

CONTEMPLATIVE THEOLOGY GROUPS

ANSWERS TO SOME QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE



IT'S NOT JUST A MEETING.
LIVING UNITED
IS A CALL TO ACTION. TO LEAD. PARTICIPATE.
CONNECT.
THEY AREN'T ONE MORE THING TO DO.
SMALL GROUPS
ARE THE THING TO DO.
SMALL GROUPS ARE DOING LIFE TOGETHER.

NOVEMBER 2017

Contemplative Theology

Contemplative Theology Groups

1. What is *Contemplative Theology* (CT)?

Broadly speaking, *Theology* can be defined, simply, as St. Anselm famously put it: “faith seeking understanding”. This brief definition is perfectly compatible with what is described in point 236 of (the English edition of) the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Contemplative Theology (CT) is, metaphorically speaking, doing Theology "on our knees"; this is, seeking "understanding" on God's revelation, while we immerse ourselves in prayer.

2. What would *Contemplative Theology* (CT) groups do?

Contemplative Theology (CT) Groups offer a platform in which members of the diocese might engage in theological reflection.

CT groups would meet, regularly and in their respective parishes, to deepen the Truth that our Church treasures, in light of the Holy Scriptures, the Magisterium, and the precious intervention “here and now” of the Holy Spirit in contemplation.

By practicing CT, we recognize that we seek understanding with our heads, and we thirst for conversion in our hearts.

3. Does Motherwell Diocese – and Bishop Toal – support the formation of *Contemplative Theology* (CT) groups?

The creation of CT groups is the Motherwell Diocese response to the papal calls for the new evangelization, in line with Bishop Toal’s initiative.

Bishop Toal encourages us to have a deeper experience of the diocese as “local church,” the primary place where we receive and promote the new evangelization; and to “be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind.” (Philippians 2.2)

The Diocesan Curia has been rearranged so that the various departments – Marriage and Family Life, Youth, RCIA, Faith-Sharing, School Retreats and Adult Catechesis –, now belong together to the Office of *Mission and Evangelization*. This is to foster a deep sense of co-operation and collaboration in all ministries, both at diocesan and parish level.

4. What moves us to form groups dedicated to *Contemplative Theology* at parish level?

- To infuse this theological activity with contemplative prayer so that we allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit. “Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is He who “helps us in our weakness” (*Rom 8:26*). “The Holy Spirit knows well what is needed in every time and place. (...) This is what it means to be mysteriously fruitful!” (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 280)
- To identify fresh ways to proclaim the Good News of Christ and the Kingdom of God in the diocese of Motherwell. “The Church’s roots are in the teaching of the apostles, the authentic witnesses of Christ. (...) Then, let us rediscover today all the beauty and responsibility of being the Church apostolic! And remember this: the Church is apostolic because we pray—our first duty—and because we proclaim the Gospel by our life and by our words.” (Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*)
- "To this end, it is more necessary than ever for all the faithful to move from a faith of habit, sustained perhaps by social context alone, to a faith which is conscious and personally lived. The renewal of faith will always be the best way to lead others to the Truth that is Christ." (St John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America*, no. 73)

5. What’s the theme / material CT groups can work on, during this (liturgical/academic) year?

5.1. The Paschal Mystery

In Christian theology the term “*Paschal Mystery*” refers to Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and their saving significance for us. Paul reminds Christians that the core of their faith concerns Jesus’ death and resurrection and that, whatever genuine intellectual wisdom and spiritual gifts they might possess, they are rooted in the mystery of the cross. In bringing these people to Christian faith, Paul had proclaimed to them that the cross of Christ had made possible for them the spiritual benefits of redemption, peace with God, access to God, justification, reconciliation, salvation and so on. In this context, the first Passover was a shadow of even greater realities to come with Christ: “For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7).

The *Paschal Mystery* is proposed as the theme that might be explored throughout this year by the Contemplative Theology groups across the Diocese of Motherwell, in the hope that as a central faith truth, it will attract and draw us to deeper understanding of God’s revelation, through participation and immersion.

A booklet – *Being Catholic Today* – has been produced to cover the main aspects of the *Paschal Mystery* and suggestions for contemplation this year. The booklet contains the christological, trinitarian and ecclesiological vision for what we are doing and so offers a theological framework for subsequent contemplative theology. *Lectio divina* is proposed to lead this exercise of contemplation and discussion. Three meditations are offered.

5.2. How to get it (the booklet)?

The booklet is available online, either via the Diocese website – <http://www.rcdom.org.uk/adult-catechesis-ministry> -, or as a file in the Facebook Contemplative Theology (close) group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1561962143824701/files/> (please note you need to be a member of the group to access this; see question 10 to join in). The leaflet provides suggestions for contemplation and a short text for theological reflections, as well as a set of questions to encourage gentle discussion.

5.3. Who prepared the content of this booklet?

The programme proposed for this year, and entitled *Being Catholic Today*, has been put together by our Vicar Episcopal, Father Thomas Magill.

5.4. What is the timescale for the study of the material?

The theme proposed for this year (the *Paschal Mystery*) can probably be explored and contemplated for a long time, but guide is given to cover three different sections and the time estimated to go through them could be of 6-10 weeks. Groups may adapt this, though, to work through the liturgical or academic year, at their convenience.

5.5. How is it proposed that CT groups work with the provided leaflet?

Each CT group meeting is proposed to last about 90 minutes (1 and ½ hr), and the session/meeting might be divided in three parts.

Part 1: Contemplation. Approx 20 minutes + should be spent in contemplation. This can take the form of Centring prayer, imaginative contemplation, Lectio Divina, etc (see appendix). What is important here is to “be in prayer” rather than “saying prayers”.

Part 2: Theological reflection on the text provided (for that session/meeting). It may be the scripture passage which you’ve prayed with or some other text. The important thing is the need to listen to each other with respect and engage with each other harmoniously. What should be expressed is how the text challenges, confirms, comforts and questions you. The experience should be positive and uplifting, not negative and complaining.

Fresh ways of thinking and useful suggestions will gradually emerge. However, don’t feel that each meeting must produce “practical” results. Take note of what you think is important and then bring that to our next plenary session. One suggestion is that each participant keeps a journal with points noted in the meeting and your own personal reflections recorded. This is much better than having a “minutes” secretary.

Part 3: Conclusion. End the meeting with a short prayer – i.e. Hail Mary, etc.

5.6. How much we have to cover in each meeting?

The theological reflection that follows each text may need more than one meeting, so don't feel the need to hurry. For instance, if in the 1st Meditation, *"The Christian In Christ"*, you find yourselves having time for only some of the questions, don't be tempted to prolong the meeting. At the next meeting, continue where you left off. However, it is important that you experience another Lectio Divina with the text — it will surprise you the new insights you bring after a period of time to the same text.

5.7. Is there any extra material to support discussions/prayers for each of these topics?

It is good if someone in the group prepares in advance and provides extra material that may help the reflection of the central points of the session. Short readings – i.e. a paragraph from the Holy Fathers, the Vatican Council, the Holy Scriptures, the Catechism, etc – will help.

As we make progress, across the diocese, this additional material might be uploaded on the Facebook group, so we can all help each other and enrich our reflections with what we feel might assist us.

5.8. Is it expected to have another theme next liturgical year (after summer)?

In principle, yes; however, although we might be tempted to answer all questions at this stage, perhaps it might be wiser allowing the Holy Spirit to work on us and decide for (or with) us. Let's also draw inspiration from Mary, Mother of Evangelisation: may she intercede for us so that we can acquire the holy audacity needed to see what God wants from us and discover new ways to bring the gift of salvation to us and to everyone around us.

6. What to do if someone wants to form a CT group in their parish/deanery?

Clearly, they should have a conversation with their parish priest. The priest should be informed of this diocese initiative. If they are not, or they would like to hear more from us, please discuss the ideas presented in this paper or give a copy to him. If they need further info, please contact us via the Facebook group or let him know about this source, and encourage him to join. The Adult Catechesis group members will be happy to discuss further and assist.

It might be helpful also if you could encourage or find another parishioner(s) to join you and talk together to the priest. Alternatively, and through the Facebook group, we could look for CT groups already up-and-running near-you, and together we may look for ways to facilitate how to contact your priests and make the first moves to form a small group.

7. Is it expected all parishes form a CT group?

It would be desirable, but perhaps we should be wiser again and let the Holy Spirit guide us on how we move forward. One small step at a time might echo the well known parable of the mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32; Mark 4:30-32; Luke 13:18-19) that we all know.

8. Any practical ideas to run a CT group?

- Once a group is formed (might be just 3 people), it might be helpful to make sure your contact details (mobile number and/or email address) are shared with other members, specially with whom might facilitate these meetings, so they have your details. This would be useful in case meetings need to be re-schedule, someone cannot make it, or anyone wants to communicate something relevant before next meeting.
- If you are in Facebook, please join the close group for Contemplative Theology, so all groups and groups members can be connected across the diocese, encourage on-going feedback and identify any issues that may emerge. See instructions to join in question 10.
- For practical reasons, it might be important to decide who (one or two individuals) might play the role of facilitating your parish CT meetings. Their role would be to make sure everybody is welcomed, material for contemplation and discussion is shared and available, meetings schedule is agreed, timing in the sessions is respected, and all works well. Each meeting, though, could benefit from rotations for this role, although a group facilitator would also be important, in terms of feeding back to the diocese group (if required) and making sure things really happen.
- Some groups in some parishes in the diocese have already started this adventure. The opportunity to engage with them and share experiences is there, by participating in the Facebook group, so please feel free to engage with all. Don't feel it's too late to join in an existing group in your parish, or to form a new group. Any time is good to start: you will get the support from other groups if you let us (the rest) know of your interest.
- It might be that diocese workshops are organised, occasionally, throughout the year; this will be advertised in due course. In any case, a plenary session will hopefully be scheduled in Pentecost 2018, to learn from this first year and to continue asking the Holy Spirit to continue being "the principle evangelizing agent and (...) who makes it possible to understand the words of salvation" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*).
- As an additional support to groups, we would hope to record some audio podcasts – or short videos, if possible –, while doing the same exercise you would be doing in the parish. They will be uploaded on the diocesan website in due course, and sign-posted from our Facebook group. The idea is not to present gold standards of these sessions, as we don't set any, but to facilitate a framework in which we let ourselves «assure the growth of a clear and deep faith... forming mature ecclesial communities... remaking the Christian cloth from the same ecclesial communities» (*Christifideles Laici*).

9. How often should the meetings happen?

Meetings frequency can be decided by the group: it might be thought as a monthly meeting or scheduled every fortnights. Perhaps it would be important to highlight the groups should avoid creating a burden on group members with meetings that become too frequent. Equally, creating a big gap between meetings may also disjoint the overall flow of the initiated theological reflections. Somehow, the group should seek harmony between all members and help each other with the view to grow together in faith and in good understanding of everyone's needs.

10. What's the purpose of the Facebook (close) group and how does it work?

The close group created in Facebook aims to create a live (virtual) community among us all, in Contemplative Theology groups, and be a service to all in the diocese of Motherwell.

Facebook, as one of the most popular social networking services currently available, offers a structure that allows us to support our presence and our interests, share news/events that might be relevant for us in the diocese, and above all stimulate relevant discussions/thoughts among all in one spot.

In a close group, any member can post anything, with the guarantee that only group members have access to read it.

How to join?

You need to have a personal Facebook (FB) profile; then you can either:

- once in FB, search for the group (name): Contemplative Theology; or
- open the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1561962143824701/>; and

Then request to join.

Alternatively, we (any of us at the Mission & Evangelisation, Adult Formation group) can invite you to join, by sending you an email. Please let us know if you rather do this way by sending us an email to missions@rcdom.org.uk.

A final question: what can I, a weak fragile sinner, do? God says to you, Do not be afraid of holiness; do not be afraid to aim high, to let yourself be loved and purified by God; do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Let us be infected by the holiness of God. Every Christian is called to sanctity...; and sanctity does not consist especially in doing extraordinary things, but in allowing God to act. It is the meeting of our weakness with the strength of his grace, it is saving faith in his action that allows us to live in charity, to do everything with joy and humility, for the glory of God and as a service to our neighbour."

Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

