

SMALL GROUP RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

This is a list of materials different small groups at St. Joseph's have used and would recommend other groups consider using. Copies of most of these materials are available in the parish offices for review.

Traveling Light – Max Lucado

This is an easy and very entertaining read where the author uses the 23rd Psalm as a way to teach us the value of leaving behind the baggage of everyday life that weighs us down and holds us back. The book includes a study guide that has plenty of questions to help facilitate a discussion.

Being the Body of Christ – Marci Alborghetti

The author imagines herself as seven of the people present at the Crucifixion, from Mary to the centurion, then tells their stories of what they were thinking and feeling at the time. Each story reaches back to earlier times in Jesus's life and ministry. Reflections tie the story to the present day and include questions on how the reader can respond. The stories are powerful, and this is a good book to consider using leading up to Holy Week.

Parables of the Kingdom – Mary Ann Getty-Sullivan

This is part of the Little Rock series, so there is a study guide and DVD to go along with the book. Parables offer such a depth of meaning and guidance that it is hard not to come away with some new insight into what these teach us.

Do We Worship the Same God – Comparing the Bible to the Quran – George Dardess

This is a very informative and eye-opening book, as the similarities are more significant than one might imagine. There are guided discussion questions to help with facilitating the discussions. This may not be appropriate for all groups, but it is a good one to consider if your group wants to know more about the Muslim faith. The author is a permanent deacon at Blessed Sacrament parish.

My Life with the Saints – Father James Martin

This explores the life of many of our church's saints and ties them to everyday life. Fr. Martin describes his relationship with these saints with humor and insight. Besides being educational, it gives us heroes for directional prayers.

The Soul of a Pilgrim – Christine Valtner Painter

The author explores what it means to be a pilgrim – to leave behind that which is not important and to go where God leads us. It touches on the life of pilgrims throughout

the church's history and relates that to today. The book includes scripture readings and guided reflection to help readers gain insight.

Divine Mercy – Stephen J. Binz

The author explores scripture readings from both the Old and the New Testament to demonstrate God's unending mercy towards us. This provides a constant reminder of God's unconditional love for us. The book includes reflection questions and guides for group leaders.

The Shack – Wm. Paul Young

This work of fiction explores one man's face to face encounter with God in all three persons as he faces one of the most difficult moments in his life. It is delightful and deeply moving story that offers much room for discussion of today's issues.

Inner Compass An invitation To Ignatian Spirituality – Margaret Silf

Inner Compass is based upon the fundamental questions once explored by St. Ignatius Loyola in his book, The Spiritual Exercises. These questions regard every human existence and are suited to address the concerns of all people, of all denominations. Margaret Silf uses an informal style of writing coupled with wise instruction, hope and encouragement. She coaches each reader to ponder and recognize their own unique spiritual path in alignment with the will of God. In her writing she promotes a lifelong personal journey in recognizing God within our own hearts and lives, thereby building a strong personal faith day by day.

Desperate Women of the Bible – Jo Kadlecek

Eight nameless biblical women are driven by their passion and desperation to seek out Jesus. The stories reflect how Christ's love for these women transforms their lives and brings new hope. The historical context allows the reader to learn about the culture and everyday events of Jesus' time on earth. Powerfully and visually written, the book makes you feel you are right there as the author describes the encounter each woman has with Jesus. It helps us see everything relating to Christ more clearly and experience him more deeply. Questions for discussion/reflection are included after each chapter.

The Other Side Of Chaos, Breaking Through When Life is Breaking Down – By Margaret Silf

The author supports the truth that we all experience "crosses" in life. She refers to these as opportunities, spiritual and otherwise, to grow in strength and wisdom and bring us closer to God. Along the journey, she provides ways to recognize these challenges and offers options for walking through the "muddy waters." The author uses some catchy terminology, "Bridges over Troubled Waters" and "God Bless the Mess," to

help us feel that we are not alone. She provides examples from Scripture to support transitions of Biblical characters. Finally, Margaret Silf takes us on a life changing spiritual journey to “Restoration, Renovation and Re-creation.” She calls this, “The Other Side Of Chaos.”

Women of the Passion – Joan D. Lynch

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. It allows us to experience the time after Jesus' death through the eyes of the women who walked with Him. How did they think and feel in the months after the Crucifixion? It is a social history in the sense that it describes the roles of the characters and the dynamics of the women's participation in the Jesus Movement. The novel is filled with suspense and intrigue.

The Gift of Prayer – Margaret Silf

I thought this was a beautiful book on prayer. Margaret Silf provides seekers of every faith or none with a warm, compelling and sensitive primer on prayer. She reveals to us the power of prayer through examples. It is a beautiful invitation to embrace the sacred in the everyday.

The Way (DVD) starring Martin Sheen

The movie, *The Way*, is a beautifully written story of Tom (Sheen) who has lost his faith and also his son Daniel. He and Daniel had a strained relationship and now his son is killed while walking the El Camino de Santiago. Tom travels to France/Spain to recover his son's body and is encouraged by locals to finish the walk for his son.

Reluctantly he does, though he prefers to do it “alone”. But along the way he meets people who are completing the journey also and they “join” him in the way. All of them are searching for something they feel they are missing spiritually and/or are trying to make peace with themselves and others in their life.

I believe it is a great movie to see with your small group and can lead to many interesting and deep conversations about everyone's own “pilgrimage” through life.

The Power of Forgiveness (DVD - 78 min.) – A film by Martin Doblmeier

The film explores the healing power of forgiveness. While a number of the examples focus on wrongs inflicted on communities or groups, the principles inherent in forgiveness can be applied to personal situations as well. The examples presented will lead readily to a discussion of the role of forgiveness in our lives and inspire us to examine our own need for forgiveness.

How Great is Our God (DVD - 40 min.) – A film by Louie Giglio

This DVD shows us that our life is a miracle and we are wonderfully made. The conclusion is a surprise.

The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation – Jeff Cavins and others

DVD series and workbooks

Highly recommended. Gives participants an understanding of how salvation history has unfolded in 12 stages and ever-growing circles (from a Hebrew family to the world-wide church). Made for easy orientation and memorization, therefore a simplified presentation. Will help you to place the Sunday readings in their historical context. The author is a Catholic convert with a Protestant background, stressing Catholic orthodoxy. There are 24 sessions, requiring the reading of 12 books of the Bible in their entirety and answering questions in preparation of each session. A lot of preparation is required but well worth it. The more you put in, the more you will get out of it!

Drawbacks: It was hard for some group members to find the necessary time for preparation. The DVD set is quite costly. We borrowed it from another church. Another year, our group went with the less involved shorter version (10 sessions). Still gives you the essential facts though you miss out on fascinating details from the longer version. Better accommodates busy members, less preparation time.

Revelation: The Kingdom Yet to Come – Jeff Cavins, Thomas Smith

Same author as of Bible Timeline. Good introduction to this difficult book. 10 sessions, DVD series and workbooks. (Ascension Press has published more titles on other books of the Bible in this series since.)

Catholicism – Robert Barron DVD and workbook

There is also a book mostly based on the DVD script. While not needed for the program, people who enjoyed the DVD presentation and would like more than the 2-3 page summaries per chapter in the workbook may consider purchasing it. Contains illustrations of the glorious artwork shown in the DVD, though the photos are mostly black and white (plus some color plates) and, therefore, less stunning than the video footage. 12 sessions, may be spread out to 22. Questions for understanding and for application included in the workbooks, as well as a 2-3 page intro for each session. Starting with the person of Christ and his teachings, the program also covers “The Mystery of God”, and specific Catholic topics such as Mary, the Petrine office, four marks of the Catholic Church, the Eucharist, saints, and the four Last Things. Beautiful Catholic art accompanies the sessions with images and music as well as references to literature. Each DVD episode runs 50-60 minutes so it is longer than average DVD sessions for small groups.

Seven Deadly Sins – Seven Lively Virtues – Robert Barron DVD (112 min total) and workbook

Essentially a nine session retreat. A great choice for Lent (though if you meet weekly you would need one or two additional meetings or one longer meeting to accommodate all sessions.) Explores the seven capital sins and seven virtues as their positive counterpart, and how they can motivate our actions. Many references to Dante's "Purgatory" (part 2 of the "Divine Comedy") since that book focuses on overcoming those sins. You do not need to have read Dante, though. Questions involve looking up Bible verses and entries in the Catholic Catechism. DVD episodes run about 10-15 min.

Genesis 1-11: God Makes a Start – Kevin Perrotta

We include at least one title per year from this series of 6-week Bible studies. If we do two, we make sure to pick one title from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The books focus on the main chapters of a Bible book or a group of books, so they usually do not include the full text. The excerpts discussed are printed in the book, however, so participants do not need to bring a Bible. Easy to use for discussion leaders – gives warm-up questions and two sets of questions (on the text and on application in life), as well as a commentary that can be read out during sessions. Less involved than the Little Rock series, the books are an easy read and do not require a lot of advance preparation by the participants. Appreciated by busy moms. Recommended for groups that include participants new to bible study, or with busy schedules.

The Lamb's Supper – Scott Hahn

This book by theologian Scott Hahn heightens your appreciation of the Eucharist and gives you a deeper understanding of the liturgy through unexpected connections to the heavenly liturgy as described in the book of Revelation. You become more aware that Heaven is present at each Mass, and the angels and saints celebrate along with us. 13 chapters, 163 p. No study guide, so you would just talk about the chapters and what struck you.

Panorama of the Old Testament – Little Rock Series

Our group has been together since the beginning of the small group program. We have done a lot of the Little Rock scripture studies. We recently read the "Panorama of the Old Testament". This also comes with a DVD, study guide and answer book. We all felt it was a great way to have an overview of the Old Testament. We wished we had done it earlier. For any new small group, we recommend starting with this. We are looking forward to reading "Panorama of the New Testament" next.

Panorama of the New Testament – Little Rock

A good choice to follow Panorama of the Old Testament. It gives a nice overview of the New Testament. It wets your appetite for more in depth studies. Again, these are a

great way to start a group. This included a DVD, study guide and answer book. We really enjoy the Little Rock DVDs. They help to enhance our discussions.

The Abbey - James Martin

Our group enjoyed this book. We have read other books by James Martin and like his style of writing. It was easy to read and we felt we could relate to their difficulties. It also provided the opportunity to contemplate over the different situations. There was no study guide with the book, so we would have a general discussion of the chapters and think of our own questions.