

# INTRODUCTION

**LifeCrossings** is distinctive in providing learning materials on topics that pose some of the greatest challenges to Christian life. Living in Christian community in contemporary society is one of those challenges. Materials are designed to provide sufficient background on the many aspects of this challenge without requiring leaders to read several books. Each session has been carefully crafted, revised subsequent to review by our advisory board, and revised again after field-testing in four churches located in small town, city, and suburban settings.

## From Here to Community in Twelve Sessions

The goals of **From Here to Community** are to help individuals see beyond personal concerns to the importance of relationships with wider communities and to encourage the transformation of local Christian churches or study groups into more vibrant communities with an enhanced understanding of, and commitment to, living as a Christian community in American society. We move toward this goal, the **Destination**, by

- (1) examining some of the important challenges to living a Christian life in our society (Sessions 1 – 4)
- (2) learning how essential the Christian community is to Christian living and how that can be enhanced (5 – 9)
- (3) exploring potential responses of the Christian community to the challenges that it faces. (10 – 12)

**It is strongly recommended** that the twelve sessions be undertaken sequentially on a weekly or biweekly basis. If a significant interruption is necessary, the cohesion of the materials and of the group will be disrupted the least if the break occurs between Sessions 7 and 8. A high degree of comfort and trust among participants is crucial for the deepest level of sharing envisioned for Sessions 7 and 12.

## Teaching Approach

**From Here to Community** includes many **Encounters Along The Way** – stories, dramas, readings, questions, and discussion. These materials are not intended for lecturing. The extensive use of stories and dramas is intended both to educate and to motivate. The question and discussion section, usually based on the story or drama, is the heart of every session. From a learning theory standpoint, the more the leader can involve the participants in the stories, dramas, readings and especially the discussion, the more effectively they will learn.

The focus is clearly on the Christian community as a connector that can prompt us to act faithfully and support us in making choices in a complex society. The title **From Here to Community** suggests movement, and the movement intended is toward Christian individuals and communities that are more faithful and more effective. Each session is a journey – thus the metaphor that is used in each of the twelve sessions.

## Supplementary Material for the Leader

This Leader's Guide provides supplementary material for each of the twelve sessions of **From Here to Community**, including:

- guidance on leading the session
- suggested layouts for either a flipchart or a marker board
- potential responses to questions
- extra background reading

The appropriate pages from this Leader's Guide can be removed and used with the learner's version, thus making the teaching hints and visual aid suggestions readily available when leading the session. The sidebar prompts in their book will help the group move through each session and inform them of the time allotted for each activity so that the material can be covered in a one hour time period. Encourage participants to write helpful notes in the same sidebar space and to underline new ideas.

## Setting for discussion

These materials are suitable for adults either in a home discussion group or a Sunday School class. The group can be as few as 4-5 or as large as 30-40. Use of either a marker board or a flipchart is assumed even for those meeting in a home setting. Some sessions suggest use of an overhead projector but an equivalent picture can be prepared on a flipchart ahead of the meeting time. Arrange chairs in a semicircle so that all can see the visuals as well as each other. Provide an opportunity for introductions if some people do not know each other. A cup of coffee or tea somehow encourages conversation.

Sessions are designed for 45-60 minutes with time estimates provided for each subsection. If more than an hour is available, some groups may appreciate extended discussion time on the encounters or the leader may supplement with material from the *Digging Deeper* section.

### Dual Responsibility for Leader

#### *Session leader*

Be familiar with materials ahead of time.  
Estimate of preparation time – two hours.  
Arrange flipchart to record responses.  
Sense when it is time to move on.

#### *Facilitator for discussion*

Encourage a balanced, focused discussion.  
Encourage participation by everyone.  
Discourage domination by anyone.  
Don't talk all the time.

## Bible Based

Every session has scripture and prayer as *Food For The Journey*. The prayers include confession and petitions for guidance for the discussion time and also for possible action. Some participants may feel that efforts to understand and strengthen Christian communities are misplaced and that the church should focus on personal salvation. Others may have difficulty in thinking about the relationship between God and the Christian community, or the Christian community and the wider American society, because they are accustomed to thinking primarily of their own personal relationship to God.

Both the Biblical and theological background builds in a way that hopefully will convince them to move from that personal concern to a broader viewpoint, that is, *From Here to Community*. It is suggested that comments from these perspectives be respected and responded to by the leader in a way that tries to encourage an open mind.

## "Homework"

Although the action components in *Re-Entry* at the end of each session are focused toward the individual participant, the leader should use the opportunity in the group session to encourage the reflections and actions that are suggested. Doing this gives the participants a greater depth of understanding and commitment than would be the case if they just learn what is included in the group session.

There is opportunity for brief discussion of "homework" from the previous session in the *Postcard*, but each session moves on to new material quickly and does not depend on completion of the Re-entry "assignment" by the participants.

## Recommended Readings

Although it is not a requirement that the instructor read the recommended references, there are two that would be especially helpful background for any instructor of these materials: *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah, et al. and *The Once and Future Church* by Loren Mead. Both of these books were written some time ago, but they are both recognized as classics and apply as much today as when they were written. Many of the other references included in *Travel Guides* are of more recent vintage and are included where appropriate.

**We pray that God will be with you in this endeavor and bless you with an enthusiastic and receptive group of participants!**