

The Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible Study Program

A Leader's Guide for Implementation

General Considerations

The Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible Study Program Session Plans are written for a facilitator (identified as "Leader" throughout the plans) to use as a guide for small group discussion. This "leadership role" may be held by the same person from week to week or may rotate to other members of the group. Regardless of how this is handled (depending on the dynamics and experience of the members of each group) some considerations for the Leader should remain in focus to ensure the success of the program.

Setting - Whether conducted at the church or in homes, the setting for each session is very important. Strive for informality to enhance the experience for all participants. Being able to see each other (with no one apart from the group) is important for many of the activities. The ability to adjust the lighting and maintain convenient access for the CD player is also important. Every effort should be made to create an atmosphere of inclusion. Unlike traditional Bible study that may emphasize lecture and note taking, this experience should be about sharing with each other; both verbally and emotionally.

Preparation - The leader should always be well prepared. Reading over the "Leader's Guide for Group Discussion" (including all the articles and the related Scripture for each insert) several days ahead of time will ensure that all necessary props and materials are at hand before the session begins. Arrangement for refreshments should be made before the session. It is the leader's responsibility to make sure every participant knows the date, time and location of each session.

Participation – It is the leader's responsibility to ensure that each participant has an equal opportunity to participate in every session. This may involve soliciting a response from time to time from someone who is rather shy or quiet or even making sure the discussion and sharing is not dominated by one or two of the strongest members. It is helpful to stress in the first few meetings that the sessions are designed for all to participate where and when they are comfortable doing so. The wording of most of the questions and the supporting language on the Participant's Worksheet stress the importance of everyone being a part of the discussion. However, only the leader can best control what actually happens.

Schedule – For the Program - The 22 sessions of the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible Study Program are designed so they can be conducted in any order and at any time of the year. This flexibility allows parishes the opportunity to work this program around busy parish or personal calendars. However, for those groups that can follow it, the accompanying syllabus and suggested schedule facilitates the emphasis of each theme at the most fitting times of the liturgical year. For the Sessions – Each session is designed to last 1 hour, 15 minutes. An additional 15 minutes is suggested for fellowship after the session is completed. For convenience and as a tool for the leader to use in keeping the session on schedule, each

discussion or activity is listed with a time limit for completion. Because they are only suggestions, the leader may use her discretion to allow for more or less time depending on the response of the participants to that particular discussion or activity. Every effort should be made to give each activity or discussion an appropriate amount of time and to begin and conclude each session on time.

A Leader's Guide for Using the Session Plans

Each of the twenty-two 90 minute Session Plans contains some elements drawn from the information on the corresponding thematic inserts in the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible. It is critical that each member have a copy of this Bible in hand at each of the sessions. Depending on the theme, some additional elements and or activities (not found in the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible) may be used to enhance the experience for all participants. Following are the details and some explanation of the resources you will find on-line to support your use of this exciting new program.

Leader's Guide for Group Discussion – The Leader's Guide for Group Discussion for each session is designed for use by the **"Leader only."** These pages contain directions for the leader to give and instructions for the leader to follow in accomplishing tasks for the group during each session. In fact, **some plans include exact language for the Leader to use at specific times. At these times, you will find the word "Leader" bolded in front of this text and the exact words underlined.** These session plans for each of the twenty-two themes.

Content Descriptions

Title(s) – Each "Leader's Guide for Group Discussion" is clearly titled corresponding to one of the twenty-two identical titles found on the insert pages of the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible. The Title bar of each Session Plan also includes the name of the song, composer, CD and track location for the corresponding song from the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible Music CD.

Materials Needed - This list contains all the materials that will be needed for that particular session. It is critical that the Leader check this list well in advance of the meeting time to make sure all the participants have what is needed for the session.

Setting the Stage - This reminder for the leader stresses the importance of each participant having a copy of the Participant's Worksheet well in advance of the session. It also is a convenient reminder to the leader to follow up as needed with all participants about any change in the meeting date, time or place. The leader is also reminded that this is a good time to play the corresponding song on the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible Music CD in the background as one part of enhancing the setting.

Warm Up – This optional activity begins each session to help all the participants focus on one area. Usually directly related to the theme, this activity is also valuable in getting the participants to think about the topic of the evening in a creative way. Each leader and/or group should decide on the importance, value or need of the warm-up depending on the dynamics of the relationships in the group.

Opening Discussion – The sessions always open (even before prayer) with the sharing of answers to some general questions regarding the theme. These discussions are designed to provide for the smoothest transition from the socializing and fun of the greeting and warm-ups to the more staid atmosphere of personal sharing and prayer. To make them more relevant, when possible, every attempt should be made to adapt these questions to the circumstances in the lives of the participants.

Opening Prayer – The Opening Prayer is always taken from the "Spiritual Awakening" section of each insert in the Faith-Filled Catholic Women's Bible. It is important to have each participant join in reading this prayer together. It will ensure that all are on the same page for the next discussion with a focus on the Bible as their primary source for the session.

Spiritual Awakening - Recognizing – At this point in the session plan, the leader is encouraged to ask the participants to volunteer to read and pray together each one of the Scriptures that are printed in the "Recognizing" section of "Spiritual Awakening." These are some of the Scriptures (not addressed in the lesson plan) that speak to this same theme that are found throughout the Bible. It is important during this part of the session that an atmosphere of prayer is created during the reading of these passages. Reminding all participants that these passages are to be read slowly and that the group will observe some silence between the reading of each passage will help to create this atmosphere. Asking the participants to volunteer any spontaneous acclamations, prayers, praises or thanksgivings that these passages might inspire will also help to emphasize that together they are "praying the Scriptures."

Spiritual Awakening - Reflecting – This section (or sections) is one of the best opportunities the group will have to do an activity together while sharing their responses with each other. The discussion questions here are designed to encourage each person (and the group as a whole) to reflect on what a specific passage or story and related theme in Scripture means in the context of their lives. It is very important to make sure that all the participants are encouraged and/or have an opportunity to share in these reflections.

Group Prayer – This activity is a cornerstone of the program and very important to the success of each session. In most sessions, there is a Leader's thematic introduction followed by a direction in each prayer for the participants to one-by-one "**enter aloud all individual intentions.**" It is important to stress here that these prayers can be petitions, praises or thanksgivings for anything each member has on her heart. The leader should do everything to make this a comfortable and inviting experience. Reminding all from the very first session on that this "Group Prayer" opportunity will be a part of every session will enhance the comfort level for all.

Closing Prayer – In most cases, text is provided for the closing prayer. However, in some instances, reflections on an article, listening to music or even silence may have been chosen as the format for this experience. Again, maintaining a prayerful atmosphere is key to the success of each session.

Fellowship – Each session ends with a reminder of the importance of fellowship and sharing outside of the context of the lesson. Arrangements should be made in advance for any refreshments that might be a part of this important activity. Music is always encouraged as a background to this final time together.

Participant's Worksheet - A Participant's Worksheet is designed to increase the comfort level and to give every member of the group time to pray and reflect on the themes in advance of the sessions. This handy worksheet includes every question that will be asked at the upcoming session. A challenge to respond to Scripture in a practical way as well as additional verses to turn to during her personal Bible reading also personalizes the piece for each participant

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