

GROUP
READING
GUIDE

PROMISE
— AND —
HOPE

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

— SMALL GROUP SESSIONS —

Gather. Welcome everyone to your group. Ask participants to introduce themselves if needed.

As your class or group session gets underway, begin with the Sign of the Cross. Offer an appropriate psalm or other prayer together. Ask God to bless your time together and send the Spirit to guide you.

Read. Moving around the circle in your group, read aloud the material for the particular session. Rotate readers with each paragraph. Pause for quiet reflection before entering into discussion and prayer.

Discuss and Pray. When you come to the group process notes, continue around the circle, discussing or praying as the notes direct. Use the guide's suggestions as a starting point and add your own questions, prayers, or action plans.

Finish. As you come to the end of your process, invite participants to identify the one or two large ideas that they will take away from your time together. Each participant may hear the material differently; there are no "correct" answers.

Conclude your session with a brief prayer and hospitality. Remind participants of the time and date of the next gathering.

SESSIONS

- SESSION ONE** Introduction – Promise and Hope in Pastoral Theology
Part 1 – Points of Orientation for Pastoral Theology
- SESSION TWO** Part 2 – Guidelines for Accompaniment
- SESSION THREE** Part 3 – The People of God Seeking to Be Accompanied
- SESSION FOUR** Part 4 – Theological Reflection as the Method
for Accompaniment
- SESSION FIVE** Part 5 – The Person Who Is the Accompanist and the
Process of Accompaniment
- SESSION SIX** Part 6 – Becoming a Parish of Promise and Hope
Conclusion and Next Steps

SESSION ONE

INTRODUCTION —

Promise and Hope in Pastoral Theology

In preparation for this session, all participants are asked to read pages 1–29 before the session.

By way of introduction, Bill Huebsch describes a developing awareness of pastoral theology since Vatican II that has continued with successive papacies. It is an awareness concerned with the human person and shaped by the person of Jesus Christ. Its outcomes are “to heal people and restore their hope, to invite and welcome people into the Church in Jesus’ name, and to help people become adult Christians of mature faith” (page 3).

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION: *What is your reaction to this theology? Does your heart say “yes,” or “yes... but?” What has been your experience as a minister as well as one being ministered to?*

PART 1 – Points of Orientation for Pastoral Theology (page 7)

Regarding the segment “Encounter with the Person of Jesus” (pages 8–10)

Bill Huebsch describes the first point of orientation as one leading to an encounter with Jesus Christ. In turn, such an encounter animates all of our ministerial efforts. “All pastoral ministry flows from the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we enact pastoral ministry we do so under the power of grace with Jesus acting through us” (page 10).

FOR DISCUSSION: *In what way have you been touched by the love and mercy of Christ? How do you reflect that love and mercy through your pastoral leadership?*

*Regarding the segment “Sinners Leading Other Sinners to Mercy”
(pages 10–14)*

The second point of orientation is an awareness of our own sinfulness and belief in the limitless mercy of God. Drawing upon the account of the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 8:8–11), Huebsch emphasizes the need to see the person rather than the sin. He writes, “What strikes me in this story is the amount of silence the storyteller includes....In that silence the forgiveness and mercy of God became the resounding message” (page 14).

FOR DISCUSSION: *How have you known the need in your life for the healing touch of Jesus? What does this gospel passage—particularly the way in which Jesus remains silent for a time—say to you about parish ministry? Why is it so important to be a listening presence to others as part of your ministry?*

Regarding the segment “Personalist Theology” (pages 15–16)

The third point of orientation is a reminder of the person-to-person approach of pastoral ministry. This requires a way of relating to parishioners on an individual basis and respecting each person’s journey of faith.

FOR DISCUSSION: *Given the various demands of work in a parish, how realistic is this approach? What would it take to make your ministerial efforts more personal?*

Regarding the segment “Liturgy is the Source and Summit” (pages 17–18)

The fourth point of orientation is on the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the community. While our faith entails a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, it is also essentially communal. “Everything leads us time and again back to the table of the Lord” (page 17).

FOR DISCUSSION: *What place does the Eucharist hold in your parish? In what way does each ministry flow into and out of the liturgy, leading us back to the Lord’s table?*

Regarding the segment “The Paschal Mystery” (pages 19–20)

The fifth point of orientation centers on the Paschal Mystery. As Huebsch notes, a profound encounter with Christ often comes through the suffering that is part of bereavement, loss, failure, and ruptured relationships.

FOR DISCUSSION: *How have you experienced hope springing from despair, life from death, light from a dark and desperate time? In what way has your own experience of the Paschal Mystery influenced the way you attend to those who are suffering in your parish?*

Regarding the segment “God is Still Speaking” (pages 20–21)

The sixth point of orientation is the ongoing revelation of God in our day-to-day lives. Learning to listen, through prayerful discernment, is a continual process. It is one that leads us not only to look for the direction God is giving to us, but also to consider the way in which we might help others seek and find guidance in their own lives.

FOR DISCUSSION: *How would you assess the spiritual offerings in your parish, especially those that focus on prayer and discernment?*

Regarding the segment “Grace” (pages 21–22)

The seventh point of orientation is the free-flowing nature of God’s grace, which animates all efforts toward ministering to and with others. Pope Francis described grace as something beyond our consciousness and “the amount of light in our souls, not knowledge nor reason.”

FOR DISCUSSION: *Name a time when you have found just the right words or response to a pastoral situation. In what ways would you attribute that response to this unconscious reality of grace?*

Regarding the segment “An Illustration” (pages 24–29)

An encounter works two ways. The story of John and Mary Ellen illustrates how the process of accompaniment flips when we open ourselves to the other.

FOR DISCUSSION: *Think of a time in which your ministry resulted in an encounter that flipped your assumptions and led to something unexpected. How did it affect your approach to pastoral ministry?*

FINAL REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION: *Revisit the first question about your initial reaction to pastoral theology. Has it changed as a result of going through the material in this chapter? How do the seven points of orientation give you a better appreciation for this theology?*