

**A STEP-BY-STEP  
PLANNING GUIDE for LEADERS and  
FACILITATORS  
of  
FAITH FORUM GROUPS**

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For the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in  
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## Table of Contents

Welcome to Faith Forum!.....	1
An Outline for Getting Started.....	2
A Sample Agenda for the 1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting.....	4
A Sample Faith Forum Series using <i>Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study</i> .....	5
A Sample Faith Forum Series using <i>Twelve Tales Untold: A Study Guide for Ecumenical Reception</i> .....	7
A Sample Faith Forum Series using <i>Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It</i> .....	10
A Sample Faith Forum Series using <i>Ending Racism in the Church</i> .....	15
A Sample Faith Forum Series using <i>Ancient Faith and American Born Churches</i> .....	17
Important Tips.....	20
Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue.....	21

## Welcome to Faith Forum!

*You are to be commended for looking into Faith Forum—a new way to engage your Christian neighbors!*

*What follows is a step-by-step guide (with lots of concrete outlines, ideas, lists, and suggestions) for putting together a Faith Forum dialogue group in your area.*

*Read this Step-by-Step Planning Guide along with The Faith Forum Program for Local Ecumenical Dialogue. The Step-by-Step Planning Guide will give you practical advice, but you need to understand why you are doing Faith Forum in the first place—that is what The Faith Forum Program for Local Ecumenical Dialogue (and The Faith Forum Handbook for Participants in Local Ecumenical Dialogue) will explain.*

*All the following are suggestions. Please tailor your Faith Forum group to fit the needs, interests, talents, and abilities of your participants.*

*Also, please note that the goal of Faith Forum is dialogue. The purpose of the suggested books is not primarily to convey “information,” but rather to provide a topic and a starting point for discussion. The value of Faith Forum is in the conversations that participants will have with each other.*

## AN OUTLINE FOR GETTING STARTED

1. **Speak to your pastor** and to pastors of nearby churches with whom you would like to dialogue
  - a. Be in consultation with your religious education directors as well or with other parish leaders, also
  - b. Make sure the pastors are informed about the Faith Forum program and get their support. Give them a copy of *Faith Forum: A Guide for Local Ecumenical Dialogue*.
  - c. See if at least one pastor or lay leader from one of the participating congregations can commit to be present at each meeting. It will be helpful to have someone with some theological training/knowledge present if difficult questions come up. However, the focus remains on the participants and on their own experiences and their own faith. The greatest value in Faith Forum (FF) will come from conversation, not from any kind of formal lecture/teaching/information.
2. Gather a **steering group** together
  - a. The steering group will lead by
    - i. planning the **dates and times** of the meetings
    - ii. announcing and **promoting** Faith Forum among their parishes
      1. once the steering group prints a schedule, other parishioners can help distribute the schedule and promote Faith Forum
    - iii. coordinating the meeting **locations**
    - iv. typing and printing a **weekly agenda**
    - v. **introducing participants to what dialogue is**, using *The Faith Forum Program for Local Ecumenical Dialogue* for background information and *The Faith Forum Handbook for Participants in Local Ecumenical Dialogue*
    - vi. committing to **read** the short weekly reading assignment
    - vii. committing to preparing easy-to-understand **summaries and presentations** of the reading assignments (and/or delegating this weekly task to a pastor or other capable participant)
      1. The success of Faith Forum (FF) is not dependent upon each participant doing the reading each week. The greatest value lies in conversation, sharing, and mutual understanding. Also, the reading may be difficult for some participants and they should not feel left out if they don't have time for the reading or it is difficult.
      2. Therefore, it falls on the leaders' shoulders (or other participant) to present the most important parts of the reading at the beginning of each meeting.
      3. If the short 10-minute presentation can include Power Point, visuals, or group participation, all the better.

- viii. being **good examples** of dialogue and trying to make sure that the conversation includes all voices and avoids proselytism.
- 3. **Read background material** for information about dialogue
  - a. Read through *The Faith Forum Program for Local Ecumenical Dialogue*
  - b. Read the Preface of *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*
  - c. Recommended: Forward (pp. ix-x) and Introduction (pp. 1-22) to *Ancient Faith and American-Born Churches: Dialogues between Christian Traditions*
- 4. **Meet**
  - a. The steering committee members should meet to discuss what they have read
- 5. **Begin planning** your first Faith Forum series based on Segment One (or based on another segment if you so choose)
  - a. decide **how many meetings** you should have in the first series (8 is recommended for the *Confessing One Faith* series)
  - b. schedule **dates and times** for meetings, taking into consideration the events calendars of each parish
  - c. pick a **location**
    - i. location can change week to week so that participants visit each other's churches, or you may prefer the consistency of one meeting place
    - ii. consider what amenities like flip boards, projectors, tables, chairs you would like
    - iii. consult with your parish priest/building coordinator in regards to scheduling conflicts and/or janitorial services
  - d. plan for **food and drinks** if desired for fellowship time
    - i. Will the hosting church provide or will this be done potluck style?
- 6. Plan the first meeting as an "Introduction to Dialogue"
- 7. Initial Promotion
  - a. Hand out **flyers** for FF (get help with this from participants at each congregation)
  - b. Give interested participants *The Faith Forum Handbook for Participants in Local Ecumenical Dialogue* to look at before coming to the first meeting
  - c. Give interested participants the **schedule** (meeting days and times) for all the planned meetings so they can see if they can make the meetings
    - i. Schedule should include
      - 1. series topic
      - 2. each week's subtopic
      - 3. meeting location
      - 4. time
      - 5. weekly reading assignment

## A SAMPLE AGENDA for the 1<sup>st</sup> MEETING

### WHAT IS DIALOGUE? and WHAT IS FAITH FORUM?

1. **30 minutes:** Fellowship
2. **40 minutes: Presentation of the Faith Forum Program to participants.**
  - a. **10 mins: Present Part I of *The Faith Forum Program for Ecumenical Dialogue*, with a focus on the "Welcome" and the "Frequently Asked Questions"**
    - i. Of course, mention that the overall goal is to foster unity among Christians in response to Christ's prayer in Jn 17:21
    - ii. From the "Movement Toward Unity in Christ" section on pg. 2, mention the idea that "the walls that divide humanity across the globe are quickly crumbling" and that people find less comfort nowadays in these walls of prejudice and/or assumptions. "These barriers are used less and less as the most important means by which an individual defines his or her Christian identity."
  - b. **10 mins: Group discussion/questions about Faith Forum**
  - c. **10 mins: Present "The Challenges of Dialogue" (pg. 20-21 of *The Faith Forum Program for Ecumenical Dialogue*)**
    - i. **refer people to pg. 5 of *The Faith Forum Handbook for Participants in Local Ecumenical Dialogue***
  - d. **10 mins: Group discussion/questions about "The Challenges of Dialogue"**
  - e. Different members of the steering committee can do the different parts of the presentation or one person/pastor/religious education director can do the entire presentation
3. **15 minutes:** Show DVD *Being Christian Together*
4. **10 mins:** Group questions/discussion about the DVD
5. **5 minutes:** Briefly introduce the material that participants should read and questions they should think about for the next week
6. **20 minutes:** End with time for fellowship

## A SAMPLE FAITH FORUM SERIES using *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*

*Confessing One Faith* is a great introduction to dialogue. It does, however, require some reading by the participants outside of meeting time. For many this will not be a problem. For others, they may not have interest in reading; reading may be difficult; or they simply may not have the time. Therefore, it is important that a short 10-minute presentation summarizes the reading material at the beginning of each meeting.

### FAITH FORUM SERIES TOPIC:

**The Nicene Creed: *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study***

### Weekly Sessions for *CONFESSING ONE FAITH*

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY SUB-TOPIC	QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS	MEETING LOCATION
1		Intro to dialogue and Faith Forum	#s 1-2, pg. 18 of <i>Confessing One Faith</i>	
2		Introduction and How the Creed Came to Be	#s 3-7, pg. 18	
3		The Father	#s 1-4, pg. 32	
4		The Father	#s 5-8, pg. 32	
5		The Son	#s 1-4, pg. 42	
6		The Son	#s 5-9, pg. 42	
7		The Holy Spirit	#s 1-5, pg. 56	
8		The Holy Spirit and Afterward	#s 6-9, pg. 56	

### WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS

- ✧ Before session 1: read *The Faith Forum Handbook for Participants in Local Ecumenical Dialogue*
- ✧ Before session 2: "Introduction," pg. 5-8 and "How the Creed Came to Be: pg. 11-17 in *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*
- ✧ Before session 3: "The Father," pg. 21-31 in *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*
- ✧ Before session 4: None ☺
- ✧ Before session 5: "The Son," pg. 35-41 in *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*
- ✧ Before session 6: None ☺
- ✧ Before session 7: "The Holy Spirit," pg. 45-55 in *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*
- ✧ Before session 8: "Afterward," pg. 59-63 in *Confessing One Faith: A Guide for Ecumenical Study*

## WEEKLY MEETING AGENDA for *Confessing One Faith*

1. Participants enter and pick up the **a) agenda, b) next week's reading assignment** , and **c) the Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue** (*found on pg. 20 of this guide*)
  - a. Even if the meeting agenda is the same each week, it's always helpful to remind people of the amount of time allocated to each task and agendas are welcoming to someone who is new to the group
  - b. Always have the Guidelines for Dialogue available—without this weekly reminder, dialogue can too easily give way to debate
2. **30 minutes:** Fellowship
3. **Short Prayer**
  - a. Check with all the senior pastors of the participating churches to make sure that they are comfortable with joint prayer.
4. **10 minutes:** Presenter reviews most important/interesting points from the reading
  - a. the presenter can be one from the steering committee, a capable participant, or a pastor
  - b. whoever the presenter is, a leaders should remind him/her that it's important to stay within the 10 minute time-limit
  - c. Power Point, visuals, interactive activities are great!
5. **5 minutes:** Review guidelines for dialogue—*very important*
  - a. at the first couple meetings, have different participants read different sections aloud
  - b. at every meeting, remind people to look these over
6. **45 minutes:** Small groups (4-6 people) discuss the topic
  - a. use the discussion questions as a guide
7. **15 minutes:** One representative from each group summarizes and/or shares a main point of their small group discussion with the group at-large
  - a. Depending upon how many small groups you have, time allotted here may need to be increased, perhaps taking time away from one of the other activities.
8. **5 minutes:** Remind participants of the **reading material** that they should read before the following week's meeting and any other **announcements**
9. **10 minutes:** is left so that people can fellowship again if desired



## A SAMPLE FAITH FORUM SERIES using *Twelve Tales Untold: A Study Guide for Ecumenical Reception*

FAITH FORUM SERIES TOPIC:

**Our Stories about Baptism**

**OR**

**Our Stories about Ministry**

**OR**

**Our Stories about Eucharist**

[steering committee will *choose* Baptism, Ministry, or Eucharist]

*Twelve Tales Untold* is conveniently already set up for thematic study and discussion. Choose one of the three possible topics: Baptism, Eucharist, or Ministry for your Faith Forum Series. If you include an introduction session about dialogue as a first session (as described above), your Faith Forum Series will be 5 sessions. Otherwise, each topic in the *Twelve Tales Untold* book has 4 chapters devoted to it, so your Faith Forum series will be 4 sessions.

The strength of *Twelve Tales Untold* is that the case studies are short enough to be read aloud at the meetings. Participants don't need to do *any* reading outside the meetings—though they could be encouraged to read the commentary.

### Weekly Sessions for our tales about BAPTISM using *Twelve Tales Untold*

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY TALES	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	MEETING LOCATION
1		Introduction: What is Dialogue? and What is Faith Forum?		
2		Lutheran/Baptist, pp.19-20	pg. 20	
3		Culture and Church, pp. 26-32	pp. 32-33	
4		Greek Orthodox/Roman Catholic, pp. 34-37	pg. 39	
5		Baptist/Pentecostal, pp. 43-44	pp. 44-45	

### Weekly Sessions for our tales about EUCHARIST/ THE LORD'S SUPPER/ HOLY COMMUNION using *Twelve Tales Untold*

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY TALES	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	MEETING LOCATION
1		Disciples/Roman Catholic, pp. 53-55	pg. 55	

2		Lutheran/Roman Catholic, pp. 63-64	pg. 70	
3		Presbyterian/Episcopal, pp. 71-73	pp. 73-74	
4		Methodist/Roman Catholic, pp. 82-84	pg. 85	

**Weekly Sessions** for our tales about MINISTRY using *Twelve Tales Untold*

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY TALES	DISCUSSION QUESTIONS	MEETING LOCATION
1		Anglican, pp.95-100	pp. 100-101	
2		United Methodist/Presbyterian, pp. 102-103	pg. 104	
3		United Methodist, pp. 112- 115	pp. 115-116	
4		United Church of Christ, pp. 117-120	pg. 120	

**SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA for *Twelve Tales Untold***

1. Participants enter and pick up **a) the agenda and b) the Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue** (*found on pg. 20 of this guide*)
  - a. Even if the meeting agenda is the same each week, it's always helpful to remind people of the amount of time allocated to each task and agendas are welcoming to someone who is new to the group
2. **30 minutes:** Fellowship
3. **5 minutes:** Review guidelines for dialogue—*very important!*
  - a. at the first couple meetings, have different participants read different sections aloud
  - b. at every meeting, remind people to look these over
4. **15 minutes:** Participants take turns reading paragraphs of the "Tale" (and possibly the "commentary")
  - a. The steering committee leaders should read the tales ahead of time in preparation
5. **5 minutes:** Participants take turns reading previously selected points from the "Commentary" out loud to the large group
  - a. Leaders should read the "Commentary" ahead of time and decide—depending upon the participants whether commentary would benefit the group
  - b. If you think your participants will benefit from the commentary, then: Ahead of time, a leader should pull out the most important/potentially helpful points (no more than 5 points) from the "commentary" and list these

on one large sheet on paper or on one power point slide that can be projected for participants to read from

6. **45 minutes:** Small groups (4-6 people) discuss the topic, using the discussion questions as a guide
  - a. Leader reminds small groups to first try to talk out their own thoughts and solutions to the case study, but if groups are having difficulty or need some ideas, they can take a look at the "Possible Outcomes" section.
7. **15 minutes:** One representative from each group summarizes and/or shares a main point of their small group discussion with the group at-large
  - a. Depending upon how many small groups you have, time allotted here may need to be increased, taking time away from one of the other activities.
8. **5 minutes:** Any announcements
9. **5 minutes:** is left so that people can fellowship again if desired

## A SAMPLE FAITH FORUM SERIES using *Love for the Poor: God's Love for the Poor and the Church's Witness to It*

Schedule 6-7 meetings. This series will end with a ministry project for the participants to undertake. A seventh meeting scheduled could aid in the execution of the project, though it would be possible for the participants to make up their own schedule for executing the project after the sixth meeting.

### Weekly Sessions for *LOVE FOR THE POOR*

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY TOPIC	NOTES	READING at the MEETING (or before the meeting, depending upon your group)	MEETING LOCATION
1		Introduction and Scripture	Bring Bibles!*	<b>Preface:</b> all of pg. ix and the last 3 paragraphs of pg. xi <b>Introduction:</b> all (pg. 1-2) <b>The Scriptural Witness:</b> read entire section	
2		Insights about Love from Early Centuries of the Christian Community	Bring Bibles again*	<b>Insights from Early Centuries of the Christian Community:</b> Read entire section	
3		Heroes of the Faith and an Ethic of Justice-Making <i>and</i> The Inner Life and the Pursuit of Justice	Bring Bibles again*	<b>Heroes of the Faith and an Ethic of Justice-Making <i>and</i> The Inner Life and the Pursuit of Justice:</b> read both sections	
4		The Virtue of Prudence		<b>The Virtue of Prudence:</b> read entire section	
5		The Present Situation <i>and</i> Millennium Goals: What can we do?		<b>The Present Situation:</b> read entire section <b>Millennium Development:</b> read the bolded goals	
6		Advanced Planning and Execution of a Project to Love the Poor			

\*Bibles will be useful in exploring the discussion questions.

### SECTIONS TO READ & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR *LOVE FOR THE POOR*

As indicated by the table above, it is not recommended that you read the entire booklet. The suggested readings are repeated below, listed session by session.

Additionally, there are no discussion questions printed within the booklet, *Love for the Poor*. Below are suggested discussion questions for each session.

- ✧ Leaders will want to print out the discussion questions for each session or project them on a large screen so participants can use the questions to guide their dialogue.

### **SESSION 1:**

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**Preface:** Read all of pg. ix and last 3 paragraphs of pg. xi

**Introduction:** read pg. 1-2

**The Scriptural Witness:** read entire section

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What Biblical texts have spoken most urgently to you with regard to caring for the poor?
2. How is caring for the poor spoken about in worship? Are there other readings often read in worship that speak about caring for the poor?
3. Are there Gospel readings that you read each year that deal with this issue?

### **SESSION 2:**

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**Insights from the Early Centuries of the Christian Community:** read entire section aloud

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What theology or theological writings are you aware of that give basis to our solidarity with the poor? (Gen 1:26, for example)
2. What in the Gospels and in Jesus' ministry do we learn about love for the poor? (Matthew 25:31-46; 22:37-39; and 7:12)
3. How does St. Paul talk about love? What do you make of the apparent connection between Romans 13:8-10 and Matthew 7:12? How do you think 1Cor 8 and 1Cor 11:17-22 might be applied to love of the poor?
4. How does your parish talk about stewardship? Does that encourage you to give to the poor?
5. Do you tend to be a grudging or cheerful giver? Do we live out of an attitude of abundance or scarcity? Given that Christ has risen and granted us redemption, does an attitude of abundance or scarcity seem more befitting for a Christian?
6. Do you feel empowered by the Holy Spirit to care for those in need? Why or why not?
7. Who is it harder for you to help? Those in need nearby who you might know personally? Those strangers in need who you might encounter on the street? Those living in another state or another country?

### SESSION 3:

**Heroes of the Faith and an Ethic of Justice-Making and The Inner Life and the Pursuit of Justice:** read both sections in the large group

#### Discussion Questions:

##### *Love for a Vulnerable God*

1. "Kenosis" is often understood as "self-emptying" and is used to refer to the Son's self-emptying in his condescension to become human. Read Philippians 2:5-11, which is often called the *Hymn of Kenosis*.
2. What strikes you about this passage?
3. How does the passage relate to love for the poor?

##### *Imitation of Jesus of Nazareth*

4. How do you think obedience and poverty are connected?
5. How is poverty not only the lack of "things"?
6. How might we follow this example of Jesus and Francis today?

##### *Compassion for the Poor*

7. Have you ever before heard "compassion" explained as "real kinship with the rest of creation"? What do you think about compassion as suffering with others so that "their pain becomes our pain"?
8. How might this understanding of compassion change us as Christians?
9. If by compassion we indicate our dissatisfaction with disharmony, what does that say about how Christians might act?
10. How might we encourage ourselves and/or our children to have this kind of compassion?

### SESSION 4:

**The Virtue of Prudence:** read this section together as a large group

✧ *HOMEWORK to do before session 5: At the next session the group will begin to brainstorm about putting together a ministry to the poor. 1) They should read the **bolded goals** under the section, "Millennium Development." 2) They should assess the needs of their community and speak with their parish priest/pastor or other lay leader for ideas and come to the next session with some ideas.*

#### Discussion Questions:

1. How do you personally try to make decisions based on prayer (God's will/guidance) and not social principles/information alone?
2. Does this idea that a "decision is God's work and not merely our own," have any potential problems?
3. What struck you most/what seemed most helpful in the paragraphs about prudence? Why? How?

4. "Silence is absolutely necessary in order to pay attention to God," (pg. 20). What kind of practices of "silence" does your church, congregation, or tradition have?

5. Of the 6 principles of the 1987 Catholic bishops of the US statement, *Economic Justice for All*, was there a principle that stood out? Was there a principle that sparked an idea for how your parish or your parish with the neighboring parishes could work for justice?

## **SESSION 5:**

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**The Present Situation and Millennium Development Goals and Targets:** read "The Present Situation" and the bolded goals under "Millennium Development" together as a large group

### *Special Notes for the facilitator/leader of Session 5:*

- ✧ *Continue working together in one large group today*
- ✧ *YOU WILL NEED: 1) a person to serve as "recorder" 2) white board, blackboard, or flip chart. For brainstorming and to help keep the group on the same page, someone will need to be in charge of "recording" the ideas of the group on a large flip board, white board, or blackboard.*
- ✧ *What follows is more of an agenda than a list of discussion questions, though #3 will involve conversation.*

1. Leader should explain that the purpose of the meeting is to develop a ministry to the poor in the community. This can be a one-time event, an on-going project, or a short-term ministry lasting for a couple months.

2. Pray together for courage to more perfectly love the poor.

3. Of the 6 points listed under "The Present Situation" and of the 8 goals of the "Millennium Development Goals" is there one point that you think your parish would be open to learning more about and working towards?

4. Pick one goal that your parish/parishes could realistically work towards.

5. Put an action plan together for how your parish or the area parishes together can work to love the poor.

6. Commit to speaking with the pastors and implement this plan over the next couple months.

## **SESSION 6:**

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**Advanced Planning and Execution:** Today you will continue planning your joint project. Additional meetings can be scheduled as necessary.

## **SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA for *Love for the Poor***

1. Participants enter and pick up **a) the agenda b) discussion questions and c) the Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue** (*found on pg. 20 of this guide*)
  - a. Even if the meeting agenda is the same each week, it's always helpful to remind people of the amount of time allocated to each task and agendas are welcoming to someone who is new to the group
2. **30 minutes:** Fellowship
3. **Short Prayer**
  - a. Arrange for a participant to give the prayer ahead of time
4. **5 minutes:** Review guidelines for dialogue—*very important!*
  - a. at the first couple meetings, have different participants read different sections aloud
  - b. at *every* meeting, remind people to look these over
5. **20 minutes:** Participants take turns reading paragraphs of the section for the day
  - a. If *everyone* participating is able and willing to read the material ahead of time, then more time can be given to discussion. Please use discernment before suggesting this option, so as not to marginalize anyone. Perhaps this option is best voted on among participants using YES or NO on pieces of paper. If even one person is opposed, then it is best to read aloud during meetings.
6. **40 minutes:** Small groups (4-6 people) discuss the topic, using the discussion questions as a guide
7. **10 minutes:** One representative from each group summarizes and/or shares a main point of their small group discussion with the group at-large
  - a. Depending upon how many small groups you have, time allotted here may need to be increased, taking time away from one of the other activities.
8. **5 minutes:** Any announcements
9. **10 minutes:** is left so that people can fellowship again if desired



## A SAMPLE FAITH FORUM SERIES using *Ending Racism in the Church*

### FAITH FORUM SERIES TOPIC: *Ending Racism in the Church*

Racism is a valuable topic for dialogue within Faith Forum for many reasons. It is a central component of our cultural heritage in the U.S., and the challenges of overcoming racial division offer lessons that can be used to overcome other divisions among Christians.

*Ending Racism in the Church* is divided into three (3) parts and has fourteen (14) total chapters. The first chapter of each part is a “case study”—a story about Christians who have worked to end racism. The following chapters deal with theories about racism, based on the authors’ experiences. One possible way of using *Ending Racism in the Church* is recommended in the chart below. You should feel free to pick and choose the chapters that seem most interesting and relevant for your group.

Another possible way to use *Ending Racism in the Church* is to simply use the Appendix, *A Guide to Address Racism and Work for Justice*. The appendix provides a detailed guide, activities, and discussion questions for six (6) interactive meetings in which participants learn more about racism by exploring its role in their lives. Participants are encouraged to find out about issues of racism in their community, and together they plan to take concrete steps to address local racism. It would also be possible to use the Appendix after only a few of the sessions suggested in the table below.

#### Weekly Sessions for *ENDING RACISM IN THE CHURCH*

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY SUB-TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT to be done <u>before</u> the meeting	MEETING LOCATION
1		<b>Uncovering Racism in the Churches:</b> Case Study	Introduction: pp. 1-2 Chapter 1: pp. 7-14	
2		<b>Uncovering Racism in the Churches:</b> Confessing What Separates Us	Chapter 2: pp. 15-23	
3		<b>Being the Body of Christ:</b> Case Study	Chapter 5: pp. 43-49	
4		<b>Being the Body of Christ:</b> Questions of Inclusion in the Christian Scriptures	Chapter 6: pp. 50-57	
5		<b>Anti-Racism Work Across the Churches:</b> Case Study	Chapter 11: pp. 93-100	
6		<b>Anti-Racism Work Across the Churches:</b> A Call to	Chapter 13: pp. 110-119	

		Move Beyond the Heritage of Christian Racism		
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## WEEKLY MEETING AGENDA for *Ending Racism in the Church*

1. Participants enter and pick up the **a) agenda, b) next week's reading assignment** , and **c) the Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue** (*found on pg. 20*)
  - a. Even if the meeting agenda is the same each week, it's always helpful to remind people of the amount of time allocated to each task and agendas are welcoming to someone who is new to the group
  - b. Always have the Guidelines for Dialogue available—without weekly reminders, dialogue can too easily give way to debate
2. **30 minutes:** Fellowship
3. **Short Prayer**
  - a. Check with all the senior pastors/priests of the participating churches to make sure that they are comfortable with joint prayer
4. **10 minutes:** A presenter who is knowledgeable about this week's topic offers a short summary of some of main issues of the dialogue that was read for this meeting.
  - a. the presenter can be one from the steering committee, a capable participant, or a pastor
  - b. a leader/steering committee member should remind him/her to stay within the 10 minute time-limit
  - c. Power Point, visuals, interactive activities are great!
5. **5 minutes:** Review guidelines for dialogue—*very important!*
  - a. at the first couple meetings, have different participants read different sections aloud
  - b. at every meeting, remind people to look these over,
6. **45 minutes:** Small groups (4-6 people) discuss the topic
7. **15 minutes:** One representative from each group summarizes and/or shares a main point of their small group discussion with the group at-large
  - a. Depending upon how many small groups you have, time allotted here may need to be increased, perhaps taking time away from one of the other activities.
8. **5 minutes:** Remind participants of the **reading material** that they should read before the following week's meeting and any other **announcements**
9. **10 minutes:** is left so that people can fellowship again if desired

## A SAMPLE FAITH FORUM SERIES using *Ancient Faith and American Born Churches*

*Ancient Faith and American Born Churches* is a great book for exploring the different beliefs that Christians have. Each chapter of *Ancient Faith* is a written ecumenical dialogue between theologians of different Christians traditions.

The written dialogues are **examples of one way of doing dialogue**. The written dialogues also **explore the theological differences** between Christian traditions. *Ancient Faith* will show readers how varied different Christian theologies of baptism, grace, and worship, for example, are.

*Ancient Faith and American Born Churches* is **not** for everyone:

- ✧ *Ancient Faith and American Born Churches* is heavy reading and is only recommended for those who have done significant previous theological reading and/or study. It is also only recommended for those who are comfortable with 20 pages+ of reading per week.
- ✧ There is so much theology presented in each written dialogue that anyone could be easily overwhelmed. Participants should be reassured that they likely will not understand every point that the authors are trying to make; and this is more than okay!

Special Notes to the Faith Forum leaders:

- ✧ This series is also advanced because no discussion questions are provided. Group leaders, priests/pastors, or religious education directors will need to take turns preparing discussion questions ahead of time.
  - Participants can also be encouraged to think about what they might like to discuss in their group.
- ✧ It will be best for a person who is knowledgeable about the week's topic to present a short summary of some of the main issues dealt with in each written dialogue. This person can also help answer questions participants might have.

FAITH FORUM SERIES TOPIC:

***Ancient Faith and American-Born Churches (or Exploring our Theological Beliefs)***

### Weekly Sessions for ANCIENT FAITH AND AMERICAN-BORN CHURCHES

SESSION	DATE	WEEKLY SUB-TOPIC	READING ASSIGNMENT to be done <u>before</u> the meeting	MEETING LOCATION
1		Holiness	Dialogue 1: pp. 27-43	
2		Reconciliation	Dialogue 2: pp. 47-67	
3		Apostolicity	Dialogue 3: pp. 71-112	
4		The Role of Creeds and Confessions	Dialogue 4: pp. 117-170	

5		Christian Initiation	Dialogue 5: pp. 175-209	
6		Authoritative Teaching in the Church	Dialogue 6: pp. 213-239	
7		Authority and the Function of Scripture	Dialogue 7: pp.243-287	
8		Eschatology and Mission	Dialogue 8: 291-312	

## **WEEKLY MEETING AGENDA for *Ancient Faith and American-Born Churches***

1. Participants enter and pick up the **a) agenda, b) next week's reading assignment** , and **c) the Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue** (*found on pg. 20 of this guide*)
  - a. Even if the meeting agenda is the same each week, it's always helpful to remind people of the amount of time allocated to each task and agendas are welcoming to someone who is new to the group
  - b. Always have the Guidelines for Dialogue available—without weekly reminders, dialogue can too easily give way to debate
2. **30 minutes:** Fellowship
3. **Short Prayer**
  - c. Check with all the senior pastors/priests of the participating churches to make sure that they are comfortable with joint prayer
4. **10 minutes:** A presenter who is knowledgeable about this week's topic offers a short summary of some of main issues of the dialogue that was read for this meeting.
  - d. the presenter can be one from the steering committee, a capable participant, or a pastor
  - e. a leader/steering committee member should remind him/her to stay within the 10 minute time-limit
  - f. Power Point, visuals, interactive activities are great!
5. **5 minutes:** Review guidelines for dialogue—*very important!*
  - g. at the first couple meetings, have different participants read different sections aloud
  - h. at every meeting, remind people to look these over,
6. **45 minutes:** Small groups (4-6 people) discuss the topic
7. **15 minutes:** One representative from each group summarizes and/or shares a main point of their small group discussion with the group at-large
  - i. Depending upon how many small groups you have, time allotted here may need to be increased, perhaps taking time away from one of the other activities.
8. **5 minutes:** Remind participants of the **reading material** that they should read before the following week's meeting and any other **announcements**
9. **10 minutes:** is left so that people can fellowship again if desired

## ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT TIPS

### AGENDAS

- ✧ The agendas given in this handbook are for the leaders' purposes.
- ✧ The agendas you hand out to the participants should:
  - Be short (minimal words)
  - Include time frames (such as 7:00-7:30) instead of allotted minutes
  - Be in outline format

### TAILORING FAITH FORUM TO FIT YOUR NEEDS

- ✧ Remember to make the resources provided here fit your needs—feel free to change them for any reason to fit your unique group!
- ✧ If you alter the program utilize the gifts of your parishioners. They may have prior experience with teaching, facilitation, program-planning or other talents. Fellow parishioners can be great resources!
- ✧ For example, it is recommended to read and/or present some of the material aloud at the beginning of meetings. This ensures that no one—who hasn't read or who has had trouble reading, for example—will be left out. However, for some groups, this may be unnecessary. If all your participants have no problem with reading assignments, then they can certainly do the reading ahead of time. In this case, the suggested presentations can be left in or taken out, leaving more time for dialogue or fellowship.
- ✧ As another example, Faith Forum suggests an **order** in which to use the books and a certain number of sessions for each book. However, this order is not set in stone. Perhaps the material presented in *Confessing One Faith* is not interesting for some. Others may not enjoy discussing one topic multiple times, as presented in *Twelve Tales Untold*. Advanced adult Faith Forum groups may need more substantial material to discuss; they could possibly begin with *Ancient Faith and American-Born Churches*.

### THE GOAL OF FAITH FORUM IS TO DIALOGUE!

- ✧ As you alter Faith Forum to fit your needs, keep in mind that the **purpose of Faith Forum and the books is NOT primarily to convey "information,"** but rather to provide a discussion topic and a starting point for discussion.
- ✧ The value of Faith Forum is in the conversations that participants will have with each other!!

### WEEKLY GUIDELINES FOR GOOD DIALOGUE

- ✧ This handout is provided for you on the following page. Simply photocopy or print out a copy for each participant. Everyone should have a copy of this at every meeting to help preclude heated debate.

# Weekly Guidelines for Good Dialogue

*Talking about our most important religious beliefs can be really difficult.*

*Faith Forum is about yearning for the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," (Eph 4:3). We will learn to love each other even when we fundamentally disagree, but it will be difficult.*

*Keeping the following goals in mind will help:*

## **Our Goals are:**

- ◆ To love each other
- ◆ To increase understanding of each other's faith

## **Our Goals are NOT to:**

- ◆ convert others
- ◆ figure out who is right and who is wrong

Everyone is expected to listen and to help protect the process from debate/conflict.

## **Some Challenges to dialogue are:**

- ◆ We believe different things.
- ◆ We talk about what we believe in different ways.
  - For example, there is no way to compare group 1's formal written statements (creeds) with those of group 2, if group 2 does not use written documents.
- ◆ Agreement one week followed a week in which we do not agree can lead to frustration.
- ◆ One word may mean different things for different people.

## **Three Basic Responses We might have in Conversation:**

1. *I hear you and I'm with you.*

You understand what the other person is saying about their belief and you **agree** with it. This is easy and comfortable.

2. *I hear you, but I'm not with you.*

You understand the point being made, but you **disagree** with it. This can be uncomfortable, but at least you heard/understood each other.

3. *I don't hear you. I can't get it.*

You don't understand what the other person is saying. This aspect of their faith is so outside your experience (and maybe your language) that you can't even imagine it. This can be disturbing, because it creates a feeling of alienation that is deeper than disagreement. There is no easy solution, but do not give up hope. There is always the chance that understanding will come from more conversation.



We all have something to offer, and when we seek to learn from each other, we all are enriched. In this way we move a little closer to being a Church (a Body of Christ) here on earth that is *one*, as it is in heaven.