

Tweeting with GOD



Specials

#TwGOD step by step: addition
to the Manual for group leaders

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About the #TwGOD Specials

The #TwGOD Specials are intended for group leaders who want to engage a group in a conversation about the questions from the project Tweeting with GOD. Each Special provides specific tips and suggestions for organising a #TwGOD session. For an overview, see www.tweetingwithgod.com/howto.

The Specials are an addition to the #TwGOD Manual, which they will often refer to. The aim of the project Tweeting with GOD is to bring people together to talk about their own questions. There will be so many questions that more than one session will be needed to discuss all of them, especially because one question leads to many others.

Season

With #TwGOD you can easily organise a series of sessions. It is important to use the participants' questions as a starting point: you do not have to discuss the #TwGOD questions from A to Z. In the "Season with #TwGOD" you can shift sessions to meet the needs of your own group. #TwGOD offers several methods that you can combine to develop a programme:

- **Manual** (SEE MANUAL B1-B6; APPENDIX 1). The manual describes the steps you can take to create a series of #TwGOD sessions. You can buy the manual online (SEE WWW.TWEETINGWITHGOD.COM/HOWTO).
- **Specials** (SEE WWW.TWEETINGWITHGOD.COM/HOWTO). For a number of sessions we have created a fully worked out schedule that you can follow with your group. You can download the Specials on the #TwGOD website.
- **App** (SEE WWW.TWEETINGWITHGOD.COM/APP). You can use the #TwGOD app to scan the large photo on each double-page spread in the book. That way you gain access to extra information from the Youcat and the Compendium of the Catechism, but also

to several citations of popes and Church Fathers about the theme you're intending to talk about with your group.

- **Videos** (SEE WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/TWEETINGWITHGOD OR DIRECTLY GOO.GL/wDGkPg). We are working on videos that provide more background information regarding the different #TwGOD questions and help to generate sub-questions from the group. More videos will be added over time.

Follow-up

Upon their return home from a pilgrimage, for example World Youth Day or Lourdes, (young) pilgrims are full of questions. #TwGOD can help them in two ways. Firstly by giving their travel experiences a place in their everyday lives, secondly by searching for answers to all the new questions that arose during and after the journey. The #TwGOD Manual and specials therefore have a twofold approach:

- **Looking back and to the future** (SEE MANUAL, D6). The first few sessions will take the form of reunions during which the pilgrims can revive memories from their trip. These sessions are also excellent opportunities to discuss how they can

make their travel experiences part of their daily lives.

- **A season full of questions** (SEE MANUAL, APPENDIX 7). The questions of pilgrims will not be very different from those of the people who did not go on the pilgrimage. To encourage a connection between the trip and daily life it is best to proceed the follow-up with a more general approach which addresses non-pilgrims as well. See Specials S1, S2, ...

Follow-up 1: Looking back

Goal of the meeting: looking back on travel experiences with fellow pilgrims and exchanging thoughts on how it feels to be back home. The way pilgrims manage to integrate their experiences in their everyday lives is of particular importance.

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Exchange

- Have a coffee or soft drink together.
- Exchange photos.
- Meet new people (SEE APPENDIX 3).

20.45 Conversation

If the group is large enough, divide it into smaller groups. Questions for the groups:

- What is your favourite memory of the trip?
- What did you like least?
- What do you find hardest now that you're back home?
- How do you think you can give your experiences a place in your daily life?

21.45 Prayer in the chapel

- Sing songs that were sung during the pilgrimage.
- Spontaneous prayer intentions by the participants.

- If possible: a moment of Eucharistic Adoration.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

Follow-up 2: Looking towards the future

Goal of the meeting: facilitating a smooth transition from a unique travel experience to a continuous and daily growth in the faith. After several meetings the faith questions become more important. From that moment onwards you can open up the group to non-pilgrims.

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Exchange

- Have a coffee or soft drink together.
- Take some time to catch up.

20.45 Conversation

If the group is large enough, divide it into smaller groups. Questions for the groups:

- What questions did people ask you when you returned home?
- What do you find difficult about connecting your travel experiences to daily life?
- How can you live as a good Christian?

21.45 Prayer in the chapel

- Sing songs that were sung during the pilgrimage.
- Spontaneous prayer intentions by the participants.
- Pray Compline together (SEE TWEET 3.13).

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

#TwGOD Special S1: Big Bang versus the story of Creation

This Special describes how you can hold a meeting about Tweet 1.1 in the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Doesn’t the Big Bang rule out faith in God?” This is a good question to start with, because it is not too personal - therefore, participants will share their opinions on the topic more easily. We suggest only discussing this Tweet during this session, as participants would likely have a lot to think about. Should you have some spare time, you could include Tweet 1.3: “Evolution or Creation?”. We have provided some suggested times below that you can adapt as you see fit.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introducing new people; agreements

- Let everyone briefly introduce themselves.
- Depending on the group, you could do a more playful introduction (SEE MANUAL, APPENDIX 3.1).
- Read the #TwGOD rules (SEE APPENDIX, B.1) and let everyone agree with them.

Conversation

20.05 Introducing the question of the evening

- A long introduction of the topic is probably not needed, as the question itself will already generate responses from the group.
- To get the conversation going, you could draw an imaginary line across the floor. Pose the question as a statement: “The Big Bang opposes faith in God!” Whoever agrees stands on one side of the line, whoever disagrees stands on the other side.
- Ask participants to sit down again.

20.10 Discussion round 1

- Start the conversation by asking participants why they stood on either side of the line. “Why do you believe this?” is an important question for the group leader to ask. You will notice all kinds of arguments

being used in favour of and against the Big Bang theory, both ecclesiastical arguments from theology or the catechism and arguments people have heard at school.

- Try to delve deeper by asking more questions. Help the participants realise what the arguments in favour of and against their standpoint are.
- A good question to continue the conversation is: “Do you know who first came up with the Big Bang theory?”
- Most participants will be surprised to learn that Georges Lemaître (†1966) was a Catholic priest who received several ecclesiastical decorations for his work in science.

Video and Bible

- This is a great moment to start steering the conversation towards the position of the Church on the beginnings of the world.
- Watch the video underneath Tweet 1.1 on the website ([GOO.GL/PMDU74](http://goo.gl/PMDU74)).
- In addition, you can also read the first part of the story of Creation: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called

the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good” (GENESIS 1:1-10).

- Ask: “Is it possible to believe both in the Big Bang and in the story of Creation?”
- To advance the conversation further you could quote Saint Augustine, who said that the days of creation do not necessarily have to be days from sunrise until sundown (SEE THE BOOK, TWEET 1.2).

Input: Read more

- Use the app to look up the ‘Read more’ quotes. For instance, you could read the second quote from the Wisdom of the Church with the argumentation of Saint John Paul II: it is against human reason to only look at the consequence (Big Bang) and never look for the cause (God?).
- Discuss this together.
- To proceed with the conversation, you can ask “when you look around you at nature you see that it is beautifully ordered. Could all that have come into existence by chance?” Now the conversation can proceed in any direction, depending on the participants’ contributions.
- In the end you may read the short Tweet of 1.1: “The Big Bang theory does not rule out faith in God. On the contrary, it can be be-

lieved as the way God began his creation of the universe.”

21.35 Summary and conclusion

- Ask: “What did you learn tonight?” Have people changed their perspective on the topic? The goal of this evening is not to make everyone have the same opinion, but for it to be a starting point of each person’s individual walk with God.
- Therefore, an important closing question is: “How does this information relate to my personal faith and my relationship with Jesus?” This is a good transition to the closing prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Closing prayer

- (If possible) go to a chapel or church. Light the candles and sing a song or chorus.
- Open the prayer: “Dear God, thank you for tonight’s conversation and for what we have learned about you and about the origins of Creation. We do not understand everything yet, but ask you to help us to continue to grow in faith.”
- Say: “You can now pray aloud or in silence. Just pray whatever is on your heart.”
- You could also finish with a moment of Adoration, during which you bring everything that was discussed and learned to Christ, King of the Universe.
- Conclude with the Our Father and a song (optional).

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

#TwGOD Special S2: The Church as body of Christ

This Special describes how you can hold a meeting about Tweet 2.1 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “What is the Church? Who is part of the Church?” and optionally also Tweet 2.14: “Can I be a good Christian without the Church?” The information in this meeting will be linked directly to the daily lives of participants. We have provided some suggested times below that you can adapt as you see fit.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introducing new people; agreements

- If there are new people, let them introduce themselves briefly.
- (If this is the case, read the #TwGOD rules (SEE APPENDIX, B.1) and let everyone agree).

20.05 About last time...

- Ask the participants whether they have gained any new insights on the topic of last meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL S1) and take a moment to talk about these.
- You could ask them: “What does the story of Creation mean for your personal relationship with God?”.

Conversation

20.10 Introducing the question of the evening

- Ask: “How many Catholics do you think there are in the world?”
- The correct answer is 1.2 billion.

20.15 Discussion round 1: the Church in the world

- Not all Catholics live the same way or have the same vocation.
- Draw the scheme at the bottom of the page on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.
- Ask the participants what they know about each of these groups of faithful, starting with the lay people, then the religious, and finally the deacons, priests and bishops. Are they married or not, what kind of work do they do, which religious orders do you know?
- A number of possible questions: “How do these groups differ?”, “In what ways do these different groups serve the Church?” and “Do you think some vocations are more important for the Church than others?”

Video and Bible

- Now you have a great basis to start thinking about the personal task of each of the participants within the Church.
- Watch the video under Tweet 2.1 on the website (goo.gl/AAXRVM).

Total number of Catholics: 1.2 billion		
Lay people (99,89%)	Religious (0,08%)	Deacons, priests, bishops (0,3%)

- The Apostle Paul often spoke about the Church as the “body of Christ”. Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 together.

Discussion round 2: the Church and you

- In this discussion round the focus is on the participants’ personal relationship with the Church.
- A good question to start the conversation with is: “Do you feel part of the Church? Why (or why not)?”
- Another question that will likely surface is “Do I need the Church? Can’t I be a good Christian without the Church?” Therefore you may also incorporate Tweet 2.14 in this round, or discuss it next time.
- Keep in mind that perhaps not all participants are religious. The goal of the meeting is not to convert all participants to Catholicism, but to make them think about the role of the Church in the world and the role it can play in the lives of individuals.

Input: Read more

- Use the app to look up the ‘Read more’ quotes. For instance, you could go to Tweet 2.14 and read Youcat 132: “What is the task of the Church?” It states that the task of the Church is to make peace and justice germinate and grow, and that this is needed for the Kingdom of God.
- Ask the participants: “What does this mean?”, “In what ways can the Church contribute to peace and justice?” and “What is the ‘Kingdom of God’?”.
- You could also ask: “In what way do you think you can bring peace and justice yourself?”
- Encourage the participants to come up with a resolution that they will try to put into practice until the next meeting. A few examples: visiting a lonely or sick person; saying ‘please’, ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’

more often; listening to others better in conversations; starting and finishing the day with a short prayer, e.g. the Our Father; not speaking or thinking badly of others.

21.35 Summary and conclusion

- Ask: “What did you learn tonight?” Have people changed their perspective on the topic? The goal of this evening is not to make everyone have the same opinion, but to be a starting point of each person’s individual walk with God.
- Therefore an important closing question is: “How does this information relate to my personal faith and my relationship with Jesus?” This is a good transition to the closing prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Closing prayer

- (If possible) go to a chapel or church. Light the candles.
- You could for example pray Compline, the last prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Distribute a copy of the text to each participant (you can find the text in various apps, online or in a Book of Hours).
- Explain that this prayer is prayed by members of the Church throughout the world.
- You could also conclude with a moment of Adoration, during which you bring everything that was discussed and learned to Jesus, who brought peace and justice as a way to God.
- Sing a closing hymn together.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

Worksheets for this Special

Worksheet 6: Compline or night prayer

#TwGOD Special S3: Prayer – why and how

This Special describes how you can hold a meeting based on Tweet 3.1 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Why should I pray and how do I pray?” This question is the starting point of the meeting, but the Tweets following 3.1 may also be discussed. We have provided some suggested times below that you can adapt as you see fit.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introducing new people; agreements

- If there are new people, let them introduce themselves briefly.
- (If this is the case, read the #TwGOD rules (SEE APPENDIX, B.1) and let everyone agree with them.)

20.05 About last time...

- Ask the participants whether they have gained any new insights on the topic of last meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL S2) and take a moment to talk about these. Which resolutions did the participants put into practice in order to contribute to peace and justice, or better said, the Kingdom of God?

Conversation

20.10 Introducing the question of the evening

- Ask: “Do any of you ever pray?” Then ask: “Have any of you ever doubted whether prayer has any effect?” Discuss these questions.

20.12 Discussion round 1: why should I pray?

- Draw a large vertical line in the middle of a whiteboard or large sheet of paper. Invite the participants to write down all reasons why they think there is no use in

praying on the left side, and all arguments in favour of praying on the right side.

- Select three arguments from each category.
- Ask the people who wrote them down why they did so. Are these arguments based on their own experience? Or have they heard them from others?
- Keep in mind that perhaps not all participants believe in God. The goal of the meeting is to help people think about the role the faith plays or could play in their lives, and to find out how prayer can be a part of this.

Video

- This is a good moment to start talking about different types of prayer.
- Watch the video under Tweet 3.1 on the website (GOD.GU/SRO5JP).

Discussion round 2: how can I pray?

- In this discussion round the participants learn about various types of prayer.
- Ask the participants to write down all forms of prayer that they know on a whiteboard or sheet of paper, such as the rosary, intentions, praying with a Bible text, Eucharistic Adoration or singing songs.
- Discuss the contributions and optionally include more examples using the #TwGOD app.
- You can remind the participants that prayer has always been important for Christians. Jesus regularly asked his disciples to pray. When they asked him how, he taught them

the Our Father, which is still used daily by Christians around the world.

- Now read Matthew 6:9-13 and talk about it together. Ask: “What does this text mean?” and “Would you be able to pray like this?”

Input: Read more

- Use the app to look up the ‘Read more’ quotes. For instance, read the reference to Youcat 486 underneath Tweet 3.2: “Why should we petition God?” It states that although God knows what we need, it is important to put our petitions before him so that we do not remain focused on ourselves. Through prayer we express our relationship with God!
- Distribute paper and pens and ask the participants to write down a name or intention for whom or which they would like to pray. Explain that these so-called intentions will be used during the closing prayer of the night, but will not be opened.
- Collect all intentions in a box or basket.

- There are many ways to pray. More important than how you pray is to set aside time for God on a regular basis. The first step to a relationship with him is therefore to decide to spend some time with him in prayer every day.
- Invite participants to try out a new form of prayer before the next meeting. Some suggestions: reading a chapter from the Bible every morning or evening, and speaking with God about it; making a list of people or situations and asking for God’s help for them every day; attending a communal prayer in a local church; praying a decade of the rosary daily; listening intently to religious music, such as Taizé songs.

21.35 Summary and conclusion

- Ask: “What did you learn tonight?” Have people changed their perspective on the

topic? The goal of this evening is not to make everyone have the same opinion, but to be a starting point of each person’s individual walk with God.

- Therefore, an important closing question is: “How does this information relate to my personal faith and my relationship with Jesus?” This is a good transition to the closing prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Closing prayer

- (If possible) go to a chapel or church. Light the candles.
- Place the box or basket with prayer intentions in front of the altar or in the middle of the group.
- Use Appendix 5 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* to structure the prayer, and to look back on the day prayerfully.
- Be aware that you are in the presence of God. Look back gratefully at what you received this day. Ask for help from the Holy Spirit. Speak to Jesus in silence from your heart.
- Then lead the group in prayer, for example by praying: “Dear God, we thank you for what we discussed and learned today. In this box/basket we present to you our prayers and intentions. We ask you: hear our prayers and give us what is good for us!”
- Conclude with the Our Father.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

Worksheets for this Special

Worksheet 2: Reflecting on your day through prayer

#TwGOD Special S4: Why we are here on earth

This Special describes how you can hold a meeting about Tweet 4.1 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Why are we here on earth?” If you want, you can incorporate the Tweets that follow 4.1 as well, which discuss God’s personal plan for each of us. The goal of this meeting is to get participants acquainted with God’s plan for humanity in general, and in particular God’s plan for each of them. We have provided some suggested times below that you can adapt as you see fit.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introducing new people; agreements

- If there are new people, let them introduce themselves briefly.
- (If this is the case, read the #TwGOD rules (SEE APPENDIX, B.1) and let everyone agree with them.)

20.05 About last time...

- Ask the participants whether they have gained any new insights on the topic of last meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL S3) and take a moment to talk about them. How did you experience trying a new form of prayer?

Conversation

20.10 Introducing the question of the evening

- Pose the question: “What do you want to accomplish in life and why?”
- It could be that all answers ultimately come down to the same thing: everybody wants to be happy. But what is happiness? And how do you find it?

20.13 Discussion round 1: God’s plan for humanity

- Tell the participants that it is not only us who want to become happy, but that it is also God’s greatest desire for us. Ask if the

participants can imagine God feels that way.

- Discuss the following questions: “Is true happiness something you will only find in heaven? Or can you experience deep happiness on earth as well? What is the relationship between becoming truly happy and trusting God? Could God’s Will help us come closer to that happiness?”
- Then ask: “So what is God’s plan for humans? Is it abstract, or very concrete? For whom does God have a plan?”

Video and Bible

- Now you have laid a foundation for the question “what is God’s plan for each participant”.
- Watch the video underneath Tweet 4.1 on the website (goo.gl/zHwPzh).
- In addition, you can also read the words from Saint Paul: “I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit” (ROMANS 9:1). What does Paul mean when he refers to our conscience and the truth? What role does my conscience play? Or: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.” (1 CORINTHIANS 4:3-4). Does the truth about our destination lie outside of us? Does it lie with God?

Discussion round 2: God’s plan for me

- This discussion revolves around the question: “What does ‘God’s plan for people’ mean for the way you are trying to live your life?”
- Ask the participants to dwell on the following questions: “What are you good at? What makes you happy? Who or what inspires you? How can you use your talents and passions for others?”
- Ask them to look back at the past months or years. Have a few minutes of silence.
- Then ask the following questions: “When did you feel the happiest? Were you alone in these moments or together with others? What were you doing?”
- Take a moment again. Then ask if anyone wants to share his response.

Input: Read more

- Ask the participants: “Do you think all people are able to discern good and evil? Why (not)?”
- Ask: “Do you think we are born with a fixed conscience, or can it be shaped? Why do you think this?”
- Use the app to look up the ‘Read more’ quotes. For instance, read the reference to Youcat 333 underneath Tweet 4.1: “Is there a natural law that everyone can know?” It states that all people are born with the ability to discern good and evil, but that we need help to continue to discern these correctly.
- The Bible is one way of shaping our conscience and understanding how God meant certain things. Ask the participants: “Can you name any examples of rules and guidelines from the Bible that can help you discern good and evil?” Examples are the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes (SEE THE #TWGOD APP), but also Jesus’ words about the last judgement (MAT 25:31-46).

21.35 Summary and conclusion

- Ask: “What did you learn tonight?” Have people changed their perspective on the topic? The goal of this evening is not to make everyone have the same opinion, but to be a starting point of each person’s individual walk with God.
- Therefore, an important closing question is: “How does this information relate to my personal faith and my relationship with Jesus?” This is a good transition to the closing prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Closing prayer

- (If possible) go to a chapel or church. Light the candles and sing a song or chorus.
- Start the prayer: “Dear God, thank you for tonight’s conversation and for what we have learned about your plan for us. Thank you for wanting the best for us. Help us to always do your Will, so that we may become truly happy.”
- Tell the participants: “You can now pray aloud or in silence. Just say whatever is on your heart.”
- If possible, the participants can light a candle at the altar or cross while saying their prayer.
- Conclude with the Our Father and a song (optional).

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

#TwGOD Special S5: Christmas

This Special describes how you can hold a meeting about Tweet 3.28 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Is Christmas the greatest feast or holiday of the year?” The aim of this meeting is to help participants think about the importance of Christmas for their own lives in the context of the liturgical year. We have provided some suggested times below that you can adapt as you see fit.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introducing new people; agreements

- If there are new people, let them introduce themselves briefly.
- (If this is the case, read the #TwGOD rules (SEE APPENDIX, B.1) and let everyone agree with them.)

20.05 About last time...

- Ask the participants whether they have gained any new insights on the topic of last meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL S4) and take a moment to talk about them. Why are you here on earth?

Conversation

20.10 Introducing the question of the evening

- You may begin asking the group: “What great Christian feasts are there during the year?” Write these on a whiteboard or sheet of paper. Next, ask the group to indicate the three most important feasts. You may also ask why these would be the most important. The correct answer is Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

20.13 Discussion round 1: Three Feasts

- Start asking: “What do we celebrate at Christmas? Why is this so important for Christians? Who are the main actors?”

(Jesus, Mary, Herod, kings, shepherds, ...). What is their role in the Christmas narrative?

- Next, move on to the Easter triduum, asking the same questions. What do we celebrate? Why is this important? Who are the main actors? (Judas, Pilate, soldiers, Apostles, Mary, ...). What is their role?
- Now turn your attention to Pentecost. What do we celebrate? Why is this important? Who are the main actors? (Holy Spirit, Jesus, Apostles, Mary, ...).
- Having done this inventory, the next step is to ask how these three events relate to each other. Try to see things in the larger plan of God: Christmas is the coming of God on earth, Easter is his self-sacrifice, death and resurrection, whilst Pentecost is the gift of the Helper, the Holy Spirit to the Church.
- Ask: “Which of these three feasts is the most important? Why?” The answer: 1. Easter, 2. Pentecost, 3. Christmas. “Why do you think this is so?”

Video

- Now you can turn your attention to Christmas, as it were zooming in on the miracle of God’s incarnation: God became man.
- Watch the video underneath Tweet 3.28 on the website (goo.gl/t8o2FW).

Discussion round 2: Scripture

- With the birth of Jesus, God came very close! Jesus is the Word that God speaks

to us. “The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son full of grace and truth” (JOH 1:14).

- This comes from a beautiful but complex text from the Bible: John 1:1-18. Give participants time to read this text in silence and to think about it.
- Next, discuss the text, maybe even verse after verse. Some possible questions: “Where does this text speak about Christmas? What does John mean by “flesh”, “Word”, “beginning”, “world”, “truth”, “light”, “darkness”? How important is it that the darkness did not overcome the light? Do you see a relation to Christmas?”
- “When you read verses 6-8 about John the Baptist, what does this tell you about the season of Advent? Why do we have four weeks of preparation for Christmas? How would you like to prepare for Christmas, knowing what you have just discovered?”
- Only through Jesus we can see God: “No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (JOH 1:18). “What does this say about the importance of Christmas? What does Jesus tell us about God?”
- Did you notice the parallel with the creation story, the creation of the world and of life, which also starts with the words “In the beginning...”? (GEN 1:1). God, Jesus (the Word), and even the Spirit were already there from all eternity. “What does this mean?” If there is time, you can ask: “Do you see other parallels between those texts? (God reveals himself, Jesus brings light in darkness, creation of man vs. incarnation, ...)
- Your final question may help to move towards a conclusion: “What changed with the coming of Jesus? Which Truth did he

come to reveal? After everything you discussed, what do *you* think Christmas is all about? How would you explain to someone the importance of going to church at Christmas?”

21.35 Summary and conclusion

- Ask: “What did you learn tonight?” Have people changed their perspective on the topic? The goal of this evening is not to make everyone have the same opinion, but to be a starting point of each person’s individual walk with God.
- Therefore, an important closing question is: “How does this information relate to my personal faith and my relationship with Jesus?” This is a good transition to the closing prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Closing prayer

- If possible go to a chapel or church. Light the candles and sing a song or chorus.
- Start the prayer: “Dear God, we thank you for the gift of Jesus’ birth at Christmas. From that moment onwards you are very close to us. Help us to recognise ever more how you are present in our lives and help us with the many questions we have. We ask this through Jesus, who was born on earth”.
- Tell the participants: “You can now pray aloud or in silence. Just say whatever is on your heart.”
- If possible, the participants can light a candle at the altar or cross while saying their prayer.
- Conclude with the Our Father and a song (optional).

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a safe journey home.

#TwGOD Special 6: The Bible – a journey of discovery

This Special describes how you can carry out discussion meetings about Tweets 1.10 and 1.12 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Why is the Bible so important?” and “Did God write the Bible himself?” Together, the participants investigate what the Bible can mean for their own lives. For the discussion leader, it is also useful to read Tweets 1.20 and 1.21. The suggested time schedule is proposed as a guideline.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See the #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introduction of new people; rules

- When there are new people, let them introduce themselves.
- (Read the #TwGOD-rules (SEE MANUAL, B.1) as a reminder)

20.05 The previous meeting

- Ask about experiences or thoughts that came out of the previous meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL 5). What stayed with them in particular? Did it also play a role in their experience of Christmas?

Dialogue

20.10 Introduction to the topic

- As a warm-up, ask the participants to share their view on the Bible. For this activity, distribute Worksheet 3 with various opinions about the Bible. Ask the participants to circle their answers in silence. Then, invite them to walk around and discuss their choice with someone who has a different view on the Bible. Walk around to observe what is being discussed, and offer help when needed.

20.12 Discussion round 1: How did the Bible come to be?

- Take a Bible in your hands and ask: what

kinds of texts can you find in the Bible?

(The answer can include: stories, poems, prayers, and letters that say something about God and his relation with man).

- Draw a timeline with a number of reference points such as the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, the Ice Age, the Roman period, and the Middle Ages. You could also give a personal twist by adding an event that is particularly important to the group.
- Discuss the creation of the Bible: When do you think that the Bible was written? By whom? What was the aim of the writers? What was God’s role? Is there scientific evidence of the Bible’s truth? As certain names and years come up in the discussion, you can add them to the timeline.
- If needed, help to start the discussion by focussing first on the Gospels or the story of creation.

Video

- Watch the video in Tweet 1.10 together on the website (goo.gl/0YRHUJ).

Discussion round 2: What does the Bible have to do with my own life?

- Explain: The Bible is a valuable treasure that can change your life if you really let the text speak to you.
- In the video, we heard people speak about their experiences. What struck you? What are your own experiences? What did you find valuable? What did you find difficult? Do you have tips for each other?

- Is there a text or person in the Bible that especially inspired you? In what way?

Input: further reading

- Read a Bible passage together, for instance one of the readings from today’s liturgy (use the #TwGOD App). Ask participants to bring a Bible (or the app). Bring several printed copies along yourself, just in case.
- Explain that you don’t necessarily have to start reading the Bible at page 1, but that today you’ll read a passage that is being read by millions of Catholics around the whole world; in churches, monasteries, people at home...
- Read the text aloud and ask the participants to take note of particular words that strike them. After two minutes of silence, ask who would like to share which words they chose. Keep it at sharing, without reacting to what others say.
- Read the text again carefully. Ask the participants to consider: “How do the words that I chose affect my life at this moment?” Pause for another two minutes of silence, and share your thoughts again.
- Explain: “We just read a Bible passage carefully and thought about it personally. In this way, God can speak to you through his Word. It is something that you can also do by yourself at home.”

21.35 Summary and synthesis

- Assignment: “Look for the person with whom you spoke at the beginning. Ask each other: ‘what did you discover today?’ And: ‘Can you do something practical with it?’ Try to think about it together.”
- After five minutes, ask the participants to wrap the conversations up and return to the group. Thank the participants for their contributions and encourage them to explore the subject further at home. For those who

would like, they can take a copy of Worksheet 1 “Praying with a Bible Passage” home with them. (APPENDIX 5 IN THE #TWGOD BOOK)

Conclusion

21.45 Concluding prayer

- Go (if possible) to the chapel or church. Light the candles and sing a song.
- One of the participants reads Psalm 139, 1-18: “We open with a prayer from the Bible, from the book of Psalms. You can pray along in your heart with these words: “You have searched me, Lord...”
- Explain: “Now, you can say your prayer aloud or in silence. Simply say what’s in your heart. For example, look over your day, or over our meeting. You can set down all your questions and thoughts in front of Jesus.”
- Say a prayer, for instance: “God, we thank you for this meeting. Come home with us and give us the guidance of the Holy Spirit when we read your Word.”
- End by praying the Our Father together.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for the next meeting and wish everyone goodbye. Distribute Worksheet 1 at the exit.

Worksheets for this Special

Worksheet 1: Praying with a Bible passage

Worksheet 3: Bible assignments

#TwGOD Special 7: Problematic parts of Church history

This Special describes how you can carry out a discussion about the more controversial events in the history of the Church. We focus on Tweet 2.31 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Why were there violent Crusades?” You can also choose another event, for instance Tweet 2.32 or 2.34, depending on the choice of the group. That would just require some small adjustments to the questions and assignments. The aim of this meeting is not to historically analyse the Crusades, but to look deeper: what do these events mean for my view on God and of the Church? Your role as a group leader is not to defend the Church, but to help participants to look at the subject from different angles and to form their own opinion about it.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See the #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introduction of new people; rules

- When there are new people, let them introduce themselves.
- (Read the #TwGOD-rules (SEE MANUAL, B.1) as a reminder)

20.05 The previous meeting

- Ask about experiences or thoughts that came out of the previous meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL 6). How did it go with reading the Bible at home?

Discussion

20.10 Introduction to the topic

- Find an image of a Crusader on the internet. Show it to the group, and ask participants what it makes them think of. Terms such as “Crusader” or “Crusades” will probably come out.
- You could eventually ask why events such as the crusades can be an obstacle for some people to believe in God. Precisely because it is an obstacle, it is important to consider this theme together.

20.12 Discussion round 1:

What do we know about crusades?

- Let the participants share what they know about the crusades. What associations do they have with them? Write them on a sheet of paper. Ask them to name both positive and negative aspects. Help them when necessary with questions such as: “How did the crusades come about? What did they have to do with faith?”
- Go through the responses that came up and ask the group: “Is this fact or fiction?” Let them think about their sources, and mark which they think are fact or fiction with green and red markers. Where they’re not sure, they could leave a red question mark. The participants will probably discover that there is a lot that they do not know or that they are uncertain about. You could then say that that’s why it’s important not to make a hasty judgement about what happened.
- Tip: try to finish this discussion within 20 minutes, so that there is enough time for round 2, which is the most important.

Input: further reading

- Take the #TwGOD-book. Shortly explain what you read in Tweet 2.31. You can conclude with: “As you probably noticed, it was a complex situation at the time. It

began with good intentions, but it did not always end with good intentions.”

Video

- Explain: “The offences that were committed during the crusades went against the message of love, peace and justice that Jesus announced. How do we deal with the fact that crimes were committed in the name of the Church? Can we still trust the Church?”
- Watch the video of Tweet 2.31 on the website (goo.gl/0e3FkK).

Discussion round 2: Dealing with problematic points in Church history

- Ask if one of the participants would like to summarize father Michel’s message in their own words.
- Discuss the video as a group. The following questions can help:
 - Father Michel pointed out that the Church has done a lot of good for society. Can you think of historic examples? And from today? Which have you experienced yourself?
 - What do you think that a perfect Church would look like? Do you think that it could exist? Why, or why not?
 - Can an imperfect Church also be valuable? If so, then how? And if not, then why not? And are you willing to be part of it?
 - Do you think that the Church has a right to speak about topics such as love and justice, despite what has gone wrong in the past? How can you know that you can trust someone who is speaking on behalf of the Church?
 - Perhaps you sometimes ask yourself: “Why did God not prevent this evil?” What do you think about it? Do you think that God has good intentions for you? Can you trust him?

21.35 Summary and synthesis

- Ask: “What did you learn today?” Do the participants see the topic in a different way? This discussion should be a stepping stone for each person’s personal journey with God.
- An important concluding question is therefore: “How does this topic relate to my personal faith and relation with Jesus?” This question is a good transition to the concluding prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Concluding prayer

- Go (if possible) to the chapel or church. Light the candles and sing a song.
- Open the prayer by singing, for instance, the Taizé song “Ubi Caritas”.
- Invite participants to bring their prayer to God in silence or out loud, and to end with “Let us pray”. Answer each intercession with “God of peace, hear our prayer.”
- You can conclude the intercessions with these or with other words: “Merciful God, we bring our prayers to you. We thank you; although there is darkness in this world, you come to us with your Light. Accompany us on our way, protect us from evil and help us to build your kingdom of peace. Help us to grow in trusting you. Only in you do we find true peace! Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”
- End by praying the Our Father together.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Plan the next meeting and with everyone a good trip home.

#TwGOD Special 8: Pilgrimages and retreats

This Special describes how you can hold a gathering about Tweet 3.17 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “Why pilgrimages and processions? What is a retreat?” We will focus on pilgrimages and retreats. For participants who are unfamiliar with the themes, this will be an occasion to be introduced to them. For those who are already familiar with them, it will be an occasion to recall their experiences and to share them with others. As discussion leader, therefore, you can choose discussion questions that are appropriate to the experiences of your group. The indicated schedule is proposed as a guideline.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See the #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introduction of new people; rules

- When there are new people, let them introduce themselves.
- (Read the #TwGOD-rules (SEE MANUAL, B.1) as a reminder)

20.05 The previous gathering

- Ask about the participants’ experiences and thoughts following the previous gathering (SEE #TwGOD SPECIAL 7). What stayed with them from the previous discussion? What impact did it have on their lives?

Discussion

20.10 Introduction to the topic

- Explain that you will discuss pilgrimages and retreats during this meeting. Begin by asking the participants if they themselves have ever been on a pilgrimage, or if they have heard the experiences of others who have done so. Ask what impression they have, and briefly exchange associations and anecdotes to approach the topic.
- Tip: we recommend that the group itself go for a retreat together. See the #TwGOD Special C: “Praying at a retreat”.

20.12 Discussion round 1: Why pilgrimages?

- A tip in advance for the discussion leader: participants who have already been on a pilgrimage will likely have a lot to share. That can be very valuable for the discussion; however, it can risk leaving too little room for the others to participate. Involve them in the discussion by directing questions at them, and give them the turn to speak if you notice that they would like to say something.
- Ask: “Where can you go on a pilgrimage?” Reflect on the various possibilities – for instance Rome or the local church, but also the beach or a holiday resort. Discuss with each other whether or not it would be considered a pilgrimage. What makes a pilgrimage different from a vacation or a holiday? [Possible answers: the emphasis on being on the road, a religious aim for the trip, compromised comfort, contemplating spiritual topics, or detachment from everyday life.]
- Ask: “Why do you think that people go on pilgrimages?” [Possible answers: to step out of daily life, to look for God, to reflect, to process a serious event, to prepare for a new step in life, or to experience an adventure.]

Video

- Watch together the video of Tweet 3.17 on the website (goo.gl/b3kCey).
- Ask: “What do you think of the experiences

that were shared? Can you identify with them? Do you have questions based on some of these experiences?”

- Ask: “Many pilgrims have the need to leave their daily life behind. Do you sometimes also feel this need?”
- Would a pilgrimage have added value for you personally, compared to a vacation? If not, why not? And if yes, then why? What kind of pilgrimage appeals to you the most, and what do you hope to experience on the way? Are there pilgrimage sites close to where you live? Can World Youth Day also be a pilgrimage?

Discussion round 2: What is a retreat?

- Explain: “A retreat bears a certain resemblance to a pilgrimage: you also step out of your every life to spend time with God. But as opposed to a pilgrimage, you stay in one place for a longer period of time, often in a monastery, convent, or other restful place. You can also participate in the monks’ or sisters’ daily activities and prayers.” Ask if anyone knows what a “retreat” is. [the word comes from the French word “retraite”, meaning “to withdraw”].
- Ask: “Who has already been on a retreat?” Ask those who have not yet been on a retreat what they would expect from such an experience.
- Next, you can ask if the participants who have been on a retreat recognize some of these experiences, and if there is anything else about their retreat(s) that they would like to share. For example: Where was the retreat? Were you on your own, or with a group? Was there a programme? Why did you go there? How do you see the experience now? How did you experience God? [Is there no one in the group who has been on a retreat before? Then you can read about the experiences of three young people on Worksheet 5 together, and discuss them.]

- If there is still time, you can do the exercise on Worksheet 4.
- Tip: Will you soon go on a retreat as a group? Then it can be a good moment to ask the group about how they would like the retreat to be. Are there ideas about the location? And theme? Or would they rather have a silent retreat? Would they prefer a one-day retreat, or for an entire weekend? Who would like to help with preparations?

21.35 Summary and synthesis

- Ask: “What have you learned today?” Do they see this topic differently? The intention is that this discussion might become a step along each participant’s personal journey with God.
- For this reason, an important concluding question is: “How does this topic relate to my personal relationship with Jesus?” This question is a good transition to the concluding prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Concluding prayer

- In keeping with the theme, you can conclude this gathering with the liturgy of the hours, as monks, sisters and priests do. See Worksheet 6. You could eventually give a short explanation before you begin.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Schedule the next meeting, and with everyone a good trip home.

Worksheets for this Special

Worksheet 4: Monastic assignment

Worksheet 5: Experience in a monastery/convent

Worksheet 6: Compline or night prayer

#TwGOD Special 9: When does human life begin?

This Special describes how you can carry out a discussion about Tweet 4.26 from the book *Tweeting with GOD* (#TwGOD): “When does human life begin?” Exchanging thoughts on this topic can be a valuable basis for later follow-up discussions about ethical questions that have to do with human life. Because this discussion can quickly become an emotional one, it is recommended to postpone discussions about gynaecological procedures, abortion, IVF, etc. for the moment, perhaps to be addressed at a later point in time. The aim of the present discussion is to find out what biology, philosophy, and the Church say about the origin of human life, and why. The schedule below is intended to be used as a guideline only.

Opening

20.00 Opening prayer

- See the #TwGOD Manual, Appendix 5.

20.02 Introduction of new people; rules

- When there are new people, let them introduce themselves.
- (Read the #TwGOD-rules (SEE MANUAL, B.1) AS a reminder)

20.05 The previous meeting

- Ask about the participants’ thoughts and experiences following the previous meeting (SEE #TWGOD SPECIAL 8). How can they describe a pilgrimage in one word?

Discussion

20.10 Introduction to the topic

- Ask who has previously considered to-night’s topic, and in which context. Discuss the relevance of the topic. Does it affect the participants in some way, or could they imagine a situation in which they would be confronted with the topic?
- Do not be afraid of discussing this potentially emotional topic. Your group already has experience with discussing things amongst themselves. See the tips on Worksheet 7.

20.20 Discussion round 1: Source of life?

- Ask: “How does a baby develop during the nine months before it is born?” Ask the participants to draw a timeline on a large sheet of paper, and to mark certain reference points.
- Ask if the participants can tell from which moment the fetus becomes a person. Different answers might come up. Ask why participants chose a specific moment, and why the fetus is a person from that moment onwards and not before.
- You could show the image in the TwGOD book: the development of the fetus from conception seems to be continuous, without recognizable interruptions.
- Consider that participants might have different beliefs. The aim is to help them to think about the beginning of human life.
- Worksheet 7 gives certain examples of statements that can sustain the discussion.

Text

- This is a good moment to see what Pope John Paul II has said about this topic. Hand out Worksheet 8 and read paragraphs 44-45 of *Evangelium Vitae* together.
- Clarify difficult words and sentences to

help participants understand the Pope’s position. Ask: “What is the Pope’s core message?”

- Tip to help the group to grasp the essence of the text: have participants place a question mark next to sentences that they don’t understand, and an exclamation mark next to sentences that they find important for today’s topic. After a short moment of silence, you can discuss the text.

Discussion round 2: Consequences

- Ask: “If life starts from conception, simply because we cannot indicate a more logical moment, what are the consequences for medical and ethical decisions?” The aim is to recognize the consequences, not to have an extended discussion about abortion, IVF, handicaps and medical situations.
- Say: “Think back to John Paul II’s text: when Mary and Elisabeth met each other during their pregnancy, their children weren’t born; and yet, they were treated as human persons. They were even seen as people with a mission to save the world! What does this Bible passage mean for how we see the beginning of human life?”

21.35 Summary and synthesis

- Ask: “What have you learned today?” Do people see this topic differently? This discussion aims to be a step along each person’s journey with God.
- For this reason, an important concluding question is: “How does this topic relate to my personal faith and my relationship with Jesus?” This is a good transition to the closing prayer.

Conclusion

21.45 Concluding prayer

- If possible, go to the chapel or church. Light the candles. Let everyone find a

comfortable place. If possible, bring the Blessed Sacrament out.

- Open the prayer with a beautiful song. Then, pray: “God, we want to thank you for the life that you have given us. Thank you that we could think about the beginning of our life as humans today. Please help us to continually broaden our understanding of what it means that we have received our life from you.”
- Remain silently seated in front of God. Everyone can talk with him in their heart. If you choose so, you can occasionally read a verse from Psalm 139 (140) aloud, which relates to the beginning of human life.
- Conclude with an Our Father and a Hail Mary.

22.00 Conclusion in the meeting room

- Make an appointment for the next meeting and wish everyone a good evening.

Worksheets for this Special

Worksheet 7: Discussion tips

Worksheet 8: Letter about the unborn life

Special A: Pray – A night of prayer

After several meetings, take time to hold a longer moment of prayer, for example in the evening or on the weekend. Talking about the faith can be very helpful on your walk with God, but a relationship is not only about talking *about* God. Prayer means spending time *with* God (SEE TWEET 3.2). A communal prayer night can help the participants to start praying themselves, and continue doing so in daily life. The most important goal of the project *Tweeting with GOD* is to stimulate a personal relationship between the participants and the Lord. We have provided some suggested times below that you can adapt as you see fit.

Preparation

19.30 Preparing the prayer location

- Light the candles in the church or chapel, including those by the altar, cross and Mary. If possible you could dim the light in order to create a serene atmosphere.
- Place some aluminium foil in front of the altar or cross to put tea lights on later.
- If you want, you can lay out a blanket and place pillows or kneelers on it.
- Place paper, pens, and a basket or box in front of the altar or cross.
- Also place some reading material in the room, e.g. some Bibles and speeches from popes.
- If you are unable to access the church or chapel, you can decorate the meeting room in a similar fashion, e.g. with an icon and candles.

Prayer night

20.00 Opening

- If needed, start with a brief conversation about prayer: what is it and how do you do it (SEE TWEET 3.1)?
- Go to the church or chapel and let everyone find a seat. If the church is large then do not sit far from each other, but around the altar or cross.
- It is good to start with a calm song, such as one from Taizé.

- Have a moment of silence after the song.

20.10 Psalm and silent prayer

- Have someone slowly read a part of a psalm or a Bible verse, such as Psalm 139. Let the reader pause regularly so the participants can think about the words they are hearing. You could also repeat a certain verse several times (SEE TWEET 3.10).
- Now the participants can pray and think about these words in silence.
- Every now and then you can interrupt the silence with a chorus or song.
- Participants can walk up to the altar or cross and light a candle as a sign of their prayer.
- They can also write down their prayer intentions and put these in the basket or box.
- It is also possible to sit at the foot of the cross or in another meaningful place in the church.
- People can read in the Bible or read a different text.
- Invite participants to let the words they read sink in and pray about them. What matters is not how much you read, but whether it brings you closer to God.

20.45 Praying together

- Towards the end of the night you can pray together.
- Say that whoever wants to say a prayer intention can do so now. To make the oth-

ers feel at ease, the group leader can say the first one. After each intention you could sing a chorus.

- Conclude with the Our Father or another prayer that most people know, and with a song of thanksgiving.
- Invite the participants to preserve the silence in the chapel and to leave in silence.
- Therefore, do not tidy up just yet: some people may want to remain a few minutes longer.

21.00 Time for a chat

- Those who want can now have a chat while enjoying drinks and snacks. This is also part of the group process.
- If participants express the need, you could exchange prayer experiences: how was it? What did you learn? Did you feel close to God? Have you been able to present your prayers to him?
- During the #TwGOD season, you can hold more of these prayer nights.

Suggestions

Music group

- If there are any participants who enjoy making music, you could ask them beforehand to prepare some songs that they will sing and play during the prayer night.

Rosary

- You could pray the rosary during the prayer night and meditate on the five mysteries of the day (SEE THE #TWGOD APP; TWEET 3.13).

Adoration

- You could ask the priest to expose the Blessed Sacrament. The group can be in Jesus' direct presence. A short introduction to Adoration will be helpful to some participants (SEE TWEET 3.14).

Asking for God's forgiveness

- Should a priest be available, there could be the opportunity to confess and receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation (SEE TWEET 3.38-3.39).

Praying with the Bible

- You can hand everyone the same Bible text and let people prayerfully think about it. For further explanation about praying with a Bible text, see Appendix 4 in the book *Tweeting with GOD*.

Liturgy of the Hours

- You could pray (part of) the Liturgy of the Hours together, with three psalms, a Bible text and prayer intentions (SEE TWEET 3.13).

Praying for each other

- You can hand everyone a card on which they write their name. In addition, you may ask people to write a prayer intention on the card. Collect the cards and have everyone choose a card at random. Everyone will make an effort to pray for this person and especially his/her intention in the coming weeks or months. It is not necessary to disclose who is praying for whom.

Special B: Act – Helping someone else

You cannot be a Christian on your own. God loves all people, and especially those who face hardships. Jesus made himself very small in order to live amongst us. If you seek Jesus full of faith, you will recognise him in people who are less well-off than you. You can help these people in many ways. One of the first things we did with the Tweeting with GOD team was organising an afternoon of board games for residents of an elderly home. You can probably think of many other ways to help!

Programme

Preparation

- Decide with the group what you would like to do to help others. A collectively agreed on idea works best.
- You could also invite a representative of the place or organisation where you are going to help out. Ask that person to tell about his/her work and how the group can contribute.
- Mind the practical aspects: transport, permissions, clothing, etc.

Getting started

- Before getting to work, gather all participants.
- If possible, have one of the participants say a prayer in which he/she asks for strength and inspiration for the group, and an open heart towards the people you will be meeting.
- Divide the tasks (together with a member of the organisation) and get started.
- Always stay focused on the people you want to help: it revolves around them!
- If you want, you can hold breaks with several or all group members to discuss how things are going, if they need help and if they have any questions.

Conclusion

- If there is time left after the event, take time to talk to each other. What did the

participants think of the experience? Other possible questions: What did you learn? Were there things that surprised you? Do you think this was useful? Would you like to do something like this again?

- Optionally, conclude with prayer.
- You could also go out for dinner together to conclude the day.

Suggestions

Elderly home

- You could take the group to an elderly home to organise games.
- Take a bunch of old board games with you that the residents will probably like.
- Prepare tasty snacks and drinks. Make the residents feel extra special today!
- If any group members play an instrument, they could play some songs. You could also use the speakers to play some classics from the old days.
- Conversations will probably emerge between participants and residents. Take the time to truly listen to the people. You will notice that you do not always need to reply. Oftentimes they just want to share their story. The most important thing is that you are there for them.

Food bank

- Come up with a way to help the local food bank.
- For example, make a shopping list of prod-

ucts that the food bank could use. Do this together with the food bank.

- Stand at the entrance of one or more supermarkets (first ask permission of the store manager).
- Distribute the shopping list to people who walk into the store and ask if they would like to buy an extra product for the food bank.
- Collect the products that people hand to you in boxes.
- Sort the products by kind; this saves the food bank work.
- In the meantime, have someone transport full boxes to the food bank.

Homeless

- You could also work with homeless people.
- Most cities have organisations that work with homeless people. You could for example join the activities of the Sisters of Mother Teresa, Sant'Egidio or the Salvation Army.
- These organisations usually have daily or weekly activities that volunteers can help out at, such as a weekly dinner.
- Most important is not what you do, but the attitude with which you do it. Do not be afraid to talk to the people you meet, and to listen to their story. Today is about them after all!

In the parish

- You will also find people in need in your own parish. You could talk to the volunteer commission of the parish or to the priest and make a list of people who are in need for whatever reason.
- They may need help for all kinds of things:
 - tidying the garden
 - repairing a doorbell
 - painting a garden shed
 - purchasing heavy groceries
 - drinking tea with a lonely person...

- Divide the tasks amongst the group members and get started.
- For some (e.g. technical) tasks you may want to ask other parishioners for help. After all, the goal is to help these people!

Church auction

- To raise money for charity you could organise a church auction. That does require some preparation.
- Ask people to donate items that they don't need anymore, which you will then sell at the auction. You will be surprised at how much people will give!
- Ask a capable person to function as auctioneer, if needed ask someone from outside of the group. The better the auctioneer, the more money you will raise!
- Divide the other tasks: have people show items, wrap items, and collect and count the money.

Week of Mercy

- If you want to go big, organise a 'Week of Mercy' in the parish with your #TwGOD group. Charitable activities will be held throughout the week. Both volunteer parishioners and people in need will be happy with such an initiative.

#TwGOD Special C: Retreat

– Direct yourself completely towards God

If you regularly speak about faith together, it is also good to take time together for God. That is precisely what it means to go on a retreat: you temporarily leave daily life behind to direct yourself completely towards God. The following guidelines are for a one-day retreat, but you could also make it last several days. It is a serious retreat with a lot of silence. Do not immediately conclude that it is too much for your group – however, you are free to adapt the programme to your group's needs.

Preparation

Discuss with each other:

- Decide where you would like to go. It could be to a monastery or convent, or to a place of pilgrimage that receives groups. If you remain in the parish, make sure that there is as little disturbance as possible.
- See if a priest could guide the day, or if you could invite someone else to do so. If you do not find anyone, then you can guide the retreat yourselves as a group.
- The aim of a retreat is to be silent. It is therefore advised to try not to talk with each other for much of the day, and to search for God in your prayer.
To help keep silence during breaks, you can quietly play classical music in the background.
- Read through the programme of the retreat thoroughly, and discuss where you can carry out the different parts of the programme. The theme is silence: leave the pressure of the day behind to become silent and to make room for listening to God.
- Today's retreat is no place for mobile phones and other communication devices; to be "online" with God, it is better to be offline with social media and other distractions.
- Ask the participants to bring a pen, paper, and preferably a Bible.
- Make sure that all participants have a copy

of the schedule, or post it in a central location. Use a bell to call everyone's attention to the next part of the programme. This way, no one has to check their phone to see what time it is...

- Prepare as much as possible in advance to avoid losing time.
- Tip: Ask external volunteers to take care of practical things like preparing coffee, tea and lunch. That way, the participants can be completely focused on the retreat.

The retreat

10.00 Opening (phones off!)

- See Worksheet 9

10.15 Morning prayer in the church or chapel

- You can compose a morning prayer yourself with Bible passages and songs.
- What is most important is that you ask God, as a group, to help you to pull back from daily life to search for God in silence and peace.

10.45 First introduction in the meeting room

- See Worksheet 9

11.00 Introduction to personal prayer

- See Worksheet 9

11.15 Prayer

- Everyone finds a place where they can pray

in silence: in the church or chapel, in the meeting room, in a corner in the corridor, or outside...

- To guide the prayer time, you can use the text "Praying with a Bible passage" on Worksheet 1.

12.15 Midday prayer in the church or chapel

- If possible, gather for a moment of worship with beautiful songs of praise.

12.45 Lunch

- Invite the participants to eat in silence. After a prayer, you can quietly play a recording of classical music. Make a sincere effort not to talk, allowing everyone room for the thoughts that come up. Make sure that the food is evenly distributed along the table so that the participants do not have to get up or ask each other to pass something. Take your time to eat the lunch: try to taste the food more attentively than you would otherwise.

13.45 Silence

- Participants can choose how they spend this time: go for a walk, sit in the church... but without talking!
- When the environment and weather permits, you can go on a walk in a garden or park. You can reflect on the surrounding nature: it can be a beautiful starting point for a conversation with God about creation! You can also pray the rosary while you walk.

14.30 Second introduction in the meeting room

- See Worksheet 9

15.00 Prayer

- Everyone alone in silence, at a place where they feel happy.

16.00 Coffee and tea in silence

16.30 Introduction to a closing reflection

- See Worksheet 9

16.45 Silent prayer in the church or chapel

- See Worksheet 9

17.15 Collective closing prayer

- Take a moment together to thank God for this day. Sing songs of praise and thanks, share your prayer intentions, and ask for God's blessing.
- Everyone can contribute a prayer intention and light a candle near the altar.
- You could also use Worksheet 2 to review the day in silence.
- Close with an Our Father and a Hail Mary. Ask Mary to help you to find moments of silence to truly listen to God.

17.45 Coffee, tea and biscuits in the meeting room

- Review the day together. What did you find beautiful? What did you find difficult? Have you experienced God today? Would you want to do this again? Why, or why not?
- You do not have to share your personal experience. What happens between you and God is perhaps not intended to be told to everyone.

18.30 Closing

- Make an appointment for next time and wish everyone a good evening.

Worksheets for this Special

Worksheet 1: Praying with a Bible passage

Worksheet 2: Reflecting on your day through prayer

Worksheet 9: Texts for the retreat

Worksheet 1: Praying with a Bible passage

1) Preparing to pray

- Decide which text you will use (SEE TWEET 3.4) and how long you will pray.
- Choose a place and a body posture – sitting, standing, or kneeling – and read the text.
- Focus on a few passages and imagine what is happening. What do you see and what do you hear? How would you show that in a film? Use your other senses too: What do you feel, smell, or taste?
- Ask for the grace (SEE TWEET 4.12) you desire to receive from God at that particular moment.

2) Beginning to pray

- Start your prayer by making the Sign of the Cross. Tell God: “Lord, I am here; I seek you.”
- Thank God for the gift of your life and offer it back as your gift to him. Say that you want to listen to him and to be changed by him.
- This opening of your prayer may be the same every day, using your own words or an existing prayer.

3) Listening to God

- Now pray with the text you have chosen. Receive with joy what happens in your prayer, as a gift from God, knowing that you cannot really determine what happens to you during prayer.
- Meditate on the passages that move you. Try to understand what they mean for your life.
- You are not the one talking at this point. Try to be quiet with God. This is the longest part of your prayer.

4) Speaking with God

- While before you tried to listen, now it is your chance to talk. You can talk to Jesus about anything, as if you're talking to a friend. Sometimes you can ask for mercy, sometimes you can accuse yourself of something you did wrong, sometimes you entrust him with your problems and ask for his help.
- Finish with a vocal prayer, such as the Our Father, followed by the Sign of the Cross.
- Be loyal and stick to the time you had reserved for prayer, even if it's hard. After all, you seek God for who he is and not for what he can give you.

5) Looking back

- Take a few minutes to look back on your prayer and to write down, if possible, any possible conclusions you can draw from what you experienced during your prayer. By making a prayer diary, or journal, you can learn to recognize the thread of your life with God. Ask yourself about two things:
 - a) *That which depends on you:* the form of your prayer. Did the place where you chose to pray and your chosen body posture help you to pray? Were you fully dedicated to your prayers? How did you deal with distractions and dry periods? How long did you pray?
 - b) *That which happened during your prayer:* What were your feelings? Did you experience joy or sadness after reading passages from the Bible? Did a thought or an image come to you? Do not be afraid to listen to your feelings, reactions, and desires, because it is precisely through your deepest longings that God's Will for your life is manifested.

Worksheet 2: Reflecting on your day through prayer

1) Remind yourself that you are in the presence of God

- Wherever you are, you were created by God, who is with you and knows you. Ask the Holy Spirit for help to look at your own life and all that surrounds you with love.

2) Be grateful for what you were given today

- Try to remember one or more special moments of the day. Maybe the smell of your first cup of coffee, the smile you received in return for a friendly word, something you learned, etc. Thank God for his good gifts.
- Reflect on the gifts and talents that helped you today. Remember where you found the strength and the hope when things got difficult. Thank God for your sound mind, your health, your family and your friends. You can thank him for the fact that, despite your shortcomings, you were given another day to live. God gave all of this to you, and you may thank him for it.

3) Ask for help from the Holy Spirit

- The Holy Spirit helps you to grow spiritually, by reflecting on your own life with growing freedom, without condemnation or rejection.
- Ask the Holy Spirit for the ability to learn from what happened as you reflect on the day. Ask him to help you to grow in your self-knowledge and in your relationship with God.

4) Reflect on the day

- This is the longest part of your prayer. Try to remember what happened during the day. Reflect on what you did, and how you did it. Recognize the moments you felt torn between helping and ignoring, between hoping and doubting, speaking and remaining silent, blaming and forgiving. This is not about punishing yourself for what went wrong, but about thinking about how you dealt with what God gave you.
- Recognize what helped you to be free and more of the human being God created you to be. Try to see at what point Jesus played a part in your decisions and where you may have pushed him away for a moment.
- The purpose is to continuously improve your ability to understand what is going on inside you, and how the Spirit of God is pointing you in the right direction. See how God is speaking to you during the day, and how Jesus, with the Holy Spirit, is always with you to help you and give you strength.

5) Speak to Jesus heart-to-heart

- By this time, you have seen what happened during the day. Now you can talk to Jesus about what you did or failed to do, your feelings and your attitude. Sometimes, you will ask for forgiveness for what you did wrong, sometimes you will want to ask for help and strength, and sometimes you will thank him.
- After going through the day with God, think about yourself with charity, just like as does, and recognize how much you need his love and help. You may also recognize where God showed you the way, a correct course of action, and realize how much you need his guidance.
- You can finish with a vocal prayer – the Our Father, for example.

Worksheet 3: Bible assignments (Special 6)

Assignment 1

Which sentence best describes how you see the Bible? Circle the answer that fits you best.

For me, the Bible is...

- A. a book that has never really interested me
- B. interesting, but I don't do much with it
- C. a difficult book, but I want to understand it better
- D. a source of inspiration that makes my life richer
- E. nonsense, I don't believe anything that's in it

Assignment 2

1. Walk around and look for someone who has a different answer from you.
2. Ask the other person why they chose that option.
3. Let the other person take his time to respond. You can ask for clarification, but the aim is not to begin a discussion.
4. In your own words, try to summarise how the other person sees the Bible. "So for you, the Bible is..." Check if you have summarized it well, and let the other person correct or add to it when necessary.
5. Switch roles.
6. You can close the conversation by thanking the other person for sharing his/her story.

Worksheet 4: Monastic assignment (Special 8)

Assignment

The aim of this assignment is: to introduce participants to the idea of a retreat, and to let them be inspired by each other's ideas.

1. Take a thick marker and a large sheet of paper. Ask a participant to draw the plan of an (imagined) monastery or convent. It is important that he/she labels each space (chapel, living room, etc.). The other participants can help with naming the types of spaces. As discussion leader you can add to the suggested spaces with, for example, a garden, chapel, library, cell, living room, discussion room, conference room, kitchen, recreation room and the street outside.
2. Hang the plan up where everyone can see it. Give each participant a small piece of paper and a pen. Ask them to draw a small figure on it with their name. Then ask: "Where would you spend the most time in the monastery or convent?" Give the group two minutes of silence to consider their response. Then, ask them which place they chose and have them tape their figure in "their" place.
3. Ask several people if they can explain their choice.

Tip

Do the participants in your group like to move around during activities? Then you could make the floorplan on the floor. Use masking tape to delineate the spaces and place a sheet of paper in each space that indicates the name of the room. Instead of using small papers with their names written on them, participants can stand in their favourite space.

Worksheet 5: Experience in a monastery/convent (Special 8)

Continuation of Worksheet 5 (p. 2/2)

Experience 1: Room for thought (Marian – 21 yo)

- My first visit to a convent was a very special experience. As a student, I had just completed an intense year, and I wanted to set certain things in order for myself.
- I arrived at the sisters with my weekend bag and was offered my own room in their guest house. The room had classic furniture and I had my own bathroom. That was more luxurious than I had expected! There was a lot to get used to on the first day. I usually had a busy life, but all of a sudden I had nothing to do! As if I was standing on the edge of a cliff and someone took the railing away – that's more or less how I felt.
- But in the evening, I began to get used to the silence. I went to sit at the desk in my room and began to write an overview of the year that had just gone by. I gazed out the window to the garden, and noted that I was able to completely focus on my thoughts. How peaceful! I saw that God spoke to my heart in the silence and I had profound insights about myself and the past year's events.
- I switched from writing to wandering through the garden and praying with the sisters in the chapel. I didn't see the sisters much after that. But we nevertheless lived according to their daily rhythm, which I liked. For once, not having to organize your own life gives a feeling of relief and freedom!

Experience 2: Reflection weekend with the youth group (Anne – 19 yo)

- Just before our summer vacation, we spent a weekend in an abbey with our youth group. The idea came from some of our group members who wanted to visit a monastery to see what the monastic life was like. With our catechist as guide, we were ready to go.
- We followed our own programme in the monastery based on the theme of "vocation". We spoke about vocations in the Bible and about our own vocation. With various assignments, the catechist guided us in thinking about the topic. We also joined the meals and three daily prayer moments or celebrations in the monastery.
- For many of us, it was the first time that we stayed overnight in a monastery, and it was a very positive experience. The people were very welcoming, and we also had a discussion with a man who had been in the monastery for a long time. We also spoke with him about faith. It was a great weekend!

Experience 3: Silently searching for God's plan (Rik - 27 yo)

- Since my conversion to the Catholic faith I have been experiencing a calling for some time. In addition to the spiritual guidance I receive from my pastor, the desire to follow a quiet retreat to distinguish what God asks of me grew stronger in me.
- For my quiet retreat I went alone to a Benedictine abbey. I had heard that this monastery was known for its sobriety and the prayers sung in Latin. This liturgy speaks to me, because it helps me to feel very close to God.
- After arriving, I immediately started living with the brothers' order of the day. Eight prayer moments determined the daily schedule. The brothers, following the Benedictine prayer book, pray every week at least once each of the 150 psalms from the Bible. Everything in Latin, sung a capella, pure.
- Between these moments of prayer, I spent time in the garden for a walk with the rosary, or in the crypt under the church for personal silent prayer. In this silent prayer I experienced God to be very close to me and I received a great deal of wisdom.
- The contact with the brothers was limited. Guests were kindly requested not to have any conversations with them, because Benedictine monks only speak when necessary. You can request a meeting with one of the brothers or with Father Abbot via the guest house. The guest father is responsible for the well-being of the guests and came to our quarters every evening before the last evening prayer.
- All in all, the retreat has made an important impression on me. In a few months I will stay in the same monastery again. Of course, I am really looking forward to this!

Worksheet 6: Compline or night prayer

Compline is the last evening prayer of the Church. It is part of the liturgy of the hours, which is prayed by priests, sisters, all religious people and many faithful throughout the whole world (SEE TWEET 3.13). The following text is the Sunday Compline, which can be prayed every day. L/ indicates the text to be read by the Leader.

Opening

L/. Oh God, come to our aid.

All/. Oh Lord, make haste to help us.

L/. Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All/. As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. (Alleluia).

Examination of Conscience

This is a good moment to hold an examination of conscience.

Everyone present can take a moment of silence to review the day and reflect on how they lived with God. Then they ask forgiveness for their sins together:

All/. I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own fault, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do; and I ask blessed Mary, ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

L/. May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life.

All/. Amen.

Hymn

You can sing a song together that everyone knows.

Psalms 91 (90)

The introductory verse or antiphon is first read by the Leader.

The community is divided into two choirs that will take turns in praying the verses of the psalm. The first group begins with “He who dwells in the shelter...” and the second choir follows with

“will say to the Lord...”. Then the first choir prays the next verse, and so forth. The asterisk (*) indicates a short pause in the text.

L/. He will conceal you with his wings; you will not fear the terror of the night.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High * and abides in the shade of the Almighty says to the Lord: ‘My refuge, * my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!’

It is he who will free you from the snare * of the fowler who seeks to destroy you; he will conceal you with his pinions * and under his wings you will find refuge.

You will not fear the terror of the night * nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the plague that prowls in the darkness * nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.

A thousand may fall at your side, * ten thousand fall at your right, you, it will never approach; * his faithfulness is buckler and shield.

Your eyes have only to look * to see how the wicked are repaid, you who have said: ‘Lord, my refuge!’ * and have made the Most High your dwelling.

Upon you no evil shall fall, * no plague approach where you dwell.

For you has he commanded his angels, * to keep you in all your ways.

They shall bear you upon their hands * lest you strike your foot against a stone.

Continuation of Worksheet 6 (p. 2/2)

On the lion and the viper you will tread * and trample the young lion and the dragon. Since he clings to me in love, I will free him; * protect him for he knows my name.

When he calls I shall answer: ‘I am with you,’ * I will save him in distress and give him glory. With length of life I will content him; * I shall let him see my saving power.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, * as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

All/. He will conceal you with his wings; you will not fear the terror of the night.

Short Scripture Reading (Rev 22:4-5)

They will see the Lord face to face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. It will never be night again and they will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on them. They will reign for ever and ever.

Responsory

L/. Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.

All/. Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.

L/. You have redeemed us, Lord, God of truth.

All/. Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.

L/. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

All/. Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.

Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:29–32)

L/. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

At last, all-powerful Master, you give leave to your servant * to go in peace, according to your promise.

For my eyes have seen your salvation * which you have prepared for all nations, the light to enlighten the Gentiles * and give glory to Israel, your people.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, * as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

All/. Save us, Lord, while we are awake; protect us while we sleep; that we may keep watch with Christ and rest with him in peace.

Concluding prayer

L/. Let us pray. (brief silence)

Visit this house, we pray you, Lord: drive far away from it all the snares of the enemy. May your holy angels stay here and guard us in peace, and let your blessing be always upon us. Through Christ our Lord.

All/. Amen.

L/. The Lord grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

All/. Amen.

Maria antiphon

Now you could sing the Salve Regina or another Marian song.

Salve, Regina, mater misericordiae; vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.

Ad te clamamus, oesules, filii Evæ.

Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle.

Eia ergo, advocata nostra, illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.

Et Iesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui, nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.

O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

Worksheet 7: Discussion Tips (Special 9)

Tips for leading the discussion

- See the tips in the #TwGOD Manual, especially B5.
- First of all: do not be afraid. The succeeding of the discussion depends not only on the group leader, but also on the participants. When necessary, remind participants to speak about others with respect and to listen well. Ask everyone to help keep a friendly environment and to search for answers in an honest way.
- If a participant has experience with the passing away of a child, or with medical interventions or abortion, strong emotions can come up. It is good to be alert in such situations, and to consider how you would handle them in advance. Although it can be good to ask someone to share their experience, it can sometimes place great emotional pressure on the group, and is not always conducive to an open and free discussion.
- Some topics are not for group discussion, and are better addressed with private guidance. If someone is unusually quiet and depressed during the discussion, it might be good to approach them afterwards for a short talk. You could eventually refer them to the pastor or to a spiritual director.
- If people are aggressive in asserting their perspective, then it can be helpful to point out what's happening: "I see that you're very firm about this / become almost aggressive / become very emotional. Could you explain why?"
- If the discussion becomes too heated, propose to take a break: "Let's have some tea first." Or simply say that it's too important a topic to address now, and pick it up again at one of the following meetings.

Statements as input for the discussion

You want to give everyone the chance to express their opinion and to form their own thoughts. Give special attention to the arguments and views that the participants themselves bring with them. Then, you can also challenge them to form opinions about other positions. You yourself can propose certain statements, for example:

- "The fetus can only be said to be a person after 23 weeks, when it can survive outside of the womb."
- "Human life begins where our own life began: at conception."
- "As soon as the heart begins to beat after 18 days in the womb, human life begins."
- "Human life is inextricably linked with the soul, which man receives at conception."

To understand the Catholic view

- Read Tweet 4.26 in the Tweeting with GOD book, and perhaps the following Tweets as well.
- Firstly, there is the biological development from the moment of conception when the sperm and egg merge into a new organism. If you look at the nine-month development objectively, you have to conclude that the new life begins at conception.
- There are various philosophical positions about when this life becomes human, but these often do not give a precise moment. According to the Church, the only logical conclusion is that human life begins simultaneously with biological life. During the cells' development from conception to birth, there is no other logical moment that could be singled out when the cluster of cells becomes a human being.
- The Catholic view holds that God creates every person and gives him or her a soul at the moment of conception. The parents therefore collaborate with God when they have sex with each other. This therefore comes with an important responsibility.

Worksheet 8: Letter about unborn life (Special 9)

From the papal encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (n.44-45)

"For you formed my inmost being" (Ps 139:13): the dignity of the unborn child

Although there are no direct and explicit calls [in the Bible] to protect human life at its very beginning, specifically life not yet born, and life nearing its end, this can easily be explained by the fact that the mere possibility of harming, attacking, or actually denying life in these circumstances is completely foreign to the religious and cultural way of thinking of the People of God. [At work in] the Old Testament [is] the certainty that the life which parents transmit has its origins in God. We see this attested in the many biblical passages which respectfully and lovingly speak of conception, of the forming of life in the mother's womb, of giving birth and of the intimate connection between the initial moment of life and the action of God the Creator.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you" (JER 1:5): the life of every individual, from its very beginning, is part of God's plan... Expressions of awe and wonder at God's intervention in the life of a child in its mother's womb occur again and again in the Psalms.

How can anyone think that even a single moment of this marvellous process of the unfolding of life could be separated from the wise and loving work of the Creator, and left prey to human caprice? Certainly the mother of the seven brothers [in the Book of Maccabees] did not think so; she professes her faith in God, both the source and guarantee of life from its very conception, and the foundation of the hope of new life beyond death: "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again, since you now forget yourselves for the sake of his laws" (2 MAC 7:22-23).

The New Testament revelation confirms the indisputable recognition of the value of life from its very beginning... The value of the person from the moment of conception is celebrated in the meeting between the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and between the two children whom they are carrying in the womb... The infant leaped, the mother was filled with the Spirit. The mother was not filled before the son, but after the son was filled with the Holy Spirit, he filled his mother too".

Worksheet 9: Texts for the retreat (Special C)

Opening (10.00)

- You can begin with an image. Take a vase filled with water, with sand or mud at the bottom. Say, “Look, this water is nice and clear. But if I stir it, it becomes brown and cloudy, and I can’t see through it anymore. If I let this mixture sit still for an hour now, then all the sand will sink to the bottom and I’ll once again be able to see through the water.
- It’s the same with our mind and spirit. When I’m constantly moving, literally or figuratively, because of constant stimulation, then my mind is like the vase with muddy water. It’s a cloudy mass, and I can no longer see through it. I can’t distinguish things well. But when I rest, then everything sinks to the bottom. Then I can once again see clearly and, right away, I begin to see things that I hadn’t seen before. Today we want to give your life’s “vase” time to rest, so that the cloudiness can settle, allowing you to see God and yourself better.
- Perhaps you have experienced that there is sometimes a lot of noise in the world. So much, in fact, that we must scream to rise above it. In such a situation, it isn’t easy to hear how God speaks, especially because his voice can often only be heard in the silence. That’s why we want to spend this day in silence, for a change. We already talk a lot with each other during the #TwGOD gatherings. Now, we will be silent together to be able to listen to God.
- Some people very consciously choose to spend time in silence from time to time. They disconnect from Facebook and Snapchat, check their email less often, and sometimes they even turn their phone off! And these people are far from religious. So even beyond religious considerations, people need silence to keep functioning.
- Silence can be frightening at first. As soon as there is a moment of silence in a conversation, we try to fill it in with small talk. But silence can help our spirit in a powerful way. Today, we’ll practice keeping silence and we’ll experience the power that it gives for our search for God.
- That requires the cooperation of each one of you. To begin, turn your mobile phones off completely. Make a real effort to not speak with one another today. It is really easy to sit somewhere and whisper, but then you miss the aim of the day. Allow yourself and others to experience silence. Even if you find it difficult to believe in God, you’re very well able to be silent. Being silent is something that we should all do from time to time; to better listen to ourselves, to have peace of mind – thinking before you speak is often uncommon – and to make time and space to direct your attention to God.

#First introduction (10:45)

- Hand out the following Bible passage, and have someone read it out loud:
- *“The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” (1 KINGS 19:11-14).*

Continuation of Worksheet 9 (p. 2/4)

- Say: “Elijah is a prophet, someone who was chosen by God to speak in His name. But it also became too much for this holy man and he had a burn-out. Discouraged, he goes to lie under a bush, and falls asleep (1 KINGS 19, 4-5). God gives him food and drink, but that isn’t enough to pull him out of his depression. When God asks him about what he’s doing, Elijah rants about everything that is going wrong.
- Then God tells Elijah that he has to come out, not to give up, but to get up and keep going. Elijah is given the task to await God. God is not present in the thunder of the storm. God is not in the rumbling and shaking of the earthquake. He is also not in the roaring of the blazing fire. God is in the whisper of a soft breeze. In the middle of the stormy noise of the day, of the earthquake of our activities, of the roaring fire of all our desires, it’s difficult to recognize that soft breeze, and to listen to God’s wise whispering voice. We all need to be silent.
- Not being silent on time can become very dangerous. Just look at Elijah. In the chapter before the passage that we just read, Elijah was very successful when he called God to help him, to show that God could work wonders (1 KINGS 18, 21-39). Responding to Elijah’s prayer, God set a heap of wet wood ablaze (God is therefore also in fire, at the right moment). Everyone could thus see that God was the only true god, and not the idol Baal. But right after, Elijah collapsed. He was obsessed with his own holy zeal and could no longer be silent to listen to what God said to him. He let himself be radicalised and lost the connection with God. In this spell of self-conceit, Elijah commanded the murder of many prophets of the false god Baal. Right after he had his burn-out... He must learn to listen to God again. And then he is told that his career as a prophet has come to an end!
- Being silent on time is thus literally vital. Just as Elijah’s gaze was clouded when he could no longer be silent, so is it vital for you to be silent once in a while. Because Elijah shows us the disastrous consequences that a clouded gaze can have! Only in silence can the sand in the vase settle, allowing you to see clearly. Then you can recognize, step by step, how God is present in your life: he made you, he loves you, he sent Jesus to bring you to him, he is always there for you. And he wants to build a connection with you and speak to you. Even now. And God especially wants to talk to you in your prayer. You can really learn to listen to him and specially to make time for him. Let us ask Jesus to pray for each one of us, that we may be silent and see God’s path with us more clearly.

#Introduction to personal prayer (11.00)

- Now we will take time to pray. Take a moment to pray in silence, in a place of your choice. In the chapel or church with a lit candle, in front of the tabernacle or the statue of Mary, in the garden or in the park, in a corner of the corridor, or simply here in the room. Choose a place that can help you to search for God in silence.
- Do not be afraid of the silence: only when you become silent can you learn to listen to God. Do not talk with each other, because then you hold each other back from prayer. Nor should you be afraid if it becomes “boring”: sometimes you must pass through the aridity of the spiritual desert before you find water. Do not give up too hastily and take the time to pray: that’s why you have come today.
- Really take the time: we reserve an entire hour for prayer. Of course, you don’t have to spend the entire hour in prayer, but respect the silence and let others have the opportunity to pray.
- First, read the Bible passage again slowly, and choose two or three points that you want to contemplate with God. Begin your prayer with the sign of the cross, and end with a formal prayer such as the Hail Mary or the Our Father. Finish with the sign of the cross. That’s how you mark the time that you devote completely to God.
- On Worksheet 1, you can find an example of how to pray with a Bible passage. Hand this text out.

Second introduction (14:30)

- Hand the next Bible passage out, and have someone read it out loud:
- *“In the course of their journey [Jesus] came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord’s feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.’ But the Lord answered, ‘Martha, Martha,’ he said, ‘you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.’”* (LUKE 10:38-42).
- Say: “The two sisters, Martha and Mary, show two ways to be with Jesus, each good in its own way. They are good friends of Jesus, who visited them and their brother Lazarus regularly. When Lazarus died after a severe illness, and was already dead for three days, Jesus came to raise him from the dead. Jesus really felt at home with them. This time Lazarus is not spoken about: Martha is clearly the head of the house.
- Martha is a special woman. In her time, it was not usual that a woman should be the head of keeping the house, let alone that she herself should invite a man to her home. Perhaps Jesus brought an entire company of apostles and disciples along. So there was a lot to do to prepare food and drinks for the guests, as prescribed by the rules of hospitality!
- It is therefore understandable that Martha becomes annoyed at Mary for not helping her, and cuts in bitterly: “Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.” It should have been normal to divide the chores. But here, something completely different is at play.
- Perhaps it could help to look at another Gospel passage. When Jesus raised their brother Lazarus from the dead, both sisters (JOHN 11:17-32) played an important role. Their opposing personalities were also clearly expressed. Both were disappointed and sad that Jesus had not come on time to heal their brother before he died. Martha comes running to him, while Mary waited for Jesus at home, and only when he called her did she throw herself at his feet, weeping.
- Perhaps you recognize yourself in one of the sisters, or maybe you have something from both. The tempestuous, active, busybody personality of Martha, and the more cautious, searching, welcoming nature of Mary. It is needed that we be active Christians who engage with the people around us, especially to tell them about Jesus. Often we’re very busy, and think that we are doing useful work.
- But what often goes wrong is that we get completely caught up in our busy lives, even finding pride in our busy agenda. “Look at everything I’m doing!” We can even be so busy that we don’t manage to make time for Jesus. Even if you go to mass every Sunday, but if you have no time for Jesus during the week, you can be like Martha and be rebuked by Jesus.
- He even surprisingly says that Mary has chosen the better part. The mostly important thing in our lives is not what we do, but who and how we are. We are children of God, and therefore brothers and sisters, which is why we must engage with others. But it begins with the fact that we are children of God: He is the beginning and the future of our lives. Our activity has little meaning if it does not come from our relationship with God and with Jesus.
- That’s why it’s so important to regularly leave things aside like Mary – even important things – and direct yourself completely to the only thing of real importance. That’s what we want to do during this retreat. Take a moment to

step back and look at what is really important in your life, and what is just superficial. Based on that, you could perhaps make some resolutions later today.

- At this moment there is really only one important thing: you yourself can sit at Jesus’s feet, too. In silence. To tell him everything that you have in your heart. But above all to listen to what He will say! Go find a suitable place to pray, like you just did, and spend a generous amount of time with Jesus.

Introduction to a concluding reflection (16:30)

- If possible, go to the chapel or church. Ask the participants to bring a pen and paper.
- After a short moment of silence, you can read Irma’s email aloud; she is a young person who wrote a letter to Mary:
- “Dear Mary, I often ask myself: how much attention do I actually give to the people around me? Like this morning, when I was at grandmother’s house. She told me about something that she had experienced, but although I think I nodded at the right moments, I was actually thinking about the fun evening that I had with my friends last night. And when my girlfriend sent me a message today, I quickly replied with a smiley, and promptly returned to the film I was watching. Was that actually enough?
- I also ask myself if I make enough time for God. I actually don’t really know how I should do it. But I do know that God made me and that he loves me. I would like to spend time with my Father in heaven every day! But a lot happens in a day. I do want to make time for God, but I also want so many other things. Do I have to choose more clearly? Do I have to live more consciously? Maybe you could pray for me, Mary, that I could learn to give more priority to the more important things in my life. Irma.”
- Say the following sentences slowly, with a silence between them, so that people could reflect: “This is a good moment to reflect on your daily life. Do I spend enough time in silence? Do I give enough attention to the people around me? Do I ever direct my attention to God and, if I do, does it “work”, or is it difficult to become silent and quiet?”
- Say: “Maybe you’ve experienced that “just hear God’s voice quickly” doesn’t work. You really have to take the time. That’s why we’ll pray in silence now. Think of the questions that were just asked, and how you can allow for more silence in your daily life. Try to come up with very concrete ideas, and write them down. For example: not using your mobile phone in your bedroom, one evening a week without TV and with a good book, a retreat in a monastery once a year, ...we’ll take about 20 minutes to write these down.”