



National Bible Week 2015

THE BIBLE: A BOOK FOR THE FAMILY

Reading and Understanding the Bible

Purpose

The purpose of this adult faith formation session is to acquaint the participants with the organization and formation of the Bible and to offer tools for reading, understanding, and teaching about the Scriptures as the Word of God. This in-service will take 90 minutes but can be expanded by using the optional activities.

Materials Needed

- Tables and chairs, arranged for groups of 4-6 participants
- Bibles (*New American Bible*, revised edition) for each participant's use (or ask each participant to bring a Bible from home)
- One smaller table (card-table size)
- Book stand, covered with a colorful or liturgical cloth, for the enthronement of the Bible or Lectionary
- One or two candles and candle holders to place on either side of the enthroned Scriptures
- Chalkboard or overhead projector
- Two small chairs
- Tape or CD player and appropriate religious music
- Hymnals for the participants to use during the opening prayer service
- Copies of the articles by Hahn, Milinovich, Viviano, and Williamson (See www.usccb.org/bible/nationalbibleweek.cfm)
- Table with refreshments
- Copies of outline of opening prayer service and schedule of the in-service
- Podium or small table for the presenter
- Microphone, if needed

Schedule

- Welcome and greetings (5 minutes)
- Prayer service—enthronement of the Scriptures: Procession, opening prayer, readings, Lord's Prayer, and blessing (15 minutes)
- First activity (30 minutes)
- Break (10 minutes)
- Second activity (10 minutes)
- Large-group discussion (15 minutes)
- Closing remarks (5 minutes)
- Optional activity 1 (20 minutes)
- Optional activity 2 (15 minutes)

Preparation

When preparing this in-service, please read the articles by Hahn, Milinovich, Viviano, and Williamson that are found on the National Bible Week webpage. This in-service is based upon these articles.

If finances allow, please print out copies of these articles to distribute to participants *at the end of the meeting*.

For the Prayer Service

- Select a prayer leader, five readers, and a cantor, if possible.
- Ask the leaders, readers, and cantor to prepare their readings and songs.
- Ask the cantor to pick songs from the parish hymnal that are familiar to the participants (see suggestions).
- Drape the cloth over the bookstand on the small table where you will enthrone the Scriptures. The table should be set apart from the podium but be prominently visible to all the participants.
- Construct a handout that outlines the prayer service, and make copies for participants.

Welcome (5 minutes)

Have copies of the schedule and prayer service available at the door as participants sign in. Select people to lead the prayer, read from Scripture, and lead the song (see preparation for the prayer service, above). Have religious music playing softly as people gather.

When it is time to start, welcome everyone. Explain the purpose of the workshop, and review the schedule.

Prayer Service—Enthronement of the Scriptures (15 minutes)

The opening prayer begins with a procession of two candlebearers, the prayer leader, and two lectors, one of whom carries the Bible or Lectionary prominently. If a priest or deacon is available, have him serve as prayer leader and read the Gospel. Invite participants to join in singing the opening song as the procession moves from the back of the room to the covered table.

When the procession has reached the enthrone table, those in the procession should face the other participants until the present verse and refrain of the opening song are finished. The lector reverently places the Scripture on the table stand. All bow before the Scriptures. The readers move to chairs that have been placed off to the side. The candlebearers place the candles on either side of the table and return to their seats among the participants.

The leader begins the opening prayer from the table or podium, using a microphone if necessary. Then the leader steps to a chair off to the side and invites participants to sit.

The lector approaches the table, bows in front of the enthroned Scriptures, picks up the Scriptures, and proclaims the first reading. If a microphone is needed, the lector may proclaim from the podium. When finished, the reader places the Scriptures back on the enthrone table.

The cantor leads a responsorial psalm; if there is no cantor, the people may sing or recite the psalm. Invite participants to sing the refrain from a parish hymnal or printed sheet.

Invite participants to stand for the second reading.

The lector (or priest or deacon) again walks to the table, reverently picks up the Scriptures, and reads the Gospel aloud. When finished, the lector (or priest or deacon) places the Scriptures back on the enthrone table. The participants sit.

Three additional readers now approach the podium. Each one slowly reads an additional reflection from the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (see "Reflective Readings," below).

A period of silence follows.

After a few moments, the leader asks the participants to rise and invites them to recite together the Lord's Prayer.

A final Prayer of Blessing is read by the leader.

The leader and readers process from the front of the room in the same order as they entered at the beginning, leaving the Scriptures enthroned on the table.

If it is safe to do so, leave the candles lit.

Reading Suggestions

- First Reading: Deuteronomy 6:6-9
- Gospel: John 1:1-5, 14:24-25

Reflective Readings

Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, nos. 2, 4, 7 (found online at www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html).

Prayer Suggestions

- *Book of Blessings*, no. 459 (from the "Blessing of Missionaries Sent to Proclaim the Gospel")

- *Book of Blessings*, no. 500: Prayer of Blessing (if a priest is leading the prayer service, he prays the blessing with hands outstretched; a lay leader simply says the blessing as a prayer)

Music Suggestions

Opening Song

- "Your Words Are Spirit and Life" (Bernadette Farrell, OCP)
- "Praise to You, O Christ, Our Savior" (Bernadette Farrell, OCP)
- "Laudate Dominum" (Jacques Berthier, GIA Publications)
- "How Shall We Name God?" (Thomas Troeger, GIA Publications)

Responsorial Psalm

- "O Word of God" (Ricky Manalo, CSP, OCP)
- "Lord, You Have the Words" (David Haas, GIA Publications)

Closing Song

- "Take the Word of God with You" (Christopher Walker, OCP)
- "How Can I Keep from Singing?" (Robert Lowery, GIA Publications)
- "Thuma Mina" (South African, Utryck, Walton Music Corp.)

First Activity (30 minutes)

1. Make a brief presentation (12 minutes) that summarizes the main points from the article "Basics of Biblical Literacy" (Milinovich). Be sure to leave time for questions. Put the main points on an overhead or handout, if possible. The participants should follow the division of books from the table of contents in their Bibles. Be sure to explain the following points:
 - The meaning of the word "canon"
 - The Old Testament division of books, and what each group is generally about (note that some Bibles have only three divisions)

- How the Old Testament was formed, and the approximate dates of books
- When the Old Testament canon was decided by the Jews and by the Catholic Church
- The New Testament division of books and their approximate dates
- Sources of New Testament books and meaning of "synoptic" Gospels
- The final establishment of the canon for the Catholic Church, and the meaning of "deuterocanonical" books

2. Have the participants divide into groups of 3-5 people to discuss the following questions:
 - With which grouping of books, the Old Testament or New Testament, are you most familiar? Least familiar?
 - Which grouping interests you the most? Why?
 - What can you do to find out more about these books?
 - It is said that “the New Testament is baseless without the Old, and the Old Testament is unfulfilled without the New” (“Basics of Biblical Literacy”). Share your understanding of this statement.
- Why (except during certain liturgical seasons) do we read from the Old Testament and New Testament in the Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy?
- Ask each person in the group to share his or her responses to these questions in the small group. If time permits, ask participants to share their responses or general impressions from the small-group discussion aloud.

Break (10 minutes)

Allow time for participants to take refreshment, use the restrooms, socialize, relax, etc. Try to regroup after 10 minutes with a group of thirty or fewer; allow 20 minutes with a larger group.

Second Activity (10 minutes)

Make a brief presentation (13 minutes) that summarizes the main points from the article “The Senses of Scripture” (Viviano). Be sure to leave time for questions. Put the main points on an overhead or handout, if possible. Be sure to include the following points:

- We encounter multiple levels of meaning in interpreting Scripture.
- There are two basic levels or senses of Scripture—literal and spiritual. Both levels are intended by God as Revelation for us to believe.
- The spiritual sense (or *sensus plenior*) is the fuller sense contained in the literal sense.
- The spiritual sense is most often expressed as *typology*: i.e., persons or events in the Old Testament can be seen as “types” of persons or events in the New Testament, because the New Testament is understood by Christians as the fulfillment of the Old Testament.
- The fuller, or spiritual, sense allows the literal meaning to stand while recognizing a new meaning after the revelation of Christ in the New Testament.
- The historical-critical method is used by the Church today in interpreting Scripture.
- This method uses literary form criticism, textual criticism, source criticism, historical context, archeology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, etc. to uncover the meaning intended by the author in its historical and cultural context.

Large-Group Discussion (15 minutes)

On an overhead or handout, write out the following events from the Old Testament, and then ask the group to name a “type,” or similar event or person, in the New Testament that gives the Old Testament passage a fuller meaning. Then ask them what the literal meaning of each passage might be (the words in parentheses below are key to the fuller sense of interpretation).

- The story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his only son: Isaac carries the wood for the sacrifice (Jesus carries his cross); Abraham is told to substitute a lamb caught in the bushes (God the Father’s willingness to sacrifice his only Son)
- The story of Jonah, who is swallowed in the belly of a big fish and is coughed up after three days (Jesus in the tomb, and then his Resurrection)
- The crossing of the waters of the Red Sea, saving the chosen people from the Egyptians (Jesus’ Baptism in the Jordan River)
- The feasting on a lamb by the Jewish families prior to leaving Egypt for the Promised Land, and its continuing celebration by Jewish families in the annual Seder meal (the Last Supper, the institution of the Eucharist, and its continuing celebration in the Mass)
- The journey through the desert to the Promised Land (Jesus’ forty days in the desert)

Closing Remarks (5 minutes)

- Hand out copies of the articles used during this activity.
 - If possible, have a sample of books available for people to borrow for further study, or hand out a list of reference books. Your local religious bookstore would be a resource for this.
 - This is also a good time to recruit people for your Bible study groups.
- Thank and congratulate the participants for choosing to participate in continuing adult faith formation.
 - Close with a brief prayer of thanksgiving (e.g., the Magnificat, Luke 1:46-55).

Optional Activity 1 (20 minutes)

Have copies of recent Sunday readings available for people to use. You might choose to provide copies of the parish's worship aid or to print the readings from www.usccb.org/nab. Form small groups of 4-6 persons. Direct them to read the previous Sunday's first reading and Gospel. Ask them to look for the connections between the two readings. Use the following questions to encourage discussion.

- What is the *sensus plenior* (fuller sense) of the Old Testament reading in the Gospel?
 - What connections can be seen between the readings?
 - What relationship does the second reading, usually from the letters of St. Paul, bear to the Old Testament and Gospel readings for the day?
- After small-group discussion, invite participants to share some of their ideas with the larger group. Follow the same process with the readings for the upcoming Sunday. Invite large-group response and discussion.

Optional Activity 2 (15 minutes)

Ask the participants to reflect on the parts of a newspaper: factual news, editorial page, commentary, advertisements, obituaries, comics, etc. Write on a chalkboard some of the group answers, and add the ones in this list.

Explain the meaning of literary forms as we use them in interpreting the Scriptures. The following notes may be helpful.

- We instinctively assign a level of importance and truth to each form of writing that we recognize as a literary form of our culture. In our culture we have fiction, poetry, history, historical novels, biography, etc.
 - The literary forms of the Scriptures are different because of the culture of both the people writing and those for whom the works are written.
 - Understanding the literary form of the books of Scripture enables us to understand the human author's intention and assign a level of importance and factual truth to the words.
 - Everything in the Bible is true, but not everything is factual. Understanding the literary forms used by the human authors of Scripture helps us to understand this statement.
- The Scriptures are true because they are the Word of God in the words of the human author. Yet the human authors of the Near Eastern culture did not always use fact (as we understand it) to communicate the religious truth they wanted to record.
 - Here are some of the literary forms used in the Old Testament: proverb, legend, myth, prophecy, court history, psalm, covenant, narrative, parable, epic.
 - Knowing how these literary forms are used helps us to interpret what religious message the human author was communicating to us and what revealed truth God intended for us to know.