

COMMUNION

BOOKLET I : COEXISTENCE

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Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Singapore

catalyses the baptised faithful to live out the mission to evangelise



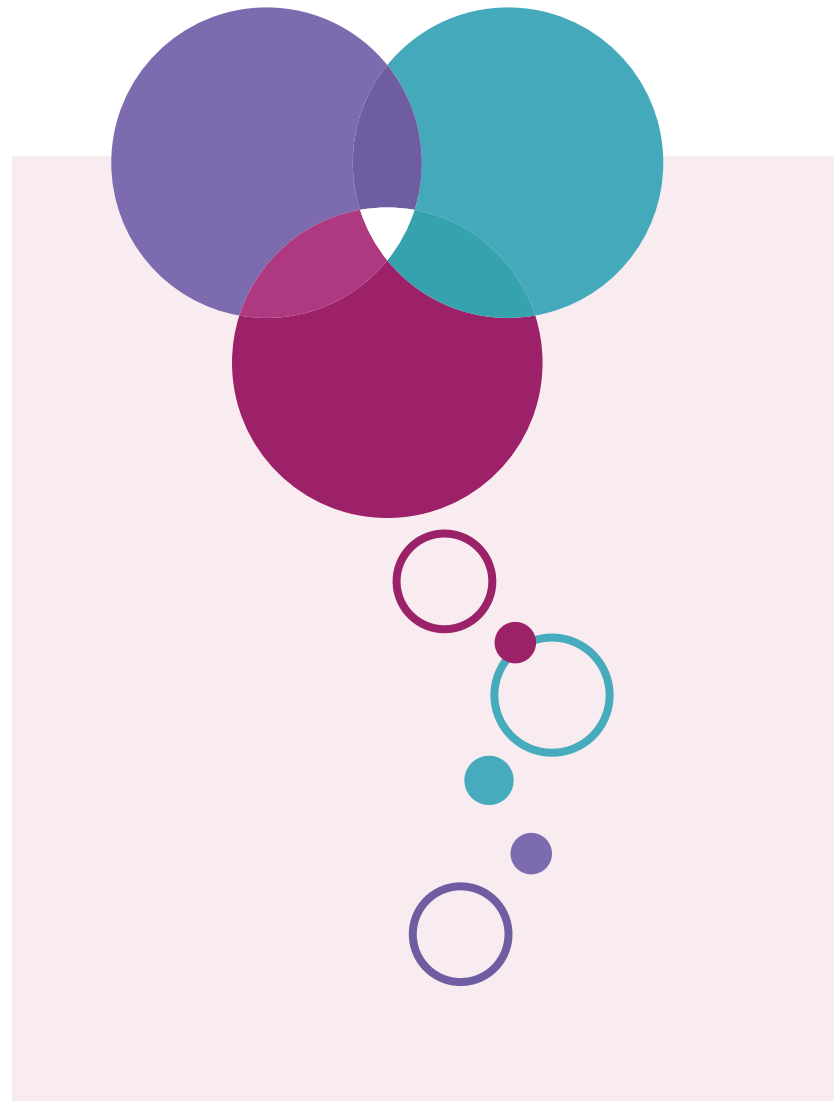
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COMMUNION

Introduction

John 17:21-23

May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me. I have given them the glory you gave to me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you loved me.

We are familiar with this discourse from John's gospel. However, in reality we often struggle with this 'oneness', this 'togetherness' that John's gospel exhorts because of the complexity of human relationships. The term 'communion' is also understood differently. While there may be a sense of belonging to a community, ministry group or an organization, more often than not, our experience of togetherness is just 'being next to each other'.

The call to be in communion is to know one another at an intimate and unitive level that begins from an intimate togetherness with Jesus Christ. This process of growing and living into communion with Jesus Christ and with each other requires, first of all, for the individual to know who and where he or she is. This knowing enables the cultivation of the habits that will produce communion, the 'togetherness' that Jesus desires us to have - 'May they be one, may they be so completely one' (c.f Jn 17:21)

This process of growing into communion cannot be achieved

at the blink of an eye. It takes the entire community, group or organization to interact and eventually grow to be in true communion. Groups or communities normally move through an awareness of being next to each other, co-existing alongside each other first. After which, they begin to communicate with each other. Communication here means getting to know each other, knowing the values the person subscribes to and what makes the person who he or she is. With greater interaction, relationships are deepened. When members of the community become closer and known to each other, cooperation takes place because of the realization that actions of each individual affect the others and the group. Hence, we cooperate so that more, if not all, members get to reap the positive effects of the action. It is then easier for the community or group to move to eventually collaborating with each other. At this point, we will not be able to say to our members that 'it is not my business' but will make sure that every member is included and cared for.

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Use of this booklet

This is the **first** of four in this series of growing in communion. Each booklet is designed with the aim of Ministries or communities learning and discovering more about the communion continuum so as to be able to grow more intimately with Jesus Christ and with one another. The sessions will not address the individual's growth in relationship with Jesus Christ, as it is assumed that this is done elsewhere.

There are three sessions in each booklet and a fictional story of a community before the sessions. Users will follow the growth of this fictional community as they work through the four booklets. It is hoped that through following the life of this fictional community, it may serve as a mirror for users to reflect on their own experience in their community or ministry as they discover and learn more about the stages of communion. So take time to go through the story.

Appoint a person who knows how to facilitate to be the facilitator for the sessions. You may want to rotate amongst those who know how to facilitate so that members have a chance to facilitate the group discussion.

At the end of each session, there is an activity for the group to do. It is essential to give time to all members to complete the activity before moving on to the next session. Members will share their experience at the next session. Begin and end each session with an opening and a closing prayer.

Since growing in communion is a process or a journey for us to grow into, we will find ourselves doing better at some point and at other times not so well. It is not the intention to move ministries or communities to communion overnight just by using these booklets. Rather, it is about raising an awareness that all ministries or communities are called to grow into communion with God and with one another. The important thing to note is that we need to be convinced that it is God our Father's great plan to draw all humankind together to dwell in His immense love. Thus, we do not give up since Jesus Christ came to show us the way. As disciples, we are called to follow so as to contribute and serve the Kingdom of God.

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Story

Hospitality Ministry in St George Parish

This is the story of the Hospitality Ministry from the Parish of St George. Encouraged by the priest, Father Jack, they are trying to take on a project of growing in communion within their ministry. Let us listen in to the conversation at one of their meetings.

Rose: Let us begin our meeting. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I thank you for bringing us together. I ask that you guide us in our meeting so that this will be a speedy meeting. Amen.

Sam: (muttering) Why the prayer so odd?

Rose: Sam, you have something to say? Can't hear you.

Sally: Aiyoh Sam, don't say so much, Rose is the leader, she knows what to do. Keep quiet lah.

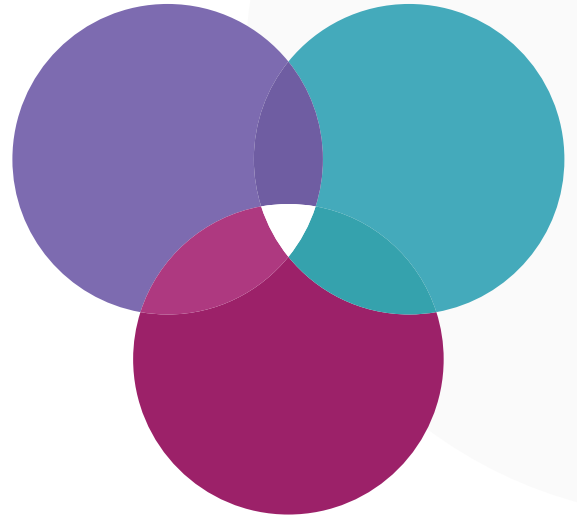
Rose: Okay, for this meeting we want to talk about the project of communion that Father Jack has asked us to take on. What do you think? Any idea? Kelvin? You just got baptized not long ago, you can tell us what you learned in RCIA?

Kelvin: Huh? ... eh.... Sorry I am new, I am learning from you guys.... (apologetic)

Rose: Aiyah, why you so shy? Sally? What do you think?

Sally: If you ask me... 'communion' means together right? We have received communion at mass and we serve the parish together. So that is communion, correct?

Sam: If that is it, why Father Jack wants us to do this project of communion? We don't fight with each other like other ministries, but I don't know you all very much.



Sally: Sam, we are one happy ministry of hospitality in St George. Like you said, we don't fight, we serve the parish. Isn't that considered communion already?

Rose: Listen people, Father Jack says that to understand the Church as communion, we need to look at communion with God and communion among men.

Robin: Well, at mass we are in communion with God and here we are together. So it looks like we have communion. Why did Father Jack ask us to do this project?

Sam: That is my point, uncle Robin. We seem to work well together but do we really know each other as well as we think? Come to think of it, I don't even know your son's name.

Kelvin: Is it important for us to know each other? I thought we just come to attend mass and to welcome and show people to their seats.

Rose: Father Jack wants us to read the Gospel of John, chapter 17, verses 21 to 23. Let's read... (the group reads the scripture text)

I am looking at this line, let me read to you...

'With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfected in unity that the world will recognize that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you loved me.'

I think this is 'communion', but it seems like only God can achieve this.

Sam: Sounds like a relationship thing... but look at us....

Sally: I know what you want to say... "I don't even know you", right? Well I know Rose, I know you, I know uncle Robin, I know Kelvin... ummm... hello girl, what's your name?

Kaitlyn: Hello aunty, my name is Kaitlyn.

Sam: See what I mean!!!!? She has been sitting here and we didn't even notice her...

Robin: Calm down Sam... Yes, you are right. We really need to learn how to grow in communion. What shall we do?

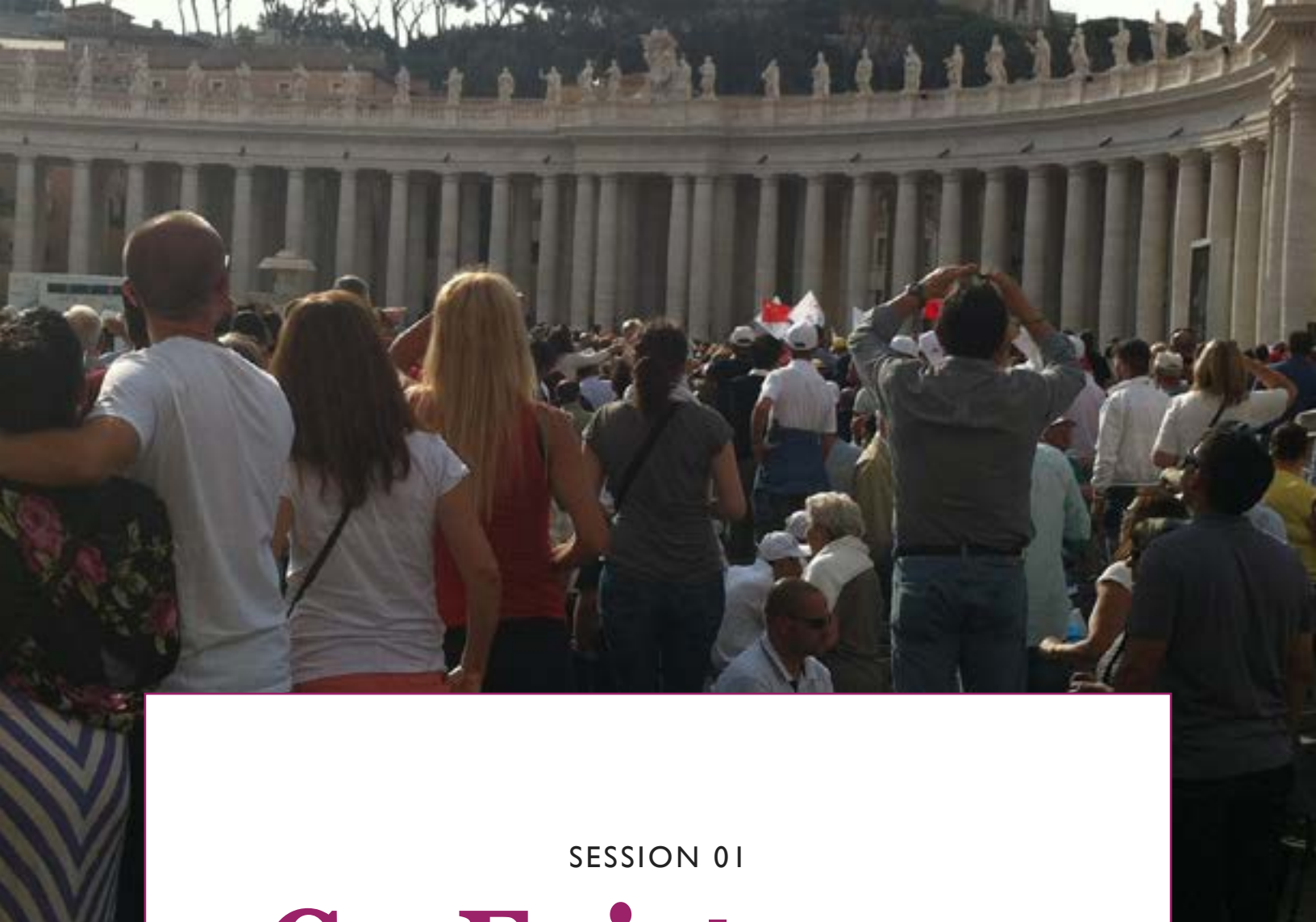
Rose: Okay, I decide. I shall ask Father Jack to come and give us a session on communion.

Sam: (muttering) There she goes again....

We shall leave this community now and meet them again another time. Before we begin our learning, we share a thing or two that resonate with us.

(You may want to read through this story before each of the following sessions to help members to keep this story in mind)

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SESSION 01

Co-Existence

First step toward communion

session one



Understanding

Most of us understand 'communion' as the Eucharistic Celebration or receiving the 'Body of Christ' at the celebration. During this celebration, we stand next to each other, facing the priest at the altar and only acknowledge each other's presence at the exchange of the sign of peace with a cursory nod. So when we hear the word 'communion', our understanding is what we have experience at the celebration – standing next to each other and receiving the 'Body of Christ'. That is really not what Jesus Christ is asking of us and it is not the complete understanding of communion that the Church teaches.

This acknowledgement of each other's presence at the Eucharistic Celebration has a deeper reality that is often not fully lived. Communion is first and foremost a gift from God our Father. In the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ, all the baptized are drawn into this intimate union with God our Father through Jesus Christ. Hence, communion is about relationships – the relationship with the Trinitarian God and the relationship with all humankind. Just like all human relationships, we need to invest time and energy to grow in communion. It is not enough to just acknowledge each other's status or presence; we want to intentionally grow our relationships with each other. After all, Jesus Christ has commanded us to love God and love our neighbor, thus, we are given a community at our baptism to grow in communion.

Co-existing with each other is the necessary first step on this journey toward true communion with God and with each other. In our individualistic 'silo' culture, it is easy to just make decisions by oneself and move ahead to get things done. On the other side of this coin, the rest may be happy to just allow one person to make the decisions and take action while they sit back. Perhaps they do not want the responsibility that comes with making decisions. Many groups end with one or two persons making decisions for everyone.

The first step toward communion is to start by acknowledging the existence of others so that everyone in the community, ministry group or organization can begin to take more interest in the group instead of passively following one or two persons.

Reviewing

Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus, you that used to be so far off have been brought close, by the blood of Christ. For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one entity and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart, by destroying in his own person the hostility, that is, the Law of commandments with its decrees. His purpose in this was, by restoring peace, to create a single New Man out of the two of them, and through the cross, to reconcile them both to God in one Body; in his own person he killed the hostility. He came to bring the good news of peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. Through

him, then, we both in the one Spirit have free access to the Father. So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors; you are fellow-citizens with the holy people of God and part of God's household. You are built upon the foundations of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone. Every structure knit together in him grows into a holy temple in the Lord; and you too, in him, are being built up into a dwelling-place of God in the Spirit.

Talk about this scripture text, what struck you?

Deciding

We are the 'holy people of God' and part of 'God's household'. This means that as family, we cannot shirk our responsibilities and feign ignorance. Taking our mark or alignment from Jesus Christ the cornerstone, we strive to be holy by welcoming others, bearing, comforting and admonishing others with the intention that they too will grow in holiness. This 'togetherness' is what Jesus Christ wants the church to be: one with God and one with each other so that others will be attracted to God our Father.

Society may be pulling us in the opposite direction, but as disciples of Jesus Christ, we choose to remain with one another, to be in communion so that the church may reflect the light of Christ to a world that is in need of hope. It is a choice we make because we are convinced that 'God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.' ([Lumen Gentium](#) #9) It really means that we do not leave anyone behind. The first step to that is to begin acknowledging that the person next to us is a sister or

a brother of this big family that we belong to.

Talk about what struck you so far.

Growing

Take 10-15 minutes to ask members to share in pairs the one thing that they are grateful for and the one concern that is on their mind.

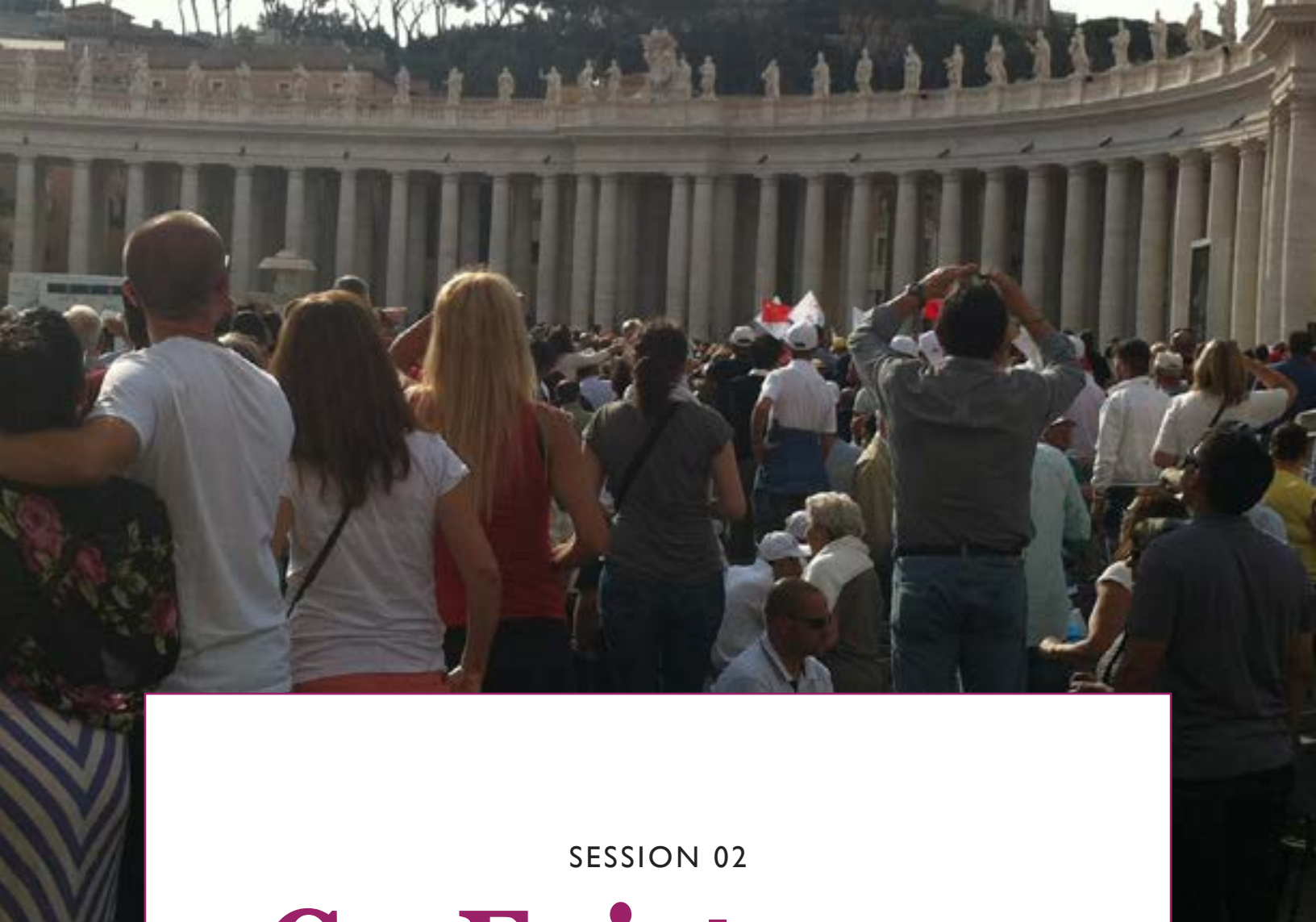
After this sharing, asks everyone in the group: 'What is something new that you have discovered about the person you just conversed with?'

What can be done to help us to know each other in the group better or deeper?

To help each other group better, have the contact details of the person they have conversed with. In the next two or three weeks till the next meeting, each member is to pray for and keep contact with the same person. At the next meeting, each member can share his or her experience.

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SESSION 02

Co-Existence

Problem with remaining at
Co-existence

session two

Showing Concern

Invite each member to share their experience of having to pray and keep contact with each other. Ask each member how he or she feels knowing that someone is praying for and checking in on him or her?

(Note: it is essential for leader or facilitator to ensure each member does the activity in the 'Growing' part of the previous session, otherwise, members will not be able to do this check in and may feel left out.)

Understanding

What is wrong if we choose to co-exist with each other when everything looks calm and harmonious? There may not be anything wrong immediately, however, the ministry or community is 'lifeless' because growth becomes stagnated after some time. When we choose complacency by remaining with people and things that we are comfortable with, our relationship with each other stays stagnant, eventually the relationship will grow cold. We may then find ourselves stagnated in our relationship with God our Father too. When we stay stagnated, we choose the 'same old' and develop the attitude that our way is the only way. We stop growing. There are others who may be too fearful of the tension that will arise or they are fearful of being rejected, so they choose to 'play it safe' and are happy to remain coexisting with each other. To choose to remain status quo is not growing at all! Our ministry or community will stay on a plateau for as long as we the members choose to 'play it safe' and not challenge each other to grow. When we continue this way,

we will find people losing interest and disengage from the ministry or community.

Jesus Christ invites each of us to the intimate union with Him and the whole Body of Christ. This is not a static union but a dynamic one where interactions between members will bring forth new energy and the ministry or community learns and grows from that process. In staying put and not wanting to 'rock the boat', we withhold our contribution to the ministry or community. We deprive our ministry or community of growth; we are also not doing justice to the gifts and talents that God our Father has gifted us.

Reviewing

Matthew 25:14-25

'It is like a man about to go abroad who summoned his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to a third one, each in proportion to his ability. Then he set out on his journey. The man who had received the five talents promptly went and traded with them and made five more. The man who had received two made two more in the same way. But the man who had received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. Now a long time afterwards, the master of those servants came back and went through his accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents came forward bringing five more. "Sir," he said, "you entrusted me with five talents; here are five more that I have made."

His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master’s happiness.” Next the man with two talents came forward. “Sir,” he said, “you entrusted me with two talents; here are two more that I have made.” His master said to him, “Well done, good and trustworthy servant; you have shown you are trustworthy in small things; I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master’s happiness.” Lastly the man who had the single talent came forward. “Sir,” said he, “I had heard you were a hard man, reaping where you had not sown and gathering where you had not scattered; so I was afraid, and I went off and hid your talent in the ground. Here it is; it was yours, you have it back.”

[Talk about this scripture text, what struck you?](#)

Deciding

Baptism has grafted us to the true vine that is Jesus Christ. Being part of this body of Christ, each baptized has a duty and responsibility to answer the call to grow in holiness – becoming closer in our relationship with God and with each other so as to attract those who have not known Jesus Christ. As such we cannot become complacent and be content that we just exist alongside each other. Instead we are called to actively remain in the body of Christ using our God-given gifts to build up the church to serve the Kingdom of God.

‘Christ is the true vine who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us. Through the Church we abide in Christ, without whom we can do nothing (Jn 15:1-5)’. The Church herself, then, is the vine in the gospel. She is mystery because the very life and love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the gift gratuitously offered to all those who are born of water and the Holy Spirit (c.f. Jn 3:5),

and called to relive the very communion of God and to manifest it and communicate it in history (mission): ‘In that day’, Jesus says, ‘you will know that I am in my Father and you in me, and I in you’ (Jn 14:20). (CFL #8)

This quote taken from ‘[Christifideles Laici](#)’ (CFL) the document on the vocation and mission of the Lay Faithful of Christ, is clear that we as church are to remain in communion with the Trinitarian God through Jesus Christ in order to be sent on the mission of bringing the good news to everyone. It is the duty and responsibility of every baptized Catholic; hence we cannot stay stagnant.

[What do you think has to change in order to grow in relationship with God and with each other?](#)

Growing

Ask members to be in pairs (per the previous session). Now, as a pair, look for another pair. In groups of four, have each person introduce the partner he or she has come to know better in the past weeks. After that, talk about the likes and dislikes of each person.

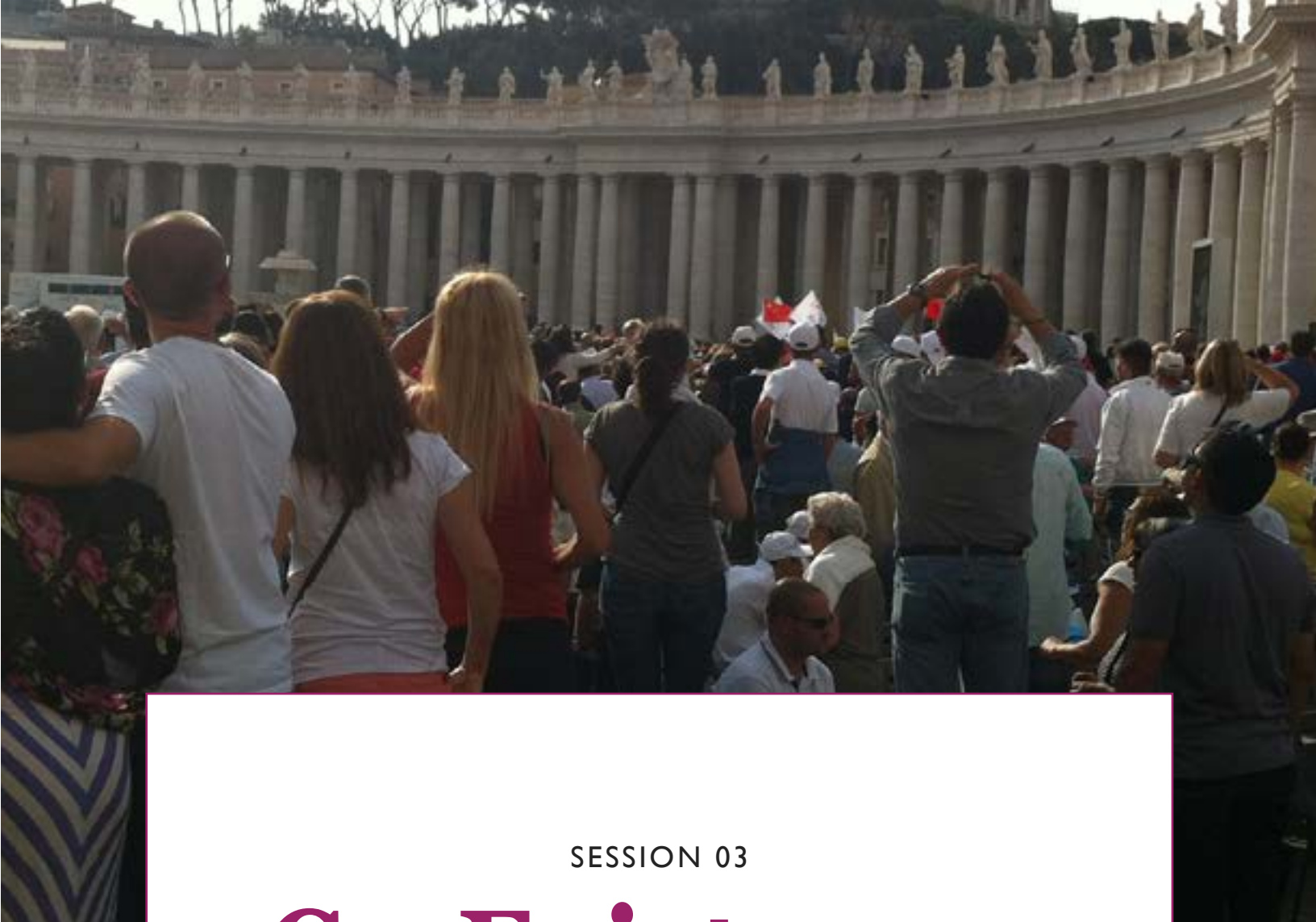
[What can be done to help us to know each other in the group better or deeper?](#)

In the next two or three weeks, the groups of four can arrange to meet up for a meal or a drink. During this meeting, share about each person’s good memories of school days or of the parish or the neighbourhood they belong to. Take time to know each other better.

Continue to pray and keep contact with each other. At the next meeting, members can share about this experience.

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SESSION 03

Co-Existence

Shake out the resistance

session three



Showing Concern

Invite each member to say something about the experience of getting to know other members better in the past weeks. What has changed in the relationships in the ministry or community?

(Note: it is essential for leader or facilitator to ensure each member does the activity in the 'Growing' part of the previous session, otherwise, members will not be able to do this check in and may feel left out.)

Understanding

The call to be 'one Body, one Spirit and one hope' in any Christian ministry or community is often received but exacting; it is often a struggle for many. Resistance takes root in the ministry or community when we allow our 'human-ness' to take over. In the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians, he wrote: 'I urge you therefore to lead a life worthy of the vocation to which you were called. With all humility and gentleness, and with patience, support each other in love. Take every care to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.' It is clear that to be worthy of the call to communion, we have to put aside our hard-hearted resistance and let the Holy Spirit move us together. God the Holy Spirit is the life-giving unifier that binds hearts together. Hence it is not enough that each member prays individually, the ministry or community has to experience and practice communal prayer, a way of listening to the Word of God and praying that allows the Holy Spirit to move and draw hearts together and to shake out resistance.

Then, we need to realize that behaviors in the ministry or community do not just happen suddenly. They are often the result of an experience that forms certain beliefs. These beliefs will generate emotions that influence

behaviors. For example, perhaps many of us are resisting close intimate relationships with other members. This resistance is a behavior that tells us that we are probably wary of others. This wariness of others causes us to resist getting close to people. What causes this emotion is our belief. We believe that people are likely to make use of us so we develop a strong sense of wariness when people want to get close to us. As we go further back, we will realize that this belief of ours is probably from a prior bad experience, such as being betrayed or hurt by a close friend. It helps when we understand why we behave in a certain manner.

To get us out of our comfort zone and move us beyond just existing alongside each other, praying together is important. However, before we can truly pray as one, we need to get past our negative behavior. A good way is for us to learn to be open to one another by getting to know one another better. Then we learn to come together to pray. It is essential that the Word of God is at the center of our prayer, directing and moving us together. In this way, we sit together listening and being guided by the Word of God, being open to the Holy Spirit who moves through us binding us into the loving union with God and with one another.

Reviewing

Colossians 3:12-17

As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it

is for this that you were called together in one body. Always be thankful. Let the Word of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God, and whatever you say or do, let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus, in thanksgiving to God the Father through him.

Talk about the scripture. What struck you?

Deciding

When we feel that our existence does matter and there are people who care, we have a sense of belonging. In belonging, we learn to be more open and trusting in our relationships with others. Reinforced by the Word of God that binds us together, we step out of our resistant shell to move closer towards communion. It is as St Paul puts it in the letter to the Colossians: “You have stripped off your old behavior with your old self, and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge the more it is renewed in the image of its Creator;” (3:9-10) As we get out of our old behavior more, we learn to put on Christ-like behaviour such as compassion, generosity, humility, gentleness and patience for others.

Differences between persons and communities can sometimes prove uncomfortable, but the Holy Spirit, who is the source of that diversity, can bring forth something good from all things and turn it into an attractive means of evangelization. Diversity must always be reconciled by the help of the Holy Spirit; he alone can raise up diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time bringing about unity. When we, for our part, aspire to diversity, we become self-enclosed, exclusive and divisive; similarly, whenever we attempt to create unity on the basis of our human calculations, we end up imposing a monolithic uniformity. This is not helpful for the Church’s mission. (EG #131)

Pope Francis in the document [Evangelii Gaudium](#) (EG) is clear that to grow in communion we need the Holy Spirit; otherwise it would just be our human will or our human

efforts of building unity. Praying together allows the Holy Spirit to move us to a deeper sense of belonging. Praying together and having the sense of care from others will move our ministry or community closer together. As we feel drawn closer to God and to one another, we need to respond by becoming truly concerned for each other. We will find that the deeper we share our life with one another, some of us will start sharing about the struggles we face. This is the time to offer concrete support, exercising patience, generosity and kindness to each other thereby putting St Paul’s words into action.

Do you have the conviction to invest time and energy in growing relationships with God and with each other? Do you want this growth? Why?

Have a look at the story on page 6 again. What has changed for you as you reread the story?

Growing

Having gotten to know some of the members better, now plan an outing together as a whole ministry or community. This can be in the form of a picnic. The objective of this outing is to continue to foster growth in relationships among the members of the ministry or community. Invite those members who are usually less active to take charge and have the leaders and the active ones support them. In this manner, those who are usually less active will feel more engaged. It should be strictly for members only. In the planning and execution of the outing, include the element of communal prayer. At the end of the outing, have members speak about the experience and how they see the ministry or community.

(If you need resource on communal prayer, go to www.one.org.sg)

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Communion...

You have just completed the 1st booklet on communion. There are 3 more booklets. You may download them from www.one.org.sg

Being in communion and learning to grow in communion is part of the work of the New Evangelisation. We will be better witnesses when others can see the loving union in our group/community. Remember to download the other booklets by clicking the button below and continue on this path of growth.

[COMMUNION](#)

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Your feedback is important to us. Let us know.

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