

Journey to Easter

A Lenten Program designed by
*The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission*¹

Program Introduction and Overview

Journey to Easter is a six-week Lenten Program designed to facilitate a deeper personal understanding of God's call to live out our Baptismal Covenant, and to channel that understanding into action in our daily lives. The program leads naturally to the Reaffirmation of Baptismal Covenant at Easter. **Journey to Easter** is based on the lectionary readings for this year's Lent, and provides a "safe space" where participants explore, share, and support each other.

It may be used in many different settings:

- Sunday morning lectionary study
- Mid-week Lenten program
- The preparation of candidates for Baptism or Confirmation at Easter
- Family devotionals
- Men's or Women's groups

If you have a very large group, it would be best to break the group into small groups of 6-10 participants.

Method

Journey to Easter relies on the African Bible Study method and the kind of question framing found in the Education for Ministry (EfM) program. The intent is to allow the Bible readings and Baptismal Covenant to inform the lives of the participants. There is no preconceived take-away message or moral, rather the guidance of the Spirit in community will determine the insights participants gain from the conversation.

In addition to intentionally gathering at the beginning and closing with prayer at the end, there are three core aspects of this process:

1. ***Listening*** The Sunday Lectionary Gospel readings will be read in a manner similar to African Bible Study.
2. ***Connecting*** The participants will connect the scripture reading with their daily lives.

¹ The Associated Parishes for Liturgy and Mission is an association of people in The Episcopal Church in the United States, the Anglican Church of Canada, and sister churches who share a passion for liturgy that is well done, appropriate to the culture and context, and revelatory of God's lively mission in the world.

3. **Applying** The participants will consider God's call to action in light of their Baptismal promises and respond to God's word by identifying actions they can take in the week ahead.

This is not a "class," nor "Bible Study" but a *conversation among peers*. Space will be given for intuitive and practical responses to scripture and the liturgical tradition. The structure is designed to help participants reflect and make connections without the session feeling like a "therapy group." The level of personal sharing is up to each participant. Some may respond in a more "thinking" or more "feeling" manner depending on their personality; this is OK.

It is expected that the sessions will be led by *lay group facilitators*. The clear structure and specific questions should make it easy for lay people to lead. The clergy has a clear role in *supporting facilitators and participants*, and may choose to celebrate optional rites, such as those found in Catechumenal programs, to support the participants as well as integrating them into the worship services during Lent.

The structure of each session

All sessions have the same basic structure:

I **Gather**: Welcome, introduction (first week)/ check-in (subsequent weeks).

II **Listen**: A participant reads the passage aloud as others listen, then quickly share a word or image that struck them.

III **Connect**: Another participant reads the same passage aloud once more, and participants explore the parallels between the passage and their daily lives (this is the longest part of the session)

IV **Apply**: Another participant reads the same passage aloud once more, and participants share how they feel called to do something concrete in response during the coming week.

V **Pray**: The session closes with prayer.

Timing.

We have found that it is most fruitful to hold the session *before* the next Sunday Eucharist to allow participant to explore it before they hear it proclaimed in the Eucharist. The session may take place during the week, or just prior to the Sunday service. Families have successfully used this to guide their dinner conversation.

Recruiting group facilitators.

Since **Journey to Easter** is not a class or a lecture, it is important to select group facilitators with skills that are different from those of most teachers. A good group facilitator:

1. Encourages the conversation and keeps it moving without dominating it, more interested in what participants have to say than in his or her own ideas.

2. Is comfortable defining the process, implementing it, and setting limits when necessary.
3. Is able to be vulnerable, willing to *briefly* share his or her own life experiences with the participants.
4. Is able to work closely with clergy, especially if optional rites are being employed during the Sunday Service.

Try to have enough facilitators so that the discussions may take place in groups of 6-10 if used in a church setting.

For a home setting, share the responsibility of leading. Any person who is old enough to read can be the one to read the "facilitator" part, while other family members may share the responsibility of prompting the family to move from one part to the next.