

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES FOR FACILITATING THE MEETINGS!

Access the Program Leader Guide for this book at  
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# Meeting Jesus Changes Everything

## *Leader Guide*



*Christian  
Family  
Movement*

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# ***Meeting Jesus Changes Everything***

## **Program Leader Guide**

The *Program Leader Guide* is akin to a “teacher’s edition manual,” meant to help prepare leaders to facilitate the meetings by giving them extra supplemental resources or ideas the author had while writing the chapter that might enrich the meeting.

**Access the Leader Guide for Individual Chapters  
at [www.cfm.org/leader\\_guides](http://www.cfm.org/leader_guides)**

**(Leaders' Notes appear in this distinctive text.)**

### **The CFM Leader Guide for this Program...**

- Explains why the Scripture passage was chosen and provides a short summary/paraphrase of reading and includes historical background, and theological definitions, as needed
- Suggests possible responses to the Reflection, Observe, and Judge questions, to promote conversation.
- Paraphrases the Social Inquiry material for the leader, provides relevant background information, current statistics, and definitions of words, if necessary.
- Points out possible ways the conversation can get off track and provide ways to get back to the theme of the meeting.
- Adds additional reference material that may be used/brought up to facilitate discussion.

## Checklist for leaders:

- Review chapter and leader guide before meeting.
- Contact members beforehand with date & time.
- Challenge your members to make a commitment to CFM and to attend all meetings.
- Follow up by phone or email when members miss.
- Familiarize yourself with [www.cfm.org](http://www.cfm.org) and encourage your members to do so also. Help everyone to create an account.
- Get to know group members. Stay in touch outside the meeting. Have fun!

## The CFM Meeting Format

**Gathering Prayer** – The group always begins with a prayer, read or sung, prepared or spontaneous.

**Report on Actions** – (5 -10 minutes) Group members report on the progress of CFM actions taken individually, as a family, or by the group. This is the appropriate time to describe needs in your family, parish or community that have come to the attention of the members.

**Scripture Reflection** – (15 to 20-minute discussion) Quiet reflection and discussion about the scripture helps group members to step away from the ordinary pressure and distractions of the day and begin to focus on the issues of the meeting from a Christian perspective.

**Social Inquiry** – (60 -90 minutes) The Social Inquiry (Observe and Judge and Act) is the heart of the CFM meeting. Unless the group reports objective facts during the discussion, the meeting will not lead to action.

**OBSERVE** – Gather information from your community or from your own personal experience. Often facts can be opinions of others, too. At this stage of the meeting, members should refrain from expressing their opinions about facts. The knowledge and experience of group members are valuable, but the group must go beyond its own members to gather facts from the larger world and report them objectively.

**JUDGE** – In light of Christ’s teachings, make judgements about what you observed. At this stage, the group decides by discussion what Christ would want us to do. The group should try to refer only to the information observed.

**ACT** - To make a difference. Members choose an action to bring “the way things are” more in line with “the way things should be.” The best actions come from the group as a result of the discussion. Actions in the program book are just suggestions. An action may be done as an individual, a couple, a family, a small group, or a parish. The key is to take something away from the meeting and resolve to do something to live out the Gospel.

**Look ahead to the next meeting** – Set the time and place. Aim to meet twice a month.

**Prayer** – The meeting concludes with a prayer. The program book usually has a suggested prayer or another may be chosen by the group or the discussion leaders. Alternatively, a member of the group might lead a spontaneous prayer.

**Social Time** – A short social with simple and inexpensive refreshments helps members to know and understand one another better and builds community.

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# ONE

*Participant Book - Page 10*

## **Finding Good Friends - The Man with Paralysis**

MARK 2: 1-12

*Leader's note: It is wise to make a pre-meeting contact with all the families. When you call the families to confirm their attendance, share the Observe items with them. Note they are asked to discuss "traits or qualities of a friend" with their children and/or spouse in Observe #4.*

### GATHER

*Hosts for the meeting may choose to set the scene for the prayer: i.e., a hymn for the group to sing together, background music, lighting a candle, etc.*

### OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and ever-loving God, author of salvation, grant us the wisdom to recognize our own material wants so we can understand and enthusiastically respond to the needs of others. Teach us how to be true friends to others, and in that way to be true friends of yours. We know, Lord, that it is through giving that we can receive the precious gift of knowing you. Amen.

### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*The Scriptures provide a foundation for the discussion in the meeting and inspire us to see with eyes of faith and discern how to act in our daily lives as Jesus would.*

**(In this reading, we see the determined actions of  
the man's friends, who make his encounter with**

Jesus possible. The support of the friends will be just as valuable in the days to come, as he adjusts to his new life. We also see Jesus demonstrate true friendship for the man with paralysis. From Jesus, he receives healing in both body and spirit.)

"When Jesus returned to Capernaum after some days, it became known that he was at home. Many gathered together so that there was no longer room for them, not even around the door, and he preached to them. They came bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. Unable to get near Jesus because of the crowd, they opened up the roof above him. After they had broken through, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Child, your sins are forgiven.' Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming. Who but God alone can forgive sins?' Jesus immediately knew in his mind what they were thinking to themselves, so he said, 'Why are you thinking such things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven", or to say, "Rise, pick up your mat and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins on earth---he said to the paralytic, I say to you, rise, pick up your mat, and go home.' He rose, picked up his mat at once, and went away in the sight of everyone. They were all astounded and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'"

-Mark 2: 1-12, New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE)

1. What was the motivation behind the urgency of the friends of the man who was paralyzed? Have I needed friends to bring me for healing?

(Imagine that they have been concerned about their friend for a long time and know his future is bleak. Medical help for paralysis would have been very limited in this time. Jesus' appearance in the town has given them a chance to help in a way they had not previously tried.)

2. How are we called to bring others to meet Christ?

(We can accompany our friends to a church event or parish sponsored service project. There, our friends can meet others who love Jesus and see how their faith has impacted their lives. Our friends can witness how our faith matters to us, too.)

*The basic elements of a CFM meeting are OBSERVE, JUDGE, and ACT. The members of the group OBSERVE some aspect of life around them, JUDGE what they see in light of Christ's teachings, and agree to ACT as they think necessary.*

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

*Each meeting includes some background to consider before we share what we have observed.*

(Consider the traits that Christian friends should develop in order to accompany others to meet Jesus. When we experience true friendship, we learn how to become a friend to others. In this way, we help one another to imitate the Lord.)

The “friends” in this story are critical to the overall result -- the miracle of healing and forgiveness. Without their determination and perseverance, there was no way the man on the stretcher could have ever made his way to meet Jesus. Just what type of friends could these men have been to carry out such an endeavor? When we experience times of despair or

even feel a disconnection from God, we essentially become “paralyzed.” By surrounding ourselves with friends who are strong in their faith, we can rely upon them to help guide us back to God when we lose our sense of direction. They can carry us when we need to be carried. Conversely, there are times when we must act to offer spiritual aid to those who are paralyzed.

“True Christian friends will build each other up emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Friends like to be together simply because it *feels good*. We receive strength, encouragement, and love. We talk, we cry, we listen. But at times we also have to say the difficult things our dearest friend needs to hear. Yet, because of the shared trust and acceptance, we are the one person who can impact our friend's heart, for we know how to deliver the hard message with truth and grace. I believe this is what Proverbs 27:17 means when it says, ‘As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.’”

– Mary Fairchild, “Five Traits of True Christian Friends”

“There are moments when a friend is in need: One's concern about the other, one's willingness to help — if help can be given — will tell us how deep, how profound the friendship is....The true friend is one who, when the skies are dark, will be there to give his support, to share his friend's worries, and, if he can, to help him. To help a friend in need is a source of joy for the true friend.”

– Alice von Hildebrand, “The Canons of Friendship”

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

*OBSERVES are facts, for example what is happening in society, in a situation either public or personal – they are meant to be presented objectively. The opinions of the group about the facts and the discussion of the facts should wait to be voiced during the JUDGE section of the meeting.*

1. Tell of a way a friend or family member was affected by the help of others?
2. Recalling the above scripture verse, tell about a time in your life wherein you assumed the role of the paralyzed man and required help from your friends.
3. Share a memory or example of how you or someone you know was brought to Christ by their friends.
4. Ask your children or spouse what traits or qualities they look for in a friend. Which ones are ‘must have’?

(Possible responses: loyalty, patience, honesty, good example, respect for your opinions, even when different)

5. How does your parish identify and respond to those in need? How can one make their needs known?

In light of Christ’s teachings, JUDGE:

*In the JUDGE part of the meeting the group determines by discussion whether the situation observed is in line with Christian principles.*

1. Why is it important to surround yourself with faith-filled friends to support or move you into action when your faith may begin to erode?
2. Do you find it difficult to help others without receiving any acknowledgements or accolades? Do we expect some level of gratitude when helping others?
3. How can one equip oneself to be a strong faith-filled friend to others?

One can cultivate faith in one’s own life, show genuine interest in what others are going through and cultivate the practice of listening closely and noticing what is not said but only indicated,

read books or articles about how to be a supportive friend when others are suffering or doubting...)

4. How difficult can it be to help those with whom we disagree?

Based on what has been discussed, ACT:

*Remember, the suggested actions are just that, suggestions. Certainly, do not feel you must do all those mentioned in the book. It is best if the action comes from the ideas of the members as a result of the discussion, but it is important to do some action.*

1. Make a point of reconnecting or reconciling with an estranged friend or family member.
2. As a family, visit a homebound member of your parish community and find out more about their life.
3. Either individually or as a family, choose one experience that challenges you to move out of your comfort zone.
4. Join a parish ministry that brings people together to form friendships and help others.
5. Identify and make a commitment to engage in an ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY** *If children are accompanying their parents to the meeting, they could work on an activity while their parents are discussing the Social Inquiry.*

Draw a picture or write a brief story of a time that a friend helped you. Write a thank you note to your friend and send it to him or her.

### AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

*Each meeting includes a few questions to spark discussion with family members at home. This optional activity extends the CFM experience to children and continues the conversation.*

1. Who are your best friends? What makes them friends to you?
2. Do you know anyone who needs a friend? How can you reach out to them?

### LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

*Take a look at the Observes for the next meeting to see what needs to be done in preparation. Share contact information: names, home addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. Everyone should take a turn hosting a meeting and facilitating a meeting. Simple refreshments can be provided by the host family, another family, or everyone can bring something to share. Be sure and let the host family know whether you can attend the upcoming meeting.*

1. Phone or e-mail host if you cannot attend.
2. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
3. Who could you invite to join our group?

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

### CLOSING PRAYER

You have blessed us, O God,  
With the gift of friendship,  
The bonding of persons  
In a circle of love.  
We thank you for such a blessing:  
For friends who love us,  
Who share our sorrows,  
Who laugh with us in celebration,  
Who bear our pain,  
Who need us as we need them,  
Who weep as we weep,  
Who hold us when words fail,  
And who give us the freedom to be ourselves.  
Bless our friends with health,  
Wholeness, life, and love.  
Amen.

-Vienna Cobb Anderson

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement  
(found on the inside back cover of participants' book).

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## TWO

*Participant Book - Page 18*

### **Risking Meeting Strangers - The Woman at the Well**

JOHN 4:1-42

#### GATHER

*Sing a hymn that highlights that we are called to welcome all people to our faith community.*

#### OPENING PRAYER

God and Father of all people, since the time of Abraham and Sarah, you have called your people to lives of immigration and resettlement throughout all lands. You have blessed us and equipped us with differences unique to the callings and tasks you have laid out before us. As a result, humanity overflows with infinite combinations of beauty and distinction with which to praise you! Though different from one another we may seem, you reassure us that we are all created in your image. We are all beautiful in your sight. Thank you for the splendor and uniqueness of all your people throughout the whole world. Please open us to the possibility of seeing you reveal yourself to us in encounters with others whom we may think of as strangers. Forgive our tendencies to look past the needs of others we don't understand, and help us to become better neighbors and friends to our brothers and sisters whose lives may appear so different from ours. Take away our cultural narrow mindedness, and give us the courage to protect the rights and dignity of all your people. Amen.

## REPORT ON ACTIONS

*Recall your actions in response to discussion at the last meeting and take a few moments to report on the outcomes and any insights you gained from the experience.*

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

(Jesus speaks to stranger with respect and gives her his full attention. It is especially significant that his dialogue partner is a woman alone. Jesus must have noticed that she has no friends with her at the well, no one to help her or to keep her company. He is alert to the loneliness and friendlessness of the other person, even before she tells him about her life.

This otherness of the woman is compounded because she is a Samaritan and Jesus is a Jew. The two groups have the same religious roots, but they hate each other. The rift between the two groups is rooted in differing worship practices and politics.

For more on the conflict between Jews and Samaritans, see <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/the-rift-between-jews-and-samaritans/>: "Imagine the hatred between Serbs and Muslims in modern Bosnia, the enmity between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland or the feuding between street gangs in Los Angeles or New York, and you have some idea of the feeling and its causes between Jews and Samaritans in the time of Jesus. Both politics and religion were involved.")

"So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well

was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

...Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

- John 4:5-18, 25-29, New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (NRSVCE)

1. The woman obviously has been taught that the Messiah is coming. How does this knowledge/expectation shape her

encounter with Jesus? Why do we need to know about Jesus to be able to recognize when he is in our midst?

(Samaritan women were regarded by Jews as ritually impure, and therefore Jews were forbidden to drink from any vessel they had handled.

\* [4:10] Living water: the water of life, i.e., the revelation that Jesus brings; the woman thinks of “flowing water,” so much more desirable than stagnant cistern water. On John’s device of such misunderstanding, cf. note on Jn 3:3.

\* [4:11] Sir: the Greek *kyrios* means “master” or “lord,” as a respectful mode of address for a human being or a deity; cf. Jn 4:19. It is also the word used in the Septuagint for the Hebrew *’adônai*, substituted for the tetragrammaton YHWH.

\* [4:20] This mountain: Gerizim, on which a temple was erected in the fourth century B.C. by Samaritans to rival Mount Zion in Jerusalem; cf. Dt 27:4 (Mount Ebal = the Jews’ term for Gerizim).

\* [4:23] In Spirit and truth: not a reference to an interior worship within one’s own spirit. The Spirit is the spirit given by God that reveals truth and enables one to worship God appropriately (Jn 14:16–17). Cf. “born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5).

\* [4:25] The expectations of the Samaritans are expressed here in Jewish terminology. They did not expect a messianic king of the house of David but a prophet like Moses (Dt 18:15).

Source: Footnotes in the New American Bible, John 4)

2. What does the encounter between Jesus and the woman teach us about how men and women can relate to one another?

("The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it:

Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design." - CCC, no. 1935)

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

(We learn more cultural background about ethnic prejudices and the idea of the "stranger", extending from Jesus' time to the present.)

“The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman would astonish his contemporaries for three reasons: the hatred between Jews and Samaritans, the moral status of the woman, and gender segregation. In the Mediterranean culture of the first century, the daily flow of life meant to separate the sexes, especially in the routines of a common village. For example, in the morning and evening, women would gather together so they could fill water jars from a common well in the middle of the marketplace. During mid-day, however, only men would conduct business in the market place. Not only did society separate genders, many Jews believed Samaritan women were unclean from birth. Association with a Samaritan woman would make a Jewish man unclean. Intermarriage would automatically excommunicate him. The fact Jesus sat alone with the woman increased her suspicions.”

- Larry Broding, Word Sunday.com

Fear can perpetuate peoples' prejudices and unwillingness/difficulty to reach out to others perceived as “strangers”. Even people we know may feel like strangers to us. So being a stranger is more than being an unfamiliar person. According to a New York Times report, when the Icelandic government pledged to take in only 50 refugees in 2015, a group of Icelanders called on the government to permit 4,950 more to enter the country. They wrote on Facebook:

“Refugees are our future spouses, best friends, our next soul mate, the drummer in our children's band, our next colleague, Miss Iceland 2022, the carpenter who finally fixes our bathroom, the chef in the cafeteria, the fireman, the hacker and the television host. People who we'll never be able to say to: 'Your life is worth less than mine.'”

Migrants often can't go back to where they came from. They need new homes and new lives, and it's up to us to help them. In order to do that, we need to start seeing them not as refugees, but as our potential neighbors.

*Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. - Hebrews 13:2, NABRE*

Political commentator Sam Smith discusses the idea of “strangers” in his essay, “How to Get Along with Other Americans Living Next to 290 Million People Who Aren't Quite Like You”:

“The most important fact about prejudice (is) it's normal. That isn't to say that it's nice, pretty, or desirable. Only that suspicion, distrust, and distaste for outsiders is a deeply human trait. Many attempts to eradicate racism from our society have been based on the opposite notion that those who harbor prejudice towards others are abnormal or social deviants.... What if, instead, we were to start with the unhappy truth that humans have always had a hard time dealing with other peoples, and that much ethnic and sexual antagonism stems not from hate so much as from cultural narcissism? Then our repertoire of solutions might tilt more towards education and mediation and away from being self-righteous multi-cultural missionaries converting yahoos in the wilds of the soul. We could turn towards something more akin to what Andrew Young once described as a sense of ‘no fault justice.’ We might begin to consider seriously Martin Luther King's admonition to his colleagues that among their dreams should be that someday their enemies would be their friends.”

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* - Galatians 3:28, NABRE

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. Tell about a time when you misjudged or discounted someone based on his/her appearance, gender, age, or affiliations.
2. What role, if any, does social media play in accentuating differences in order to perpetuate chasms among groups of people (Christian vs. non-Christian, man vs. woman, Democrat vs. Republican, etc.) in today's culture? How is social media being used in attempts to unify all groups of people?
3. Consider how living out your Christian faith may lead others to think of you as the stranger. Have you ever compromised your beliefs to put someone else at ease or to fit in?
4. What makes it difficult for you to reach out to others, especially those of a different gender, age group, socio-economic class, race/culture, and/or religion?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. When you encounter unfair or unjust stereotypes, how can you respond?
2. What would it take for you to intentionally reach out to someone with whom you feel you have nothing in common or whose values are in conflict with your own?

(Possible responses: If we had to work together on a common project to help another; when both parties

recognize a need in their neighborhood that requires them to cooperate)

3. What messages are you communicating to your own children about other people - especially those with whom you disagree?
4. How can we respond when our values put us in the position of being at odds with prevailing social practice/thinking?

(Keeping Jesus as our model for recognizing the humanity in our opponents, we can have more mercy and understanding for them. Our calmness and kindness will speak volumes to those who have pre-judged us.)

Based on what has been discussed, ACT:

1. Perform an act of kindness/charity for a stranger. Make an effort to interact with the person rather than acting anonymously.
2. Plan a cultural night at your house complete with a meal (home cooked or take out) and a prayer common to a culture different than your own. Involve your children by having them look up facts about the culture/country and presenting them at dinner. Maybe end the evening with a foreign film from or about the country/culture you are exploring.
3. The woman at the well was despised and rejected by her community because of her offensive past. As a family, go to church together so each can go to confession and then gather again to celebrate the gift of God's boundless love and complete forgiveness. Talk about why it is easier to focus on the sins of others rather than confronting our own. Which does Jesus want us to do?

4. Spend time with your family (or CFM group) planning and implementing an interactive activity (game night, hymn sing, etc.) at a local nursing home. Challenge each (family) member to identify at least 3 things he/she has in common with one of the elderly residents at the facility.

Some tips for visiting in nursing homes: "Your Go-To Guide for Volunteering with Seniors: Offering Your Time, Talent, and Good Conversation":

<https://createthegood.org/campaign/volunteeringwithseniors>

5. Research and highlight some positive contributions made by a group of people (a certain culture) that is currently being portrayed negatively or as controversial in today's media.
6. Identify and make a commitment to engage in an ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments. If you have chosen an ongoing action, continue your commitment.

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Make a sculpture with modeling compound of your family, with one more person added to represent a new friend.

#### AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

*Each meeting includes a few questions to spark discussion with family members at home. This optional activity extends the CFM experience to children and continues the conversation.*

1. Discuss with your school-aged children if and how their school acknowledges or even celebrates different cultures represented within the student body.

2. Recall a time that your family experienced a “culture shock” and what that experience taught you about yourselves and the people who seemed to be so different from you.
3. As a family, discuss people in your lives who seem difficult to approach or make a connection with. Would you see the benefit of trying again with any of these people to have a meaningful encounter? What affect might that have on you or on the other person? What would keep you from reaching out?
  1. Look ahead at the Observe questions for the next meeting.
  2. Who could you invite to join our group?

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

### CLOSING PRAYER - *A Prayer for Tolerance*

Teach us, God, to treasure the differences that distinguish one person from another. Fill us with the strength to overcome senseless fear and hatred. Open our hearts to the radiance that shines forth from every human soul. Inspire us to shed our apathy; remind us that it is our obligation to be responsible for one another. Open our ears to the cries of all who are in need of our assistance. Give us the courage to combat prejudice and intolerance wherever they exist. Teach us to see each other through Your eyes, God. In Your eyes all people are equally loved, equally precious. Bless us all, God, with compassion, with kindness, and with peace. Amen.

- Rabbi Naomi Levy

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement (found on the inside back cover of the participants' book).

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# THREE

*Participant Book - Page 27*

## **Believing in Times of Doubt - Thomas the Apostle**

JOHN 20: 24-29

### GATHER

*As a candle is being lit, play/sing a song or appropriate hymn related to the meeting theme.*

### OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray for an increase in faith.

Father God, on a daily basis our faith is being challenged by our secular world. Some people scoff at our beliefs in the Virgin Mary and the Holy Eucharist. Many people want to use various aspects of science to deny all religious beliefs. Help us to recognize that science and religion both have their mysteries that point to you. We pray that the Doubting Thomases in this world might come to recognize the truth of your mercy and love, like Thomas himself did. We also recognize the doubter in ourselves. When one of our prayers is not answered as we desire, we too may question you. Sometimes we want to see proof of the living God. Help all of us, we pray, to receive the Holy Spirit in our hearts and to continually renew our faith and believe in you. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

### REPORT ON ACTIONS

## SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

"Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.' Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.'"

- John 20: 24-29, NRSVCE

(We ordinary Christians can be encouraged that Jesus continues to understand and love his friend, Thomas, even when he has doubts. "Faith is an entirely free gift that God makes to man. We can lose this priceless gift, as St. Paul indicated to St. Timothy: "Wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith."<sup>44</sup> To live, grow and persevere in the faith until the end we must nourish it with the word of God; we must beg the Lord to increase our faith;<sup>45</sup> it must be "working through charity," abounding in hope, and rooted in the faith of the Church." - CCC 162)

1. How did Jesus react to Thomas's doubting?
2. What was Thomas's response to Jesus after seeing him?
3. What do you think about Thomas asking for proof that Jesus was resurrected?

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

We can use the story of Thomas to provide us with instruction and encouragement. Doubting Thomas did not stay a doubter. He was trying to learn and grow in his faith. When he sees the risen Jesus, he is the first disciple to put into words the truth that Jesus is both Lord and God. He utters the greatest confession of faith recorded anywhere in the Bible. Jesus knew Thomas's weaknesses, just as He knows and understands our weaknesses and our sins. Jesus doesn't have to appear to each one of us personally to show us His wounds but He shows Himself in many other ways. We have a God of mercy who is ever present and ready to forgive and give us a second chance. The sacrament of reconciliation helps us examine our consciences and the act of confessing our doubts and fears can help us become more forgiving. Reconciliation is an example of God's mercy and love.

It is a part of human nature, for each one of us, even as Christians, to experience doubt at some time. Blessed Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa) was secretly tormented and suffered over a lost faith. She often wrote letters to a few trusted friends and spiritual directors expressing how she doubted her faith and felt completely abandoned by God at times throughout her lifetime.

Mother Teresa used pen and paper in letters to her spiritual confidante, the Rev. Michael Van der Peet, to express how she felt "no presence of God whatsoever." She referred to her smile as "a mask" or "a cloak that covers everything." She wrote, "In my soul, I feel just the terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing." She told him, "Jesus has a very special love for you, as for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great, that I look and do not see, listen and do not hear."

In 2007, Rev. Brian Kolodiejchuk published her letters in the book, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: The Private Writings of the "Saint of Calcutta."* Knowing that she struggled with her faith – even doubting whether God really existed – gives us great hope and encouragement. Even though

she spent many years doubting God’s presence in her life, she never once wandered off the path God chose for her to follow.

In her article, “Doubt—and Faith,” spirituality columnist Margery Egan observes: “Indeed, the first chapter of Joseph Ratzinger’s (Pope Benedict XVI) *Introduction to Christianity* is all about doubt vs. belief. ‘The believer is always threatened with an uncertainty that in moments of temptation can suddenly and unexpectedly cast a piercing light on the fragility of the whole.’”

Saint Therese of Lisieux wrote about her own crisis of faith at the end of her life, at the age of only 24 years. The nuns she lived with were so horrified that they edited her writings to remove mentions of the ‘temptations of atheism.’

Spiritual genius Thomas Merton, the famed Catholic monk, said in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, ‘Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt...for every gain in deep certitude there is a corresponding growth of superficial doubt.’”

From your personal experience, OBSERVE

1. Think of someone you know who has doubts about God’s existence. What are his/her reasons? [For example, our modern world has practices and assumptions that make God seem implausible. Science makes it appear that everything that needs to be explained can be explained through the scientific method. Also, a relatively comfortable modern society makes it appear that living just for this life can produce wellbeing, so there’s not much motivation to think about whether there is anything important beyond a comfortable life in this world that pursues our agenda and is under our control. Or again, experiences of suffering can lead some people to question whether a good God could possibly exist.](#)
2. What are some Christian beliefs that people struggle with?  
[Possible answer:](#)

People struggle with the idea that the reason there is something rather than nothing—the reason the universe (matter, energy, etc.) exists at all—is that there is something (in fact, Someone) who exists without having been caused by some natural process. Someone who has caused matter and energy to exist. People also struggle with the idea that God is personal and not an impersonal force or oneness. And they struggle with anything that doesn't fit the rules of modern science, such as God interrupting the rules of physics and biology to raise someone from the dead.

3. Think of a time when someone doubted your word for various reasons. How do you usually react when someone doubts you?
4. Who among your friends or family has been a source of encouragement for your faith?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE

1. How can we use Thomas as an ally we can relate to on our pilgrimage to faith?
2. What can help a "doubting Thomas" have faith?

"...Thomas reminds us that we receive faith in and through the community of parents, friends and church. Thomas found faith because he returned to the community and trusted enough to show up the following Sunday. Ultimately, however, Thomas testifies to the fact that our faith must be rooted in our own experience of God, in a personal acceptance of God and commitment to God." - *America Magazine*, November 12, 2007, Gerald Fagin.

<https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/633/faith-focus/doubter-gives-lessons-faith>

3. How can we use our experiences to make us a better person and make our faith grow stronger?

4. How can you be a testament of faith to others?

(Definition of testament - Webster's Dictionary

- a: a tangible proof or tribute
- b: an expression of conviction
- c: A Creed)

Based on what has been discussed, ACT

1. Choose an action to strengthen your faith.
2. As a CFM family, help plan a church wide evening of communal reconciliation to “come in union” together.
3. Participate in one of the adult faith formation courses offered by your parish.
4. Continue your group’s ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments. To share your project with CFM, send a report and photo of your project to [office@cfm.org](mailto:office@cfm.org)

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Make a poster. Write this message in the center, “Jesus is with us.” From old magazines and newspapers, cut out images of people in happy times and in troubled times. Arrange them and paste them around the message.

### AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. Hold a family meeting allowing each member to share a time when s/he felt others doubted them and how they felt at the time.
2. What can you say or do when you think others do not believe in you or trust you?

3. When have you felt like Thomas the Doubter?

### LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

### CLOSING PRAYER – *The Apostles' Creed* (Our testament of faith)

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement (found on the inside back cover of the participants' book).

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# FOUR

*Participant Book - Page 33*

## **Overcoming Obstacles - Bartimaeus**

MARK 10: 46-52

GATHER

OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit. Come. Fill the hearts of your people!  
Enkindle in us the fire of your Love. Send forth your Spirit,  
Lord, and we will be recreated, and you will renew the face of  
the earth.

Lord, be with us as we expose those things that keep us from  
your love. Help us to overcome our limitations. Send us the gift  
of Fortitude, so that we may continue to follow you on your  
way! Amen

(Definition of fortitude: strength of mind that enables a  
person to encounter danger or bear pain or adversity with  
courage)

REPORT ON ACTIONS

*Is everyone involved in the action or actions of the group? If  
the action was forgotten, do it in the next week.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*They came to Jericho. And, as he was leaving Jericho with his  
disciples and a sizable crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind man, the  
son of Timaeus, sat by the roadside begging. On hearing that it  
was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus,*

*son of David, have pity on me.” And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he kept calling out all the more, “Son of David, have pity on me.” Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” So they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take courage; get up, he is calling you.” He threw aside his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus said to him in reply, “What do you want me to do for you?” The blind man replied to him, “Master, I want to see.” Jesus told him, “Go your way; your faith has saved you.” Immediately he received his sight and followed him on the way. - Mark 10:46-52, NABRE*

1. Many people tried to stop Bartimaeus from bothering Jesus, but he cried out even more insistently, and Jesus responded. Can you recall a time when you or someone close had to “storm heaven” to get God’s attention?
2. Jesus did exactly as he was asked, and Bartimaeus’ response was to “follow him on his way.” If blindness was preventing Bartimaeus from following Jesus, what could be preventing you from doing the same?

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

*From the Catechism of the Catholic Church: “Illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, man experiences his powerlessness, his limitations, and his finitude. Every illness can make us glimpse death. Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.” - Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1500-01*

Many times, our own limitations -- be they physical (as was the case for Bartimaeus) or spiritual, as often happens when we are bereaved or we find ourselves estranged from the Church --

prevent us from following the Lord closely. Here are some examples:

Helen Keller, who was both blind and deaf, spoke about her experience of grief in her book, *We the Bereaved*. “Often when the heart is torn with sorrow, spiritually we wander like a traveler lost in a deep wood. We grow frightened, lose all sense of direction, batter ourselves against trees and rocks in our attempt to find a path. All the while there is a path—the path of Faith—that leads straight out of the dense tangle of our difficulties into the open road we are seeking.”

(From a 2013 study of attitudes of sighted people toward people with blindness: "Blindness has been interpreted in different, often controversial ways, since ancient times. It has been stereotyped and labeled by sighted people and has thus affected the acceptance of Visually Impaired persons, the tolerance towards them and their integration into societal life...Our results showed that firstly, visually impaired people are still treated with some prejudice concerning the size of their disability, their education and their integration into society."

Pope Francis calls us to love and welcome another group who feel excluded: those who are divorced and remarried outside the Church. “The Church is fully aware that [their situation] is contrary to the Christian Sacrament. However, her gaze as a teacher always draws from a mother’s heart; a heart which, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, always seeks the good and the salvation of the people.... If we then also look at these new bonds through the eyes of the young sons and daughters — and the little ones watch — through the eyes of the children, we are aware of a greater urgency to foster a true welcome for these families in our communities. For this reason, it is important that the style of the community, its language, its attitudes, always be attentive to people, starting with the little ones. They are the ones who suffer the most in these situations. After all, how can we encourage these parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an

example of committed and exercised faith, if we keep them at arm's length from the life of the community, as if they are excommunicated? We must act in a way so as not to add even more to the burdens which the children in these situations already feel they have to bear! Unfortunately, the number of these children and youth is really large. It is important for them to feel the Church as loving mother to all, always ready to listen and to meet.” – Pope Francis, General Audience of 5 August 2015

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. Have you or someone you love experienced something that caused a separation from Jesus and his Church?

(Such as: Marriage and divorce issues, past abuse and exclusion, transportation difficulties, racial prejudice, shame, physical barriers to accessibility, i.e., steps)

2. Quite a few of our churches are very old structures and were not built to accommodate persons with physical limitations. How has your (arch)diocese tried to make church facilities available to all? What type of outreach is there to the home-bound and others who cannot attend regular worship services?
3. At times people who lose a loved one feel that God has let them down, especially if the beloved is young or taken suddenly, and they stop participating in the communal life of the Church. How are these people treated in your community? Is there a bereavement support group available to members of your parish?
4. The divorce rate among Catholics is similar to that of the general population. Many divorced/remarried Catholics are prevented from receiving communion either temporarily or permanently. Some have walked away from the Church taking their children with them. How are these families

treated in your parish? Is there any formal outreach to these families in your (arch)diocese?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. If you or a loved one experiences a physical limitation that prevents you from "following Jesus on his way," how can this best be overcome? Who can be counted on for help in these difficult situations? Why is it necessary to cry to the Lord all the louder in our distress?
2. As our population ages, more and more people are finding themselves in nursing homes, becoming functionally homebound in the process. How can we help to reconnect them to the churches they can no longer attend?

(Here is an example of a parish ministry to the homebound: St. Andrew's Parish, Rochester, Michigan, <http://www.standrewchurch.org/parish-life/elderly-homebound-ministry/>)

3. Even people of great faith feel the intense pain of loss when a loved one is taken away. How can we encourage a bereaved friend or family member to persevere in faith even if they are angry at God? How have you been able to comfort someone who was overcome with grief?

(Find out what your local hospice and funeral homes offer.)

4. Pope Francis has gone to great lengths to try to reach out to families who find themselves estranged from the Church due to divorce/remarriage. In what ways can we, as individuals and as a CFM group, support these families and encourage them to remain within the parish community?

Here are two organizations that help parishes minister to the divorced and separated:

- DivorceCare - Divorce Recovery Support Groups - <https://www.divorcecare.org/>
- Catholic Divorce Ministry <http://www.nacsd.org/>

Based on what has been discussed, ACT:

1. Many older parishioners have trouble hearing the homilies even if they use their hearing aids. Find out if installing a Telecoil Loop system or reserving some seats in the front (or near a speaker) would help them. Speak with your pastor about this.
2. Find out if there is a bereavement group that meets near your church. Advertise the group in your church bulletin so people know there is help available. Also, encourage a grieving loved one to read Helen Keller's *We the Bereaved*, available at: <https://archive.org/details/webereaved00hele>
3. Encourage the divorced/remarried couples you know to remain/return to the parish which is their home. Make them feel welcome and valued whenever you see them.
4. As a CFM group sponsor a "Welcome Home" Sunday for the families of divorced/remarried couples. Ask your priest or deacon to preach a special homily tailored to their situation, and follow this with a CFM sponsored group activity (coffee and doughnuts or the like). Invite these couples to join CFM for ongoing support and spiritual growth.
5. Continue your group's ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments. To share your project with CFM, send a report and photo of your project to [office@cfm.org](mailto:office@cfm.org)

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Paper Prayer Chain: Make a list of people who need our prayers. Write the names on strips of paper and make loops to join into a chain. Pray for one intention each day.

### AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. Can you remember a time when you felt God let you down? What did you do about it?
2. Sometimes when people get angry at God, they stop praying or going to church. Is that the right thing to do?
3. How can we remember the people who no longer come to church in our daily prayers? Do you think God will bring them back if we ask?

### LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

### CLOSING PRAYER

*“Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing away: God never changes. Patience obtains all things. Whoever has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.”*  
- St. Teresa of Avila

Lord, we place all our limitations - our broken hearts, our broken lives - in your merciful embrace; that in you we may find peace, love, and forgiveness. For we know that you alone suffice. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement (found on the inside back cover of the participants' book).

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## FIVE

*Participant Book - Page 40*

### **Fathers Pointing the Way - Jairus**

MARK 5: 21-24, 35-43

#### GATHER

#### OPENING PRAYER

Father in Heaven, you have given us each a father on this Earth, and this man is unique. Some fathers have modeled your loving care while others have left much to be desired. No matter my personal experience, I now turn to you in confidence. Please bless my father, living or deceased. Please also bless my family and all future generations of male leadership in my lineage. Amen.

#### REPORT ON ACTIONS

#### SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered round him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, "My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live." So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. While he was still speaking, some people came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the leader of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe." He allowed no one to follow him except Peter, James, and John, the brother of James. When they came to the house*

*of the leader of the synagogue, he saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. When he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. Then he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum", which means, "Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

- Mark 5: 21-24, 35-43, NRSVCE

1. What one word or phrase struck you while reading the passage?
2. The crowds pressed in on Jesus. Who presses in on you, and how does that feel?

("Christ's miracles recorded in the Gospels are signs of the divine omnipotence and of the salvific power of the Son of Man. They also reveal God's love for humanity -- particularly for those who suffer, who are in need, who implore healing, pardon and compassion." Pope John Paul II, General Audience, December 9, 1987)

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

“Healthy parenting is never the role of one parent only; it is the result of a partnership of both a father and a mother. That is why the Catechism speaks regularly of the duties of parents, and not of fathers or mothers individually. Nevertheless, there is really no such thing as a ‘parent’ in the abstract – in real life parents are always either a mother or a father, and it is recognized that fathers have different ways of parenting than mothers. Therefore, I want to address my comments particularly to fathers, although always with the consciousness

that fathers exercise their parenting role in equal partnership with their wives.... The example of fathers makes a particular impression upon young children, especially in matters of faith, prayer and Mass attendance. It is truly said that the virtues are 'caught, not taught.'"— Archbishop Denis J. Hart, Melbourne, Australia, *Reflecting on Fathers' Day*

“God has given each of our children a role to play in this world, something only they can fulfill. While neither they nor we can foresee exactly what their part will be, they must prepare for it now. This involves learning faithfulness in their current responsibilities by taking schoolwork seriously, building good friendships, and fulfilling their duties at home and elsewhere... We parents must put dreams in our children of doing something wonderful with their lives. This healthy ambition for the future will call them to excellence in whatever they do today. Without manipulating or exerting unhealthy pressure, we should encourage our kids always to aim high and do their best.” - Jeff Smith, *“Parents Make Plans in Their Hearts”*

“You have reason for hope as parents who desire to see your children have faith. The hope is the power of the gospel. The gospel is suited to the human condition. The gospel is attractive. God has already shown great mercy to your children. He has given them a place of rich privilege. He has placed them in a home where they have heard His truth. They have seen the transforming power of grace in the lives of His people. Your prayer and expectation are that the gospel will overcome their resistance as it has yours.”

- Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*

### "Ten Ways to Lead Your Family"

1. Stand tall from the front: We're talking about being an example.
2. Work in partnership with your wife or child's mom.
3. Act like a servant.
4. Live with humility.

5. Think morally.
6. Never stop learning and growing.
7. Have courage.
8. Have an open heart and mind.
9. Lead with the sure understanding that, if you don't, someone else will.
10. From your knees.  
<https://www.allprodad.com/10-ways-to-lead-your-family/>

From your own experience, OBSERVE

1. Share an example of a father exercising appropriate leadership in his family.
2. Survey friends who are parents about the kinds of support they would find most helpful to them in times of distress.
3. Share stories you have heard or personally witnessed of faith healings of children in families.
4. In the gospel reading, Christ tells them, “do not fear, only believe.” Bring in a newspaper article or blog post that offers an example of fathers acting bravely in faith, despite their circumstances.
5. Many laughed at Christ’s proclamation that the girl was not dead. Cite modern challenges in which the culture scoffs at the solution Christ offers.

(Such as: Being open to having a large family, taking in a foster child, receiving experimental treatments to try to beat a disease, being open to helping someone you do not know well, enrolling in a training program that usually only admits a specific demographic, i.e., youth, age, sex, physical abilities, showing your emotions when sad or worried)

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE

1. In our society, are fathers traditionally the more prayerful parent? Explain why you think this is so.
2. How can focusing on fathers help us encourage mothers?
3. How do you respond to your children's desires when they are not aligned with your own aspirations for them?
4. When life delivers us a raw deal why must we persist in being faithful witnesses to Christ?

Based on what has been discussed, ACT

1. Plan a fun outing for your family and include the siblings of a chronically-ill child. This offers them diversion and gives respite to their parents. Take this idea one step further, and contact your local hospital to organize an afternoon of entertaining activities for these families.
2. Organize a holy hour at church for the intentions of families.
3. Provide a meal to a family that is dealing with illness or other challenges.
4. Keep a journal of your experiences and emotional state during a difficult time in your life or pull out old writings you kept in the past, and reflect on God's hand in your life at that time.
5. Continue your group's ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments. To share your project with CFM, send a report and photo of your project to [office@cfm.org](mailto:office@cfm.org).

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

## OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Take some time to pray for your children. On nice stationery write a letter to them sharing your hopes and dreams, and maybe apologies. Give praise and thanks for their strengths and contributions and assure them of your prayers and ongoing support. When you are finished, decide if/how you would like to give it to your child or keep it among your personal things.

## AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. During a family meal, ask each member to share their hopes and dreams for the future.
2. Speak to your children one-on-one about God's love for them and His desire to have a personal relationship with them. Discuss ways to get the ball rolling on their individual prayer life.
3. Do your children have friends who are not Christian or do not appear to actively pursue a life of faith. How can we lead these people to meet Jesus?

## LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

*Take a look at the Observes for the next meeting to see what needs to be done in preparation.*

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

## CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we thank you for your healing power in our lives. May we always beg your favor as Jairus did and trust wholeheartedly that your presence with us is the difference between death and life. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement (found on the inside back cover of the participants' book).

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## SIX

*Participant Book - Page 46*

### **Practicing Hospitality - Elizabeth at the Visitation**

LUKE 1: 39-45

GATHER

OPENING PRAYER

You have promised, Lord, that where two or three gather in your name, there too you will be. We stand in awe of your presence in our midst. Please forgive those times we brushed past you, ignoring the wisdom and love you offer so freely. We are abundantly grateful for the many times you nonetheless return to us and again send us forth to be your presence in the world. We humbly ask that you bless our gathering here today. Let us grow ever more hospitable, welcoming into our homes and our hearts all who knock at our door. Give us the courage and the fortitude to spread the Good News of Your Word no matter how arduous the journey. Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of*

*your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”*

- Luke 1: 39-45, NRSVCE

(Mary had travelled a long way. "The journey from Nazareth to Hebron is about 130 kilometers (81 mi) in a direct line, probably up to half as far again by road, depending on the route taken." -

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visitation\\_\(Christianity\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Visitation_(Christianity))

1. See yourself accompanying Mary on her journey or waiting with Elizabeth. Imagine Mary's arrival. What do you observe?
2. Why does Elizabeth call Mary "blessed?"

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

In *Hospitality Is Biblical--and It's Not Optional*, Emily Cook writes, "The early Christians understood the connection between receiving Christ in the Eucharist and sharing hospitality with others. In Acts, we read that "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers . . . Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:42, 46). Similarly, we must receive Christ in the Eucharist with "glad and generous hearts." When we offer our needs and shortcomings at his table, Christ the Host offers forgiveness and renews grace in our hearts."

“Using the example of Christ meeting his disciples on the road to Emmaus, John Paul II links our reception of Christ in the Eucharist with a call to serve others: "Like the disciples of Emmaus, believers, supported by the living presence of the risen Christ, become in turn the traveling companions of their brothers and sisters in trouble, offering them the word that

rekindles hospitality in their hearts. With them they break the bread of friendship, brotherhood, and mutual help" (Homily, June 2, 2000)."

“Made pilgrims by their desire to share the gospel and in political exile because of their faith in Christ, the early Christians probably thought often of the Israelites in the desert. The life of a wayfarer would not have been easy. Peter urges the followers of Jesus, "Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another" (1 Peter 4:8-9)."

“As believers, we are sustained by the Eucharist to welcome not only strangers but also neighbors and family. Being hospitable means being vulnerable and potentially suffering the pains of living closely with those who most clearly see our faults. In marriage, being hospitable spills into how open we are to life and children. Christian hospitality requires the humility of loving service toward each member of the family, including those with whom it might be difficult to get along. But the rough spots of family life offer the most opportunity for growing in charity and holiness.”

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. In welcoming the pregnant Mary into her home, Elizabeth knew she was also welcoming her “Lord.” Name a time when you realized that you were welcoming Jesus into your home? Did you respond with the same enthusiasm?
2. Tell about a time when someone went out of their way to be with you or help you.
3. Describe a time you believed God wanted you to go and be present to an extended family member or a close friend.

4. When it comes to meeting Jesus, what hopes do you have for your children now? What hopes have you had for them in the past?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. Who, among those now living, would you call "blessed?"
2. Mary's journey to Elizabeth has a spiritual as well as a physical component. What spiritual journey do you feel called to take at this time in your life?

(Possible responses: Learn more about the Bible or the Church, move to a new house, make a new friend, reconcile with a distant relative or someone who offended you, spend more time in prayer)

3. What attributes characterize a family that is ready at any time to welcome Christ into their midst?

(Such as: They listen to one another, respect differences, take turns, forgive wrongs, welcome new people, have patience with those who are slow or difficult)

4. How closely has your child's life resembled the plans you may have for their faith life? How can we best guide our children as they choose their vocational path upon which they will tread their life journey?

(Idea: Learn more about your child's interests or activities.)

From what has been discussed, ACT:

1. Consider habitually adding an extra place to your dinner table so that there is always room for "one more."

2. Plan a pilgrimage or a retreat that your CFM group can undertake together.
3. Inquire about programs in your community that support mothers “at risk.” Become a regular volunteer in one of these programs.
4. Include stories about priests, nuns, and religious brothers in the books you read to your children and grandchildren. Pray as a family for an increase in vocations to the religious life.
5. Review the progress of any “ongoing” Action in which the group is engaged. What has been achieved? What more is needed? What is planned? Consider adding a “welcoming” component to the Action if it doesn’t already include this. To share your project with CFM, send a report and photo of your project to [act\\_editor@cfm.org](mailto:act_editor@cfm.org).

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Like Mary and Elizabeth, sometimes we have the most to learn from those we thought we knew best. For this activity, everyone needs a pen and paper. Have everyone sit in a circle and place a bowl in the center. To start, everyone writes down one thing that they think no one knows about them and then places it in the bowl. After everyone has put one in the bowl, everyone pulls someone else’s paper. Go around the circle and one at a time the person reads the paper out loud and tries to guess who the paper belongs to. You get three attempts to get it correct before the author reveals themselves.

## AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. Have each family member name the person with whom they most like to share good news. Why do they think this is the person who first comes to mind?
2. Tell your children a story about how you came to know to which vocation path God was calling you. Ask them if they have thought about what they want to be when they grow up. Ask how they think this work will serve the Lord. (If your children are grown, ask these same questions about their present endeavors.)
3. Is there someone new in your neighborhood, in your church, in your children's school? Plan, with your family, to invite them to your home.

## LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

*See the OPTIONAL ACTIVITY at the end of the next chapter.*

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

## CLOSING PRAYER

Mary, Our Mother, we turn to you as we seek to do the work given to us by your Son, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus. As you guided his first steps in his infancy, guide our steps as we go forth. As you opened your heart and your home to the Son of God when he was most vulnerable, surround us now with the warmth and assurance of your maternal affection. As you stood broken-hearted, yet faith-filled, at the foot of the Cross, stand by us now even if we falter in purpose and resolve. Intercede for us with your Beloved Son that the grace of the Holy Spirit may light our way during our earthly endeavors and as we pass into the fullness of life at the end of our journey. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement (found on the back inside cover of the participants' book).

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## SEVEN

*Participant Book - Page 53*

### **Balancing Action and Contemplation - Martha and Mary**

LUKE 10: 38-42

GATHER

OPENING PRAYER

Jesus, open us to your presence in our lives, and among us here. Teach us the value of work and of rest, of doing and being. Create in us cheerful and generous hearts ready to work on your behalf. Help us to place our good works in proper perspective, as experiences of your grace, as occasions to share our gifts, as opportunities to learn how to serve you and others better. Free us from our attachment to things that draw us away from you and from one another. Make our hearts, homes, and communities be places of true hospitality. Amen.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so, she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the*

*better part, which will not be taken away from her.*” - Luke 10: 38-42, NRSVCE

1. How have you experienced the presence of God in your activities—work, service, and play? How have you experienced God’s presence in rest, contemplation, and silence?
2. What are your preferred ways of relating to God and to others? Why do you prefer these patterns?

"My take on Mary and Martha: that if Mary is the archetype of contemplation, and Martha the archetype of activism, then let’s not lose sight of the fact that they are *sisters*. In other words, they might squabble, and activist Martha might get annoyed at contemplative Mary, but at the end of the day they are sisters, and they need each other. Likewise, we all need to cultivate both an activist and contemplative dimension to our spiritual lives."

- Carl McColman, "What’s the Point Behind Mary and Martha?" August 22, 2018.

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/carlmccolman/2018/08/whats-the-point-behind-mary-and-martha/>

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

“God is addressing us in all moments of life. We may experience some moments as more privileged than others because they reveal with more clarity and force our limitations and our giftedness. That this revelatory power is more apparent in some moments than others is due more to our own openness and readiness than to the intensity and availability of God’s saving presence.... Our task, then, is to become aware of those obstacles of egoism that block the truth of our experiences and allow those obstacles to be purged by the Truth. Our faith calls us to search our experiences, to preclude none of them, to

relish all of them, trying to reach that limit, that depth where the sound of God’s word of judgment and grace will become clear.” - Joseph F. Schmidt, *Praying our Experiences*

In *The Holy Longing*, Fr. Ronald Rolheiser shares the story of a young nun who has dedicated her life to living in solidarity with the poor. While attending a conference on poverty she has a conversion experience occasioned by the decision to allow conference attendees to have a free afternoon. At the end of the conference the nun shares her story: “I, too, had a grace-experience these past few days and I was converted in a way that I never dreamed I needed to be converted. My conversion began with the announcement of the free afternoon. From the second it was announced, something inside me froze up and I was angry. I kept thinking, ‘What an insult to the poor! This is a waste of time and money. We are here with the money and time of the poor, and what do we do with it? We walk around terraces, drink alcohol, and have a gourmet meal at the Holiday Inn!’ . . . . I walked into the restaurant, saw all the silver knives and forks and the linen serviettes, and I became nauseated and couldn’t go through with it. So, I went out and sat on the bus and waited while everyone else ate. But I had to sit there a long time. Many thoughts ran through my head, and at one stage, I asked myself the question: ‘Would Jesus be in there eating and drinking and having a good time? And I had the horrible realization that he would be! John the Baptist — with his leather belt and his grasshoppers! — would be with me on the bus, boycotting all this joy in the name of the poor. I realized that, in my mind, Jesus and John the Baptist were all mixed up, and I also realized that there was something wrong with me. There was something cold inside of me. I had become like the older brother of the prodigal son, doing all the right things, but having no celebration in my heart.”

From your own experience, OBSERVE:

1. Since the last meeting how did family members spend time together? What did you do to enrich your relationships?

2. Identify saints or contemporary figures whose lives exemplify Martha's action-orientation and Mary's contemplation.

(Contemplation: Thomas Merton, Kathleen Norris (*Cloister Walk* author), St. Catherine of Siena, Brother Lawrence, St. Anthony of Egypt, St. Therese of Avila, St. Hildegard of Bingen)

Action: Dorothy Day, St. Mother Theresa, St. Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (resistor of the Nazis), Catherine Booth (founder of the Salvation Army), Sojourner Truth (anti-slavery activist)

*Note that both types are people of prayer who also are influencers of others.)*

3. How is the labor in your household or workplace distributed?
4. Look up the definitions of “works righteousness” and “quietism.” Why are both contrary to Christian faith?

*Works righteousness:* Man's relationship with God has always been defined by God's promises and faith. God declared Adam and Eve good when he created them, because goodness is inherent in being created, but “good” and “righteous” are not equivalent terms. All humans are created good in God's eyes, but not all humans are in right relationship with him.

*Quietism:* a. a system of religious mysticism teaching that perfection and spiritual peace are attained by annihilation of the will and passive absorption in contemplation of God and divine things. b. a passive withdrawn attitude or policy toward the world or worldly affairs.

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. Considering the definition of "works" uncovered in Observe 4, when can active service be a way of avoiding growth in relationships? When can practices of piety and prayer be a way of avoiding the labor of meeting others' needs and building a more just community?
2. How should Christians respond to the growing number of events and commitments that fall on the Sabbath?
3. Do family members enjoy sufficient time to nurture intimacy, enjoy solitude, and cultivate outside hobbies and friendships?
4. What could you do to grow in your faith and experience the presence of Jesus more?
5. How is God calling you to participate in your community?

Based on what has been discussed, ACT:

1. Try a new form of prayer, either individually, as a couple, or as a family. Reflect on the experience.
2. Gather as a family and plan a fast from digital or other distractions that pose obstacles to being present to one another.
3. Invite others into your home. If possible, invite someone who is lonely, burdened, or struggling.
4. Learn about the five love languages as described by Dr. Gary Chapman, which explore the different ways people prefer to give and receive love ([www.5lovelanguages.com](http://www.5lovelanguages.com)). What is your love language? Your spouse's? Your child's?

What steps can you take to express your love in their preferred love language?

5. Continue your group's ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments. To share your project with CFM, send a report and photo of your project to [office@cfm.org](mailto:office@cfm.org)

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Play a game that requires balancing objects, such as *Jenga* or *Dominoes*.

### AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. The story of Martha and Mary reminds us that listening is an important part of welcoming and serving others. What opportunities can you find to listen to others and learn about their lives before discerning how best you can serve them?
2. Think of an experience of the presence of Jesus. Describe it to others.
3. Martha brought her complaints to Jesus and was compassionately guided to reflect on the basis for her complaints. What complaints do you bring to Jesus? Are they justified?

### LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

*See the OPTIONAL ACTIVITY at the end of the next chapter.*

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

## CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you, Lord, for sharing yourself with us. You made us to be in relationship with you and with one another. Give us the courage to move beyond our comfortable patterns of relating and acting so that we can deepen these relationships. Help us to discern your voice in our work and in our moments of quiet. Help us to perceive your presence in places where we have trouble noticing it. Teach us to want less—to find peace and joy in more simple ways of life, with fewer commitments, fewer possessions, and fewer distractions. And teach us to want more—more connection, more justice, more love. Teach us to desire you above all else, and to trust in your desire for us. Amen.

And let us pray the Prayer for the Christian Family Movement (found on the inside back cover of the participants' book).

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# EIGHT

*Participant Book - Page 60*

## **Accepting Jesus' Mission - Peter after the Resurrection**

JOHN 21: 1-20

GATHER

OPENING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we come to you as lost sheep, desiring to be shown the way in the knowledge of Jesus. Though imperfect, we strive for perfection. Grant us the grace to come to know your Son and share with others your way.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him a third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." ... And after this he said, "Follow me."*  
- John 21:15-17, 19, NRSVCE

1. Jesus entrusted to Peter the job of shepherding his church in spite of his imperfection, perhaps even because of it. How do you think Peter felt about Jesus asking him three times, “Do you love me?”
2. Are there times when you can look back and remember instances when you felt Jesus was asking you repeatedly, “Do you love me?” How did you respond?

(Shepherds often work in isolated areas and may work independently except for the assistance of herding or guard dogs. Many shepherders must be on call for their animals around the clock. A shepherd’s primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of the flock, protecting from predators, finding good pasture, giving first aid for injury or disease, and shearing the sheep.

Source: "What Are the Duties of a Shepherd?" by Beth Greenwood, June 28, 2018.

<https://work.chron.com/duties-shepherd-23576.html>)

## SOCIAL INQUIRY

Pope Francis highlights our Christian mission in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel, Evangelii Gaudium*:

“If we wish to lead a dignified and fulfilling life, we have to reach out to others and seek their good. In this regard, several sayings of Saint Paul will not surprise us: ‘The love of Christ urges us on’ (2 Corinthians 5:14); ‘Woe to me if I do not proclaim the Gospel (1 Corinthians 9:16).’ (Evangelii Gaudium, 9)

“When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment. For “here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means.” (EG 10)

“Though it is true that this mission demands great generosity on our part, it would be wrong to see it as a heroic individual undertaking, for it is first and foremost the Lord’s work, surpassing anything which we can see and understand. Jesus is ‘the first and greatest evangelizer’. In every activity of evangelization, the primacy always belongs to God, who has called us to cooperate with him and who leads us on by the power of his Spirit.” (EG 12)

“I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since ‘no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord’. The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: ‘Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace’. How good it feels to come back to him whenever we are lost!” (EG 3)

“Lay people fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, ‘that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life.’ For lay people, ‘this evangelization . . . acquires a specific property and peculiar efficacy because it is accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, 905

“Upon all the laity, therefore, rests the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. Consequently, may every opportunity be given them so that, according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church.” *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium*, no.33.

We all know someone -- a family member, friend, clergy member, or historical figure – who, although they may have personal faults or failings of their own, is inspirational to us. Peter was not perfect. Jesus was painfully aware of that, but he knew that Peter, with all his shortcomings, was the one who could lead. Peter's love for Jesus was such that he rose above his limitations and, with St. Paul, spread the gospel of Jesus for the next 20 years. Jesus entrusted to Peter the job of shepherding his church in spite of his imperfection, perhaps even because of it. Should He expect any less of us as his disciples?

From your personal experience, OBSERVE:

1. Imperfection is a human condition that is inescapable.  
Give an example of a modern person you admire despite their imperfections.  
(Here are a few examples: your parent, your boss, your spouse, Thomas Jefferson (slavery), Benjamin Franklin (women), St. Junipero Serra (colonial issues), St. Augustine)
2. Modern culture tends to be intolerant of evangelization.  
Cite examples of how popular culture gets in the way of our following Jesus.  
(Pressure to go along with gossip or an off-color joke, perception that religious people are intolerant of others' ideas, Sunday sports and work requirements, lack of sense of humor)
3. Consider your own parish. Are there programs available for parishioners to deepen their spiritual lives? Name them.

4. In many ways children mirror St. Peter's characteristics: Impetuous, reactive, boastful, lacking self-knowledge. How do you react to their faults and imperfections?

In light of Christ's teachings, JUDGE:

1. How do you come to terms with your imperfect condition when it presents itself in the form of sin? How is that reflected in your relationship with others and with Jesus?

2. How can you introduce an evangelical spirit into your daily life and in conversations with friends and co-workers?

(Be known as a kind and understanding person that is not judgmental; be seen to be a person who practices his religion; be a person of hope and patience.)

3. Can you evangelize in your own parish community by sharing opportunities for spiritual growth (bible studies, CFM, Mothers group), or perhaps by visiting with a parishioner whom you do not know in a social setting?
4. Regarding your children's shortcomings, do you react in a similarly loving way that Jesus did to Peter, with confidence and high expectations in their ability to show their love for Jesus through you? Do you as a parent find it difficult at times to remember that disciplining your children must be rooted in love?

Based on what has been discussed, ACT:

1. Keep the mission of CFM -- to promote Christ-centered marriage and family life; to help individuals and their families to live the Christian faith in everyday life; and to improve society through actions of love, service, education and example—in the forefront of your mind and speak to its value whenever possible to friends and parishioners.

- a. Have a CFM Information night when parishioners who have been in CFM give witness about its value for their marriages and parenting skills.
  - b. Coordinate a booth of CFM materials after Masses
  - c. Contact registered parishioners married two years or less to invite them to join CFM.
2. Identify one family you want to invite to join CFM. Sit down as a family and discuss ways that you have benefited as a CFM family. Find ways that family members can spread the word about CFM.
  3. Discuss with your spouse appropriate ways to shepherd your children through loving guidance in the way of Jesus.
  4. You can learn a lot about yourself through self-examination in a spiritual setting. Schedule a personal, couples or family retreat as a way to strengthen your spiritual life and to increase your faith.
  5. Continue your group's ongoing action project, based on your observations and judgments. To share your project with CFM, send a report and photo of your project to [act\\_editor@cfm.org](mailto:act_editor@cfm.org) or submit your story on-line at [http://www.cfm.org/share\\_your\\_act](http://www.cfm.org/share_your_act)

Our Action to be carried out and reported at the next meeting

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#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Make a poster showing all the benefits of belonging to CFM. Display it at your parish.

#### AT HOME, DISCUSS AS A FAMILY

1. How do we experience “living our faith”?

2. What is holding us back from spreading the gift of CFM to others?
3. What can we do as a family to help implement one of the Action suggestions?

## LOOK AHEAD TO THE NEXT MEETING

If this is the last meeting of the season, set a date for a summer get together and kick-off meeting in September.

*If children have come to the meeting with their parents, gather them to join you in the closing prayer.*

## CLOSING PRAYER

O holy Apostle Peter, you were the first to be called to discipleship by our lord, Jesus. You accepted this role without question. Although your human frailty led you to deny Our Lord three times, you were still unwavering in your love for Him. Jesus brought this home to you when he asked you for the third time, “Do you love me?” Instill in me the courage to overcome my personal shortcomings and profess my love for our Lord as you did.

Our imperfect nature should never stand in the way of our being a faithful people. If we as Christians proclaim to love Jesus as Peter did, then we must fulfill our mission to preach the gospel to all as he did. Christian marriage is a reflection of the Trinity and it is through the example of parents that children are brought into the faith. CFM is a vital part of the gospel message that we are to evangelize.

Lord, you chose Peter to guide your church even after his denials. Give me the strength to proclaim your message to all that I meet through my words as well as my actions.

Amen.

# NOTES

CFM SERIES FOR  
**Discipleship Formation**

- ❖ ***For Happier Families:***  
Learn to Observe, Judge, and Act, the CFM methodology for active faith.
- ❖ ***Meeting Jesus Changes Everything:***  
Explore the impact of our encounter with Christ on our faith journey.
- ❖ ***Loving the Family God Gives Us:***  
Focus on living our faith in our family relationships.
- ❖ ***Embracing the Mission:***  
Discover practical ways to share CFM in our faith community.

**The Christian Family Movement  
prepares families to be  
active agents of evangelization.**

**Groups may use the Formation Series  
books in any order or in combination with  
other CFM print or digital programs.**

Leader Guide for Individual Chapters  
*Meeting Jesus Changes Everything*  
[http://www.cfm.org/leader\\_guides](http://www.cfm.org/leader_guides)