

HINTS FOR LEADERS OF FOUNDATION COURSES

The Foundation Course (FC) is intended primarily for those who have recently come to a personal faith in Christ, or for those seeking such a faith. It is not intended for the agnostic on the one hand or for the established Christian on the other. Both tend to disturb the dynamics of those who want to find Christ and grow in him. It does not hurt to have one or two in the group who are already Christians but have lost their joy and gone dry. Thus the FC stands as a bridge between the non-Christians or the merely formal church members on the one hand and the warm relationships in the Fellowship Groups on the other. Normally at the end of the FC members will be put into Fellowship Groups – the most natural type of Christian informal fellowship, especially in a church like Holy Trinity which possesses no building and access to the Chapel only on Sundays.

There are notes for each evening, broken down into four sections

- a) material to help the leader give a short talk on the topic
- b) a verse of scripture on the topic for all to memorize (with its reference)
- c) a passage of scripture on the same topic for group study – and some questions to stimulate discussion
- d) some suggestions for the time of prayer. This encourages members to pray with and for others, and to look for answers over the next few weeks.

In addition it is important to make time for questions, answers to prayer, and perhaps some worship (if music is available) or (especially in the first 2 weeks) an ice-breaker. Each evening should start with drinks, nibbles and circulating time.

The Leaders need to be highly relational and warm. The overall leader needs to be well informed on questions and difficulties people experience. One leader may be better in a teaching role, another at putting people at their ease. Those leaders currently involved in BSF or equivalent groups may need to be released for the duration of the FC. All leaders need to know how to lead someone to Christ, how to run a small group studying the Bible, and how to use the course material.

General responsibilities

Before the FC starts, arrange to meet the other leader(s), pray and get to know one another's spiritual story and strengths. Plan the first meeting, sharing the leadership (one will host, one teach, one lead the Bible study, etc). Pray for all the members who will be present. And after each meeting the leaders will stay behind to de-brief and to pray.

Pastoral care

Each leader will have a couple or so members of the FC assigned to them for pastoral care. Seek to have two unhurried times with each person, before the FC ends.

The first will be to ensure that they clearly understand the way of salvation, to help them over difficulties, and to guide them begin a regular pattern of Bible reading and prayer with *Newness of Life* which will be given them after week 3.

The second session will be to help them see where they are going to be incorporated in the general life and service of the church when the FC ends.

If they miss a session, go see them, give them the notes, and tell them 'we missed you!'

General hints

It is best not to attempt to cover all aspects of a subject each week, as topics are large. The teaching spot should be short, 15 mins max., leaving people wanting to know more and allowing time for questions.

- a) Try to vary it each week. Maybe worship one week, a pot-luck meal, an open question time. Allow time for people to share experiences and express problems.
- b) The course notes are given as suggestions. Feel free to change the material according to the needs of the groups
- c) To facilitate good discussion, ask questions which demand more than a yes/no answer (i.e. What does this mean? How could it relate to our lives today? Has anyone experienced this?)
- d) After a discussion it could be good to summarize, or have one of the group do so.

The first meeting

This is crucial. Lose them then, and you have probably lost them for good. Aim to make people feel at ease. Have name tags worn for the first two weeks until everyone knows everyone. Do not begin until 10 mins after the advertised start time, allowing folk to take refreshments and circulate.

It is advisable to **start** the meeting (seated in a circle where you can see everyone) by asking what brings each of them there. Answer that question for yourself first, bringing in your discovery of Christ. Then go round, and have another leader seated on your left who will speak after you. You have thus provided two models of what you want. Do not let this get too lengthy, but it is invaluable to see where they are coming from. Welcome each contribution so that they see it is 'safe' whatever background they come from and whether or not they are believers.

Then give the **short talk** one of you will have prepared (usually the main leader for the first two weeks). This needs to explain very clearly what Christianity is not and what it is, and to show people how to accept Christ. It may help to leave out some booklets on commitment (which will quietly vanish as people leave!).

Then slot in the **verse learning** – kid them that they are back in Sunday School and then they won't mind! But it is important. They are learning to memorize scripture.

Unless the FC is small, you will need to split into two lots for the **inductive Bible Study**. You may like to let people split randomly, or organize who goes into which group (and stays there in successive weeks). Only at this point produce Bibles. They will not have brought them, so you must provide enough for all – and keep it to the same translation, NIV being the best. You can borrow Bibles from the Office but a few more may be needed. (NB If you borrow from the Office, return them smartly – they are needed for daily worship). Encourage those who possess an NIV to bring it next week. See below on leading this study.

The **end of the meeting** is a good time to offer more refreshments, make appointments (unostentatiously) with those for whom you are pastorally responsible, and hand out copies of the Notes for the evening, encouraging them

to look up the references. At the end of the evening, stay to pray and compare notes with other leaders, and to plan next week.

Subsequent meetings will not of course have that extended time of sharing at the beginning, but there is likely to be news and questions.

Experience shows that here are two main areas where leaders need help: in guiding their inductive Bible study and in doing personal work (PW) with individuals under their care.

Leading the Inductive Bible Study

The most important thing to be clear about is that this is not like a talk, with you imparting wisdom! It is exposing people to scripture so that they find things in it for themselves and share them with the group. You facilitate that process - so:

- a) Ensure they all have a Bible with the same translation, and they are sitting in such a way that you can see everyone's face.
- b) Explain where in the Bible the passage for the evening can be found. Suppose it is Romans, say 'The NT is the second half of the Bible. First there are the four Gospels, then Acts, and then Romans. If you are in Acts you have not gone far enough. If you are in 1 Corinthians you have gone too far.' Too simple for some – but it will be a lifeline to the embarrassed and ignorant!
- c) Make sure they all have time to find it. Then suggest you read round in a circle, a verse at a time. This gets people used to the sound of their own voice reading the Bible and helps to break the silence barrier. You may need to give a few sentences of explanation on what the passage is about, but keep it short.
- d) Then give them time to read it again quietly to themselves and choose something that strikes them – a challenge, a command, an encouragement, something they had never seen before, etc. Tell them that we will be sharing our discoveries with each other after two minutes by your watch (it marvelously concentrates the mind!).
- e) Invite contributions. 'Who would like to start?' Someone always will! Make them say what verse it is in, so everyone can look at it.
- f) Try to get them to ask themselves 'What does it mean?' and then 'How does this apply to our lives?' You may find mistakes are made in both. If what they say is wildly astray from the actual meaning of the text you may like to ask "OK, but what do others think it means?' and then major on the best contribution. If it is unapplied you can say 'Fine, So what is that going to mean in real life for us?'
- g) Someone is sure to moan that they wanted to choose that verse too. Say, 'Great. This book is inexhaustible. What was it *you* liked about the verse?'
- h) You are sure to have the professional talker in your group. Welcome his first and maybe his second contribution, but then shut him up gently 'Hang on a moment, Bill, you have given us a couple of very helpful insights. What have other people found?'
- i) You may well have someone who rabbits on down some irrelevant avenue. Enquire gently 'Which verse do you find that in, Jean?' Keep their noses in the text! If they come up with some major issue like predestination or suffering suggest they chat to you afterwards rather than involving everyone in

what is usually a difficult and perhaps fruitless topic which is not the major thrust of the evening.

- j) You are likely to have one or two silent people. Don't frighten them by asking them by name to contribute...for the first week or two. Then you could! But in general when about to close say 'Maybe there is someone who hasn't said anything yet who would like to contribute? Great if so'
- k) You may find that it all falls silent. So then you need to ask questions. But be specific – 'There are good things in verse 7. Anyone got any ideas?' And make sure you ask questions that will not allow a yes or no answer. 'Why?' 'How?' 'What does it mean?' usually produce good reflection and answers. Remember you have another line of defense – questions that are on the back of the Notes for the evening. Have them available (unobtrusively) for your use in times of need!

When time is up (say 5 mins before the advertised closing time) you might say something like this on the first night ' We have been talking *about* God all evening, and he has been here among us. Let's talk *to* him now. In our own words – we don't need a Prayer Book or to kneel down. Just take the thought that has helped you most tonight and turn it into a prayer, or a thank-you in your own words. Don't be embarrassed. Christians do pray out loud and God is not the least fussy about grammar. So let's go for it. I will begin and my fellow leader will close in a minute. So do chip in before that.' Some will, but certainly not all the first night. Do not press them. It will grow on them. You may like to suggest they just read out the bit of text they like and then pray very shortly 'Thank you for that ' or 'Please make this true of me'. Make sure your own opening prayer is a model – short, warm, based on the text. Others will probably take the hint!

Personal or pastoral work

It is an enormous privilege to help others into Christ and to grow in him. You need to establish warm, generous relations with the person and have a setting that is private enough for you to talk but also relaxed enough for them to be at ease. Ask them how they are enjoying the FC.? What have they most liked or disliked? Ask them if they have understood the way to a personal relationship with Christ that was explained on the first evening?. Have they taken that step of commitment and prayed a prayer of surrender like the one in the end of the booklet 'Come, Follow Me'?

They may well tell you that they have indeed done so. Rejoice with them. It is the most important decisions they have ever made. Show them that they are now in the family, the very household of God (Eph.2.19). Show them the contrast between 'then' and 'now', in for instance, 1 Peter 2.10. Warn them that there will be problems – we have made a great Friend but also a great enemy (James 4.7). Assure them that if they have asked him, Christ really has entered their lives because he promised (Rev.3.20, John 6.37 etc). Feelings will come and go: they need to rely on the promise of the One who cannot lie, and gradually the fruit of the new life will appear (Gal.5.22f). It would be good to give them a promise to take away.

But they may well tell you they have not yet taken that step. Your job is gently to discover why. A good diagnostic question is ‘Is that because of something you do not understand, or maybe it is because of something you are not willing to do?’ If it is something they do not understand, then you need to go through the way of salvation again with them: something to admit, something to believe, something to consider, something to do. Or it may be a problem like suffering which will need patient listening and loving care.

But if it is something they are not willing to do yet, that is because, in all probability, they feel the cost is too great. They may lose their friends. Christ may narrow their lives and make them overly religious. Or perhaps the whole idea of letting control go to another is too frightening. You need to respond to what the obstacle is. Of course, they may lose friends, but such will be pretty poor friends. The better ones may laugh to begin with but will soon respect and maybe start hungering after what (s)he has. Christ will not narrow life: ‘I have come that they may have life in all its fullness’ (John 10.10). (S)he is not called to be religious in the conventional sense, but to friendship with the most wonderful person in the world. In ways like this, set the fears and obstacles at rest. Never press for decision. That is the Spirit’s job. But paint the attractiveness of life with Jesus, and issue his invitation. Sometimes I ask ‘Would you rather make your response or your own, or with me?’ Usually they go for the latter (if they choose the former, ask them to tell you when they have done it). If they ask to do it with you, pray for them that they may have the courage to do so and then say ‘OK, take your time. But ask him in your own words to come in’ (S)he may well ask you if (s)he needs to pray out loud. Say ‘No, but I can’t hear you if you pray silently – and you wanted me alongside. Anyhow, Christians do pray out loud so you might as well begin as you mean to go on!’ Then you will find that they usually pour out their heart in prayer, but sometimes it is all very transactional. Emotion is not part of the deal! Welcoming Christ in is. Then encourage the person as above. The joy of leading someone to Christ is immense. May it be your lot!

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