



SCHOOL OF MINISTRY
OF THE EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NORTH CAROLINA

Conversations about the Kingdom of God

Some suggestions for facilitators

Ministry in adult Christian formation: Welcome to this opportunity for ministry! Serving as a facilitator as members of your parish reflect together about our calling to engage with one another about matters of faith is a service to the Church. Blessings to you in this role.

Conversations about the Kingdom of God: The theme of this DVD has to do with how we understand Jesus' many comments about the Kingdom of God. Whether talking about a wedding banquet or a mustard seed, Jesus set forth a vision of the Kingdom of God that we have variously interpreted as talking about the end of time or the transformation of the world, the "in-breaking" of the Kingdom. For this reason alone the theme deserves a good conversation. What do *we* believe that those extended gospel passages, especially in Matthew and Luke, to mean? How do they speak to us?

Participants on the DVD include

Paige Baker
Church of the Nativity, Raleigh

Marcia Moore
St. Andrew's Church, Greensboro

Michael Battle, Canon Theologian
Diocese of Los Angeles

George "Chip" Morgan
St. Paul's Church, Winston-Salem

"Chip" Marble
Assisting Bishop
Diocese of North Carolina

Paige Baker, Marcia Moore, and "Chip" Morgan are all engaged with Education for Ministry (EfM) in the Diocese.

There are four programs to *Conversations about the Kingdom of God* (with times):

- *The Kingdom of God is like...* (14:44)
- *The in-breaking of the Kingdom* (14:44)
- *"Practices" for the Kingdom* (13:14)
- *The message of the Kingdom* (14:47)

Purpose of the study: Our hope is that this study will

- encourage deeper thought about a key theme in Jesus’ teachings;
- help us to examine the varied interpretations of Kingdom of God theology;
- challenge us to consider the in-breaking of the Kingdom as a call to address realities in our world;
- contribute to strengthening the sense of community among ourselves;
- affirm the biblical foundations of our faith; and
- challenge us to relate study and reflection to action in the name of Christ.

Facilitation: Please refer to *Doing theology: DVDs for parish study – Some suggestions for facilitators*, which is included in the notebook provided each congregation in the Diocese of North Carolina, for general comments about your role as facilitator. (If a copy is not available, contact the School or visit our website, www.episdionschool.org.)

Number of sessions: We anticipate that each of these programs could be used successfully in a Sunday morning adult forum, the basics being that you show a program or a portion of it, and then have conversations about it. While more extensive time might be beneficial, this pattern is manageable in a Sunday school setting allowing perhaps 45 minutes. If more extensive time is desired, then obviously times other than Sunday morning provide greater flexibility.

Each of these four programs is broken down into sections, and if there is particular energy in your group for one aspect of the theme, you could easily expand the sessions.

Conversations: Three general approaches seem important to us: The first is to provide opportunity for a study group to connect with what people said on the DVD to their own lives – “what experiences have *you* had...?” The second is similar, your seeking to learn what from the DVD resonates with them – “what particular points made on the film lead you to say *yes!* or *no!*” And the third is to help people engage more deeply in theological reflection – recognizing that passages in the gospels are there not for us to pick and choose what resonates and avoid the rest, but rather to engage deeply and seriously with *all* of these Kingdom passages. (Those verses about God’s judgment, which many of us would rather avoid or explain away, is a case in point.)

Summary: In the comments on the four programs below, we encourage you to provide a summary at the end of each session. As we suggest in our general facilitation guide, however, note that we are not suggesting a detailed summary of what everyone said. Rather we find it good to somehow tie the conversation together, commending the group for their contribution, and suggesting that the group has engaged in faithful reflection together.

Key Bible passages: It’s critical to remember that the theme of the Kingdom is pervasive in the gospels, especially in Matthew. Here we point you simply to some of the key Kingdom parables:

Matthew 13:18-33
13:44-50
18:1-4

Matthew 18:23-35
20:1-16
25:1-13

Mark	4:26-32	Luke	17:20-21
Luke	13:18-21		18:15-17
	14:15-24		18:24-25

Having provided these specific passages, we hasten to remind you that there is a broader context to any small set of verses. If you choose to ask the group to read the Bible between sessions, ask them to read entire chapters, or more – Matthew 18, for example.

Additional study: The Kingdom of God is a subject that evokes many competing interpretations and quite a literature from across the theological spectrum. If you choose to encourage the group to have a book to accompany the DVD, be sure to look closely at the study before recommending it. That was a challenge for us too as we looked around to see what to put in a short bibliography. Here, simply, are some that you might find of interest for further reading, but note that aside from Kerygma, these are not designed for group Bible study.

Battle, Michael. *Reconciliation: the Ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997.

_____. *Blessed are the peacemakers: a Christian spirituality of nonviolence*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004.

These two books by Michael Battle are not specifically focused on the Kingdom of God, but the theme of reconciliation, about which he speaks on the DVD, is elaborated upon in these books.

Campolo, Tony. *The Kingdom of God is a Party: God's Radical Plan for His Family*. Dallas: Word Publications, 1990.

Campolo is a well-known evangelical who seeks to join personal discipleship and social justice.

Capon, Robert Farrar. *Kingdom, Grace, Judgement: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.

Clifford, Paul Rowntree. *The reality of the kingdom: Making sense of God's reign in a world like ours*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996.

Kaylor, R.D. *Jesus the prophet: His vision of the kingdom on earth*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.

Keating, Thomas. *The Kingdom of God Is Like*. New York: Crossroad, 1998.

McKim, Donald K., *Kerygma: The Bible and Theology*. Pittsburgh: Kerygma Program, n.d.
This Kerygma study explores eight major Christian doctrines; Book Four contains segments on “Eschatology: What is the Kingdom?”

Malina, Bruce J. *Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Temple, William. *The kingdom of God: a course of four lectures delivered at Cambridge during the Lent term, 1912*. London: Macmillan, 1914.

This is likely to be hard to find, but we thought the perspectives of one of the most highly regarded archbishops of Canterbury a century ago might be of interest.

Tutu, Desmond Mpilo. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999.

The key historic focus of this book is upon South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Committee, but his vision of forgiveness and reconciliation, which Michael Battle discusses on the DVD, is explored here.

Note that we are able to update our facilitators' guides on-line, so if you find books that you believe deserve mention here, please contact us.

Comments on each of the four programs follow. Remember that we say more about this program format in our general facilitators' guide, available on-line or in our DVD notebooks.

Program 1: The Kingdom of God is like...

In preparation:

- ⇒ Make sure that you have suitable equipment to show the DVD, and that you know how to operate it! Make sure, too, that seating arrangements are conducive both to viewing and to discussion.
- ⇒ Have Bibles available (and encourage people to bring their own next time).

This first session might look like this:

- *Prayer:* We encourage you to open and close all sessions in prayer. One you might wish to use, which appears in our general DVD facilitation guide, is adapted from *Good News: A Congregational Resource for Reconciliation*, by the Rt. Rev. Steven Charleston. It is as follows:

O God, we stand on the border to your Kingdom. We pray that your Holy Spirit will be with us to guide us in our discussions. Grant us an openness to hear you in the words of those around us, and courage to proclaim you in our own words, through the love of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

- *Bible reading:* Since direct reference is made to the passages about the parable of the sower, have someone read Matthew 13:1-23.
- *Introductions:* In some of our congregations, everyone will know everyone, but for many of our parishes, that may not be the case, and especially newcomers will appreciate a reminder

of who folks are. Take a minute or two for basic introductions. If you find more extended or creative introductions appealing, you could ask participants to complete this sentence with one word: “The Kingdom of God is....”

- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today. This is simply a courtesy to the group to make it clear how you’ll proceed and what to expect.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire first program or any segment of it. The segments are (1) The Kingdom is like...; (2) Images of the Kingdom; (3) The Kingdom is difficult to see; and (4) The Kingdom as invitation. (Note that if after showing it you or some in the group want to see a particular section again, you may simply choose the program you have just shown, then choose the section, and then just fast forward or stop wherever you wish.)
- *Conversations:* Two questions are provided on the DVD, so you may place them on the screen and leave them up as the conversation proceeds, but there is no reason to think that these questions are the “preferred” ones. We note some other possibilities below, or you may develop your own. The task is to stimulate conversation, and that requires your discerning where energy lies and drawing out insights from throughout the group. Once the conversation gets going – and we believe it will! – your task is to keep it focused, and to shift ground when a particular subject seems to have been exhausted.

The questions on the DVD are as follows:

1. How would you complete this sentence: *For me, the Kingdom of God is...*
2. What one thing did you hear in this program that makes you grateful to be a part of the Kingdom of God?

An additional question might include this one, but remember that you can design your own:

3. Drawing upon our catechism, which is cited in the final section of this DVD program, turn to page 851 in the *Book of Common Prayer*, where under “The New Covenant” it reads, “Christ promised to bring us into the kingdom of God and give us life in all its fullness.” Do you share that understanding of Christ *and* the Kingdom? What does that mean to you?
- *Summary, reminder of the next program, task for the week, and prayer:* Ask participants to read and meditate on Luke 17:20-21 during the week.

One prayer you might wish to use to close this session is also adapted from *Good News* by Bishop Charleston. It is as follows:

Dear God, thank you for the presence of your Holy Spirit in this conversation. We ask that the Spirit will go with us as we leave this place to be your ministers. Give us grace to be healers of what hurts us and heralds of what makes us whole. In the blessed name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Session 2: The in-breaking of the Kingdom

In preparation:

⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be.

The second session might look like this:

- *Prayer:* See session 1 for a possible text.
- *Bible reading:* Have someone read about “the Kingdom of God is among you,” Luke 17:20-21.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire second program or any segment of it. The sections are (1) The in-breaking of the Kingdom of God; (2) Images of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God; and 3) Now?
- *Conversations:* Two questions are provided on the DVD:
 1. What one word or phrase did you hear that made the “in-breaking of the Kingdom of God” meaningful to you? Why?
 2. Describe a moment in your life when this “in-breaking” of the Kingdom of God was deeply felt.

The questions on the DVD presume that the “in-breaking of the Kingdom of God” is indeed meaningful and has been “deeply felt.” It will be worthwhile to free people to say that this doesn’t connect with them as much as those questions presumed. Question 3 below does that directly. In any case, additional questions might include these:

3. “The Kingdom of God has already come. It is here.” What do you make of that statement?
 4. Is “the already but not yet” phrase helpful to you in dealing with the potential tension between the idea of “in-breaking” and a Kingdom of God at the end of time? How?
 5. Do “compassion” and “forgiveness” – about which Bishop Marble and Canon Battle speak – seem appropriate as characteristics of the “in-breaking” of the Kingdom? Why or why not?
 6. The passage from Luke (17:20-21), which you were asked to meditate on during the last week, concluded with Jesus saying, “the kingdom of God is among you.” What are the implications of that declaration if we were truly to believe that to be so?
- *Summary, reminder of the next program, task for the week, and prayer:* Ask participants to read and meditate on Matthew 5:1-11 during the week. See session 1 for a possible text for the closing prayer.

Session 3: "Practices" for the Kingdom

In preparation:

⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be.

The third session might look like this:

- *Prayer:* See session 1 for a possible text.
- *Bible reading:* Have someone read Matthew 5:1-11, noting that the beatitudes are really talking about the kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *The DVD program:* This DVD consists entirely of insights from Canon Michael Battle. Ideally you should show it in its entirety, as segments build on preceding sections. The sections are (1) Practices; (2) Prayer; and 3) Call.
- *Conversations:* Two questions are provided on the DVD:
 1. Name one way you try to keep yourself “open to God’s presence.” How does it relate to Michael Battle’s view of prayer as a practice of being in God’s presence?
 2. Michael Battle says that “what is ordinary is miraculous.” Do you agree? If so, are there ways in which you try to keep this in mind as a practice of the Kingdom of God?

Additional questions might include these:

3. Michael Battle says that “reconciliation is at the heart of our Christianity spirituality,” then goes on to identify five aspects: (1) Contrition, (2) confession, (3) forgiveness, (4) repentance, and (5) reunion. As facilitator you may wish to have the group view this comment again; it’s in the first section, “Practices,” and runs from 1:31 to 4:59. Talk through this as a group. If, as he says earlier, the Kingdom is trying to expose us – move us toward – transformation, then his argument seems to be that reconciliation is key to transformation. But this passage has considerable depth to it, and without a good discussion – what does he really mean? how do these five aspects fit together? etc. – there is a risk that these important points may pass us by.
4. We asked Michael Battle if he agreed with Fr. Albert Nolan’s view that “the Church is at root a movement, a movement for the Kingdom of God.” Do you? (If you as facilitator want to show Michael Battle’s answer again – perhaps *after* the group has commented – it runs in the first section, “Practices,” from 5:18 to 5:42.)
5. “The hardest place to be is where you are.” What do you think? How might you connect this statement from the Archbishop of Canterbury to our place in the Kingdom of God?

- *Summary, reminder of the next program, task for the week, and prayer:* Ask participants to read and meditate on Matthew 13:31-32 during the week. See session 1 for a possible text for the closing prayer.

Session 4: The message of the Kingdom

In preparation:

- ⇒ Make sure equipment is set up and seating arrangements are as you wish them to be.
- ⇒ Photocopy the evaluation of this program which is located after the guide in the notebook.

The fourth and final session might look like this:

- *Prayer:* See session 1 for a possible text.
- *Bible reading:* Have someone read Matthew 13:31-32 and Luke 13:18-19.
- *The plan for this program:* Provide an overview of what will happen today.
- *The DVD program:* Show the entire fourth program or any segment of it. The sections are (1) The Kingdom at the end; (2) Judgment and the Kingdom; (3) Society and the individual in the Kingdom; and (4) The message of the Kingdom.
- *Conversations:* Two questions are provided on the DVD:
 1. How do you see the end of our lives and the “now” relating to one another in terms of your theology of the Kingdom of God?
 2. When we hear passages about the Kingdom of God in our worship year after year, what do *you* hope that we hear?

Additional questions might include these:

3. Talk about the statement, “No one can be a Christian alone.” Do you agree? Why? What does your view say about your understanding of the Kingdom of God?
 4. Discuss the message of the Kingdom of God as you find it revealed in the parable of the mustard seed.
 5. How would you describe your own theology of the Kingdom of God?
- *Evaluation:* Encourage participants to complete the evaluation, and provide time for it. Please share the results with us.
 - *Final summary and closing prayer:* See session 1 for a possible text.