



The Reign of God: Transforming Our World

Core Community Meeting

Aim

This material is intended as a reflective prayer experience for the Parish Core Community, as an entry point to a deeper understanding of the reign of God in their own lives and in the life of the world.

Leader's Instructions:

The purpose of this meeting should be communicated to the Core ahead of time, and again at the start of the meeting. Note that, although this is described as a prayer experience, it should not be confined to interior renewal; it would be ideal if, flowing from the reflection and discussion time, one small action for justice could be decided on and moved forward.

Provide an atmosphere of hospitality and welcome (refreshments, music, and so on). Select a meeting space that is comfortable and informal. Set up a ritual table with a candle, and a Bible opened to the reading from Matthew's Gospel (6:9-15).

If you want to use a song for the Opening and Closing Prayers, choose one about the reign or kingdom of God that is familiar to your community. Otherwise, instrumental music may be played softly for a few moments at the beginning of the prayer.

Before the session starts, arrange to have a reader proclaim the gospel (Matthew 6:9-15). In asking people to participate, be aware of diversity and aim for as full inclusion as possible.

Opening Prayer

Leader: Let's take a moment, as we gather, to center ourselves.

I invite you to name in silence what it is that you carry in your heart as you come to this meeting. What are your hopes, fears, anxieties, and dreams? What are the hopes, fears, anxieties, and dreams of your family? Your parish? Your neighborhood? Your world?

(Pause for a few moments of silence.)

As we come together as a Core Community, let's remember that all that we are about today, every moment on our agenda, is helping to hasten the coming of God's reign here and now. Please join now in praying the prayer that Jesus taught us, asking for God's reign to come.

Reflection on the Reading

Leader's Instructions:

Lead the Core Community in praying the *Our Father*.

Reading

Matthew 6:9-15

Leader's Reflection

We pray in the words Jesus taught us, "Your kingdom come." In uttering this prayer, we acknowledge that God's kingdom or reign—initiated by God and proclaimed by Jesus—is present in our midst, yet still in the process of becoming. It is *already* here and *not yet* here.

Jesus' revelation of the reign of God witnesses to a radical new relationship possible between God and the human family, within the family itself, and through all of creation. God's reign calls for a new world order of integrity, wholeness, justice, and peace. As the people of God, it is our mission to further the reign of God, reading the "signs of the times"¹ and living lives that contribute to the transformation of our world.

We are called to follow the Jesus of the gospels, who fully inhabited his world by embracing the wounds and hopes of his time. Jesus' life witnesses to the reality that, the "joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time...are...the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."²

As we move further into Christian discipleship in the reign of God, we are challenged to conversion of heart and the doing of justice as "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel."³ Naming justice as right relationship, we will, through prayer, reflection, and dialogue in small faith communities, more easily recognize the relational aspects of the reign of God.⁴

The Holy Spirit's call to extend God's reign—a radical call to right relationship and transforming our world—leads me to face a hard question, "What am I doing right here and now, and what should I be doing to further God's kingdom?"

Faith Sharing

(Core Handout A)

Leader: Reflect for a few moments on any of these questions related to God's reign at work in your life. The questions reflect personal and community perspectives. Select one or two that you feel most comfortable with and share your insights.

1. Describe what the words *reign* or *kingdom of God* mean to me. In what ways do I feel I am already furthering it in my life?
2. How has my participation in a small Christian community helped me grow in my desire and action for extending God's reign in my family, neighborhood, community, and the world?
3. How can we as a Parish Core Community act more fully to spread the reign of God in the wider community?

Business Meeting Agenda

Leader's Instructions:

You may want to begin this section of the meeting with a discussion of future activities relating to the reign of God in our lives. Determine what is important to the Parish Core Community. Is it a personal goal for individual members? Or a goal to be pursued for the larger community? Or both? Depending on the results of this discussion, select an action(s) from some of the possibilities below or devise your own.

1. Review the previous meeting's minutes and actions.
2. Possible actions to introduce the topic of the reign of God to small Christian communities and the wider parish
 - Arrange for a follow-up session to assess in which direction the Core wants to move, flowing from this experience. Some suggestions follow:
 - Plan a reflection series on additional topics presented in "The Reign of God: Transforming Our World" workshop. (See RENEW International's www.ParishLife.com or use topics specifically chosen by the Core.)
 - Use some of the *IMPACT* Series for faith sharing in your small communities to make the connection between the reign of God and the call to do justice through small Christian communities. See *IMPACT* Series suggested titles: *Beginnings: Human and World Issues*; *Beyond Black & White*; *Civic Responsibility: What's It All About?*; *Discipleship of Nonviolence*; *Embracing Life*; *Hunger in God's World*; *Our Origin Story: Foundations for Ecological Responsibility*; *Make Media Work for You*; *Reflections on "Dead Man Walking"*. (To order by phone: 1-888-433-3221; fax: 908-769-5660; e-mail: Resources@renewintl.org; or web site: <http://www.renewintl.org/Resources/Pages/faithshare.html>)
 - Design a reflection process on parish outreach as an extension of the reign of God. This process can be directed toward one or several groups in the parish: small community leaders, small Christian communities, the entire parish, and so on.
 - Request volunteers. Be certain that the next Core Meeting agenda includes an update on these areas.
 - Provide a guest speaker for an evening of reflection on the reign of God.
 - Establish a parish library of books and tapes on the reign of God, or increase the number of volumes in an existing library.
 - Consult with RENEW International regarding this topic. (Contact Michael Fabian: SCCServices@renewintl.org); (908) 769-5400 ex 144)
 - Consider downloading the RENEW International workshop, "The Reign of God: Transforming Our World," and using it to lead a three-hour session for the Core Community, for small Christian community participants, and/or for the parish at large.
 - Consider additional ways to assist the parish with regard to this topic.
 - Consult with others in the parish who are interested in or working in the area of the reign of God.
 - **Notes:**
 - a) If we want to introduce this topic to the parish (or small Christian communities), we should first consider how and to what extent the parish or small communities experience a need for such a topic. This may take some informal or formal assessment.
 - b) If a decision is made to introduce this topic, the following may be helpful in implementing the decision:
 - How are we going to go about introducing the topic?
By combining a number of small groups into large groups?
By using small groups alone?
 - Who will we call upon to be hosts?

- Should we consult RENEW International to help us organize a workshop and/or run it?

3. Assign tasks to individual members or groups.

4. Continue with other action items to be discussed as part of normal business of the Parish Core Community.

Closing Prayer

Leader's Instructions:

You may want to introduce the Closing Prayer by inviting spontaneous prayers of praise and gratitude. You may want to offer such a prayer specifically related to the theme of the reign of God.

Introduce the Closing Prayer and lead the community into the "Let us pray together" and then a closing song, if you have chosen one.

Leader:

As we prepare to leave and embrace the challenges
of our lives and our world,
let us ask for God's blessing.

Let us pray together:

May God bless us with strength to seek justice. Amen.
May God bless us with wisdom to care for our earth. Amen.
May God bless us with love to bring forth new life. Amen.⁵

(Core Handout A)

¹ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)*, 4.

² *Ibid.*, 1.

³ Excerpt from *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish* © 1993, United States Catholic Conference, Inc., Washington, DC, p. 3. Used by permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

⁴ Excerpt from *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century, Revised and Updated* by Thomas A. Kleissler, Margo A. LeBert, and Mary C. McGuinness. Copyright © 1997 by RENEW International. Used by permission of Paulist Press. www.paulistpress.com, p. 40.

⁵ Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, *Bread of Tomorrow: Prayers for the Church Year* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 168.

