



The Formation of Citizens

Small Group Discussion Guide

Week of August 30, 2026

Primary scripture texts: Deuteronomy 1:1-8; 4:1-8

Secondary scripture texts: Philippians 3:17-4:1; Matthew 5:13-16

Learning outcome: The desired goal is that the group members would emerge from this discussion with a vision for Christian discipleship as a gift from God that takes shape in concrete and communal ways, rather than just being a private piety.

Questions that are marked with an asterisk () are priorities. If you are worried about having enough time, focus on these questions and skip those that are unmarked.*

DISCUSSING DEUTERONOMY (15 MINUTES)

Ask two group members to volunteer to read Deuteronomy 1:1-8 and 4:1-8 aloud.

Invite listeners to notice: What are the things that God has already done or given, and how are the people meant to respond? What are the surrounding nations meant to see through Israel's common life?

1. Why do you think that Moses starts by reminding the people of where they have come from and where they are going?
2. *In these passages grace precedes command. Where do you see this, and why is it an important dynamic to understand?
3. *Look at Deuteronomy 4:5-8 again. Is God most concerned with private beliefs, personal ethics, or the shared common life of the people? Why have you answered that way?

OPENING THE CATECHISM (10 MINUTES)

Remind group members that they are encouraged to keep up with the assigned catechism questions in *To Be A Christian*, and that they can access this text through the free PDF online (you should have sent them the link) or by purchasing a copy through Anglican House Publishers.

This week's assigned reading from *To Be A Christian* was Qs. 15-17 and 92-99.

1. Did anything in the assigned catechism questions strike you as encouraging, challenging, or confusing?
2. *In Question 15 we are told that "citizenship in God's kingdom" is one of the gifts God gives in saving us. Question 17 describes the core practices that God uses to transform and save us over time. We might say that the former speaks to the gift of an identity, while the latter speaks to the need for ongoing formation. What goes wrong if we get the balance between these two things wrong?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)

Below is an excerpt from *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon (Abingdon Press, 1989, pp 11-12).

Either read the passage aloud in the group or give participants time to read it silently. As they follow along or read, ask them to underline one phrase they find helpful and circle one phrase they find difficult or unclear.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul uses an image that appeals to us, that serves as a symbol for the change in mood we describe in this book. After asking the Philippian church to "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus" (no small order for ordinary people), Paul tells this forlorn, struggling church, "God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (2:13). In you. Then Paul reminds them, "Our commonwealth is in heaven" (3:20).

In the space of a few lines, Paul has called the Philippians to be part of a quite spectacular journey—namely, to live and to die like Christ, to model their lives so closely upon Christ that they bear within themselves the very mind of Christ. Yet he also calls them to "rejoice" (3:1), because in them, in their ordinary life together as congregation, God is enjoying them as divine representatives in the world. Great demands, but also great joy, at the wonder, at the adventure of being the church.

The image that evokes this adventure for us is, again, found in Philippians 3:20—“our commonwealth is in heaven.” Moffatt more vividly translates this *politeuma* as “We are a colony of heaven.” The Jews in Dispersion were well acquainted with what it meant to live as strangers in a strange land, aliens trying to stake out a living on someone else’s turf. Jewish Christians had already learned, in their day-to-day life in the synagogue, how important it was for resident aliens to gather to name the name, to tell the story, to sing Zion’s songs in a land that didn’t know Zion’s God.

A colony is a beachhead, an outpost, an island of one culture in the middle of another, a place where the values of home are reiterated and passed on to the young, a place where the distinctive language and life-style of the resident aliens are lovingly nurtured and reinforced.

We believe that the designations of the church as a colony and Christians as resident aliens are not too strong for the modern American church—indeed, we believe it is the nature of the church, at any time and in any situation, to be a colony. Perhaps it sounds a bit overly dramatic to describe the actual churches you know as colonies in the middle of an alien culture. But we believe that things have changed for the church residing in America and that faithfulness to Christ demands that we either change or else go the way of all compromised forms of the Christian faith.

The church is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. In baptism our citizenship is transferred from one dominion to another, and we become, in whatever culture we find ourselves, resident aliens.

Discussion questions:

1. Does anyone want to share something they underlined or circled, and why?

2. What might the image of the church as a colony help to illuminate, and how could it be unhelpful if taken in the wrong way?
3. *What is the difference between the Christian colony the authors envision and a vision of the church as an enclave that withdraws from engagement with the world around it?
4. *What ordinary practices might help a church “name the name, tell the story, and sing Zion’s songs”?

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)

Give participants a minute of silence to consider how they might answer this prompt:

“This week, one practice (shared with another Christian if possible) that can help me to remember to whom I belong is _____.”

If one or two people are willing, allow them to share their responses briefly.

Close by inviting participants to stand and respond to these words from the Anglican baptismal liturgy.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and confess him as your Lord and Savior?

I do.

Do you joyfully receive the Christian Faith, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?

I do.

Will you obediently keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in them all the days of your life?

I will, the Lord being my helper.

14. What should you do as the sign of your repentance and faith?

After receiving instruction in the faith, I should be baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, thus joining his Body, the Church. If I have already been baptized, I should confess my sins, seek the guidance of a minister, affirm the promises made at my Baptism, and take my place as a member of the Church. (*Psalm 51:5-7; Ezekiel 36:25-27; Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 1 Peter 3:18-22*)

15. What does God grant in your new life in Christ?

God grants me reconciliation with him (*2 Corinthians 5:17-19*), forgiveness of my sins (*Colossians 1:13-14*), union with him in Christ (*Romans 6:3-5*), adoption into his family (*Galatians 4:4-7*), citizenship in his kingdom (*Ephesians 2:19-21; Philippians 3:20*), new life in the Holy Spirit (*Titus 3:4-5*), and the promise of eternal life (*John 3:16; 1 John 5:12*).

16. What does God desire to accomplish in your life in Christ?

God desires to free me from captivity to sin and transform me into the image of Jesus Christ, by the power of his Holy Spirit. (*Exodus 33:18-23; 34:29-35; Psalm 27:4, 7-14; Matthew 17:1-9; Romans 6:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:12-18*)

17. By what means will God transform you into the image of Jesus Christ?

The first Christians “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (*Acts 2:42*). Following this pattern, I will be transformed within the life of the Church through reading Scripture and receiving the sacraments, through worship and prayer, and through fellowship with God’s people and loving witness to the world. (*Deuteronomy 6:1-9; 2 Chronicles 7:1-3; Psalm 1; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25*)

Church, and for witness and mission to the world. (*Exodus 31:1-11; Luke 9:1-6; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Ephesians 4:12-16*)

A Prayer for the Holy Spirit's Ministry

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in me the fire of your love. Direct and rule my heart in all things, empower me for witness and ministry, and daily increase in me your gifts and fruit, to the glory of God the Father; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

“THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH”

92. What is the Church?

The Church is the whole community of faithful Christians in heaven and on earth, called and formed by God into one people. The Church on earth gathers to worship God in Word and Sacrament, to serve God and neighbor, and to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth. (*Exodus 19:4-6; Psalm 22:22-23; Matthew 28:19-20; Ephesians 2:11-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Articles of Religion, 19*)

93. How does Holy Scripture teach you to view the Church?

Holy Scripture teaches me to view the Church as God's family, as the Body and bride of Christ, and as the temple where God in Christ dwells by his Spirit. (*Isaiah 54:5-8; Hosea 2:16-20; Matthew 12:46-50; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Revelation 5:9-10; 19:6-10*)

94. Why is the Church called the Body of Christ?

The Church is called the Body of Christ because all who belong to the Church are united to Christ as their Head and source of life, and are united to one another in Christ for mutual love and service to him. (*Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:25-30*)

95. What are the “marks” or characteristics of the Church?

The Nicene Creed expands upon the Apostles’ Creed to list four characteristics of the Church: it is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” (*see Articles of Religion, 8*)

96. In what sense is the Church “one”?

The Church is one because all its members form the one Body of Christ, having “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (*Ephesians 4:5–6*). The Church is called to embody this unity in all relationships between believers. (*Psalm 133; John 17:11, 20–23; Ephesians 2:11–22; 4:2–6*)

97. Why is the Church called “holy”?

The Church is holy because the Holy Spirit dwells in it and sanctifies its members, setting them apart to God in Christ and calling them to moral and spiritual holiness of life. (*Exodus 19:3–6; Leviticus 19:1–2; 20:22–26; Psalm 15; John 17:17–19; Acts 26:16–18; 1 Corinthians 3:16–17; Colossians 3:12–15*)

98. Why is the Church called “catholic”?

The Church is called “catholic” (“according to the whole”) because it keeps the whole faith it has received from the Lord, in continuity with the whole Church, in all times and places. (*Micah 4:1–4; Acts 2:1–11; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8; 2 Timothy 1:13–14; Jude 3; Revelation 5:9–10*)

99. Why is the Church called “apostolic”?

An apostle is one who is sent. The Church is called “apostolic” because it holds the faith of the first apostles sent by Christ. In continuity with them, the Church is likewise sent by Christ to proclaim the Gospel and to make disciples throughout the whole world. (*Matthew 10:1–4, 40–42; 28:18–20; Acts 2:42; 13:1–4; Ephesians 2:19–21*)