gifts and explanation for the exchange of gifts.

Note

Following the liturgy there is an evaluation sheet which should be copied and completed by each member of the group. These should then be forwarded to the YCW National Office.

SESSION 4.

Our last session takes the form of a group liturgy.

Opening Prayer

Lord as we come to this our last session, we have shared many insights into the scriptures and many experiences from our everyday lives. Help us to keep you always at the centre of our Advent and Christmas seasons.

We make this our prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

A reading from the first letter of St. John

Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; and that is what we are.

Because the world refused to acknowledge him, therefore it does not acknowledge us. My dear people, we are already the children of God but what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed, all we know is, that when it is revealed we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is.

My dear people, if we cannot be condemned by our own conscience, we need not be afraid in God's presence, and whatever we ask him, we shall receive, because we keep his commandments and live the kind of life that he wants.

His commandments are these:

That we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and that we love one another as he told us to.

Whoever keeps his commandments lives in God and God lives in him. We know that he lives in us by the Spirit that he has given us.

This is the word of the Lord.

Reflections

Each person is invited to offer their personal reflections on the reading or the time spent together as a group.

Prayers of intercession: (prayers are provided but feel free to make up your own prayers that are related to what has been discussed within the group).

Lord,

Christmas is a time for giving and receiving. Please give us the wisdom to see beneath these gestures to the real meaning behind each gift and not to value the worth of the present itself.

Lord hear us.

Dear Lord,

When Mary was invited to become the mother of Jesus she said yes with an open heart. May we too have the courage to say yes when you ask us to be a witness to your love.

Lord hear us.

Jesus was born in a stable as his parents were turned away from every door. This Christmas let us not shut people out because it is inconvenient or they are different. May we welcome all who are in need as represent for us the Holy Family.

Lord hear us.

Exchange of Gifts.

Going around the members of the group, each person in turn presents their gift to the person whose name they chose at the end of our first session, giving an explanation as to why they chose that particular gift. (Perhaps it reflected for them the real meaning of Christmas or reminded them of something that the person said during the programme or something that reflects their personality).

(When all gifts have been given, the liturgical leader continues)

We give thanks to the Lord for the gifts we have received, the meaning behind them and the time we have shared in this group as we say

Our Father who art in heaven

Concluding prayer

Lord as we celebrate your birth in the season of Christmas, we thank you for sharing in our humanity. We don't always find it easy to follow you in our everyday lives but we know you are there to support and help us always.

As this group moves forward we pray that each of us will be better able to answer your call. We make this our prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

About YCW

Mission Statement

The Young Christian Workers Movement is an international youth movement which values the dignity and worth of each young person. It enables its members to challenge social exclusion and take action to bring about change in their home, workplace and social life.

Guiding Principles

- As a Christian movement, the YCW promotes Christian values.
- The YCW is a movement **of** young people, **for** young people, **run by** young people.
- The YCW strives towards each person fulfilling their potential and through the unique method of YCW, See-Judge-Act, making real changes in their lives.

Aims

- To examine the underlying causes and consequences of social injustice.
- To challenge the existing structures on those issues.
- To develop the members of YCW in a holistic way.
- To achieve change in the individual and their environs and to activate others to take action.

What is so good about YCW?

In addition to the fact that YCW is organised by the members themselves there are three other good reasons for being involved:

- It is a chance to take action to improve the local community and wider society.
- YCW helps to develop the confidence, social skills, faith and social awareness of the young people it touches.
- YCW helps young people meet new friends from all over the country and world-wide, through its actions, meetings, training events, holidays and social occasions. YCW is an enjoyable worthwhile experience.

International

YCW is presently active in over 100 countries and every continent with more than 3 million members.

Over the past seventy years it has been a dynamic force for change as it expanded throughout the world.

YCW welcomes all young people as members irrespective of whether they are members of a faith community or not.

If you would like to know more about YCW and other programmes available then please contact us at:

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