



Allegiance to the One God
Small Group Discussion Guide
Week of September 6, 2026

Primary scripture texts: Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Secondary scripture texts: 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; Mark 12:28-34

Learning outcome: We want participants to emerge from this session with an understanding that the creedal confession of “We believe in one God” is about far more than just information. It is a pledge that no rival can claim our ultimate allegiance and worship.

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.*

LOOKING BACK (5 MINUTES)

At the beginning of the meeting, return briefly to any practices that participants shared at the end of last week’s session.

Invite anyone who wishes to share: What practice did you choose? As you sought to embrace that practice, what did you find encouraging, difficult, or surprising?

DISCUSSING DEUTERONOMY (12 MINUTES)

Ask someone to read Deuteronomy 6:1-9 aloud in the group.

Invite listeners to notice: In this passage God’s words seem to travel from the spoken word into the heart, throughout the household, and into the city square. Which repeated words in this text can help us describe the ways that our allegiance is formed?

1. How does this passage teach us about what it means to truly *hear* God? How might this type of hearing differ from simply receiving information?
2. *Why does the confession that “the LORD is one” move immediately to the command that we should love God with all of our heart, soul, and might? What

do you think that God's oneness has to do with the theme of wholehearted allegiance?

3. *In verses 6-9 there is an outward movement from the heart into every arena of life, private and public. What can we learn from this about how allegiance to God is sustained and formed?

OPENING THE CATECHISM (8 MINUTES)

The assigned reading for this week was Qs. 18-24 and 36-47.

1. Did anything in the assigned catechism questions strike you as encouraging, challenging, or confusing?
2. *Stand and recite the Apostles' Creed aloud together from Question 24.
3. *In Question 20 we are told that believing the Creeds involves an intention to live by them. What do we mean when we say "I believe in God" and "Jesus Christ" and "the Holy Spirit", and what rival claims do these affirmations implicitly deny?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)

Printed below is an excerpt from *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, a 2nd century AD letter that is the earliest account of Christian martyrdom outside of the pages of the Bible. The author of this text is unknown. The translation provided is from the Roberts-Donaldson edition and is available in the public domain.

Polycarp, the elderly Bishop of Smyrna, has been brought before a Roman proconsul on charges of subverting the government. During this time, Christians were commonly accused of being subversive "atheists" because they refused to swear allegiance to Rome's gods.

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

CHAPTER 9

Now, as Polycarp was entering into the stadium, there came to him a voice from heaven, saying, "Be strong, and show thyself a man, O Polycarp!" No one saw who it was that spoke to him; but those of our

brethren who were present heard the voice. And as he was brought forward, the tumult became great when they heard that Polycarp was taken. And when he came near, the proconsul asked him whether he was Polycarp. On his confessing that he was, [the proconsul] sought to persuade him to deny [Christ], saying, "Have respect to thy old age," and other similar things, according to their custom, [such as], "Swear by the fortune of Cæsar; repent, and say, Away with the Atheists." But Polycarp, gazing with a stern countenance on all the multitude of the wicked heathen then in the stadium, and waving his hand towards them, while with groans he looked up to heaven, said, "Away with the Atheists." Then, the proconsul urging him, and saying, "Swear, and I will set thee at liberty, reproach Christ;" Polycarp declared, "Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"

CHAPTER 10

And when the proconsul yet again pressed him, and said, "Swear by the fortune of Cæsar," he answered, "Since thou art vainly urgent that, as thou sayest, I should swear by the fortune of Cæsar, and pretendest not to know who and what I am, hear me declare with boldness, I am a Christian. And if you wish to learn what the doctrines of Christianity are, appoint me a day, and thou shalt hear them." The proconsul replied, "Persuade the people." But Polycarp said, "To thee I have thought it right to offer an account [of my faith]; for we are taught to give all due honour (which entails no injury upon ourselves) to the powers and authorities which are ordained of God. But as for these, I do not deem them worthy of receiving any account from me."

CHAPTER 11

The proconsul then said to him, "I have wild beasts at hand; to these will I cast thee, except thou repent." But he answered, "Call them then, for we are not accustomed to repent of what is good in order to adopt that which is evil; and it is well for me to be changed from what is evil to what is righteous." But again the proconsul said to him, "I will cause thee to be consumed by fire, seeing thou despisest the wild beasts, if thou wilt not repent." But Polycarp said, "Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment,

reserved for the ungodly. But why tarriest thou? Bring forth what thou wilt.”

CHAPTER 12

While he spoke these and many other like things, he was filled with confidence and joy, and his countenance was full of grace, so that not merely did it not fall as if troubled by the things said to him, but, on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his herald to proclaim in the midst of the stadium thrice, “Polycarp has confessed that he is a Christian.” This proclamation having been made by the herald, the whole multitude both of the heathen and Jews, who dwelt at Smyrna, cried out with uncontrollable fury, and in a loud voice, “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, and the overthrower of our gods, he who has been teaching many not to sacrifice, or to worship the gods.” Speaking thus, they cried out, and besought Philip the Asiarch to let loose a lion upon Polycarp. But Philip answered that it was not lawful for him to do so, seeing the shows of wild beasts were already finished. Then it seemed good to them to cry out with one consent, that Polycarp should be burnt alive. For thus it behooved the vision which was revealed to him in regard to his pillow to be fulfilled, when, seeing it on fire as he was praying, he turned about and said prophetically to the faithful that were with him, “I must be burnt alive.”

Discussion questions:

1. Does anyone want to share something they underlined or circled, and why?
2. *Try to answer this question from both sides of the debate. What does the proconsul think he is asking Polycarp to do, and why might it seem like a reasonable request to him? And why can't Bishop Polycarp bring himself to agree?
3. *Polycarp's choice was unusually stark and may not apply directly to us. However, less dramatic pressures tempt us as Christians to give ultimate loyalty to a career, relationship, ideology, or way of life. What are some

of these things that claim us? And how can we distinguish proper loyalty from worship?

CONCLUDING ACTIVITY (5 MINUTES)

Return to Deuteronomy's emphasis on creedal confession at daily thresholds like rising up and lying down, leaving and returning, and concrete markers like doorposts.

Ask participants to consider one threshold moment or object in their daily life that tends to direct their attention or command their loyalty in one direction or another.

Give group members a minute or two of silence to complete this prompt, inviting them to choose either Deuteronomy 6:4-5 or some words from the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds.

"This week, when _____, I will confess or pray:
_____."

Invite anyone who is willing to share briefly what they chose and why.

Close by standing and praying the Collect for Trinity Sunday:

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity: We beseech thee, that thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and reignest, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

PART II

BELIEVING IN CHRIST

THE APOSTLES' CREED AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

All genuine Christians affirm that authentic Christianity is apostolic Christianity. Apostolic Christianity rests on the historic, eyewitness testimony of Jesus' first followers, the apostles, to the actual events of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, ascension, present heavenly reign, and promised future return. Both Jesus and his apostles understood these events to fulfill the Old Testament hopes of the kingdom (that is, the reign) of God. God's covenant with Israel prepared for this kingdom, which the Christian Church has received from Jesus and his apostles.

We learn from Scripture about these key events, including what they mean and how they hold together. Anglicans therefore affirm that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are contained in the Bible, are "God's Word written" (*Articles of Religion*, 20).

By the second century, these essentials of apostolic faith had been organized into an outline of topics for instruction (the Rule of Faith), and this outline came to be known as the Apostles' Creed because it sums up the apostolic faith. This Creed came to be widely used by the Church as the declaration of faith made at Baptism and was later included as one of three

creeds in the 1662 Anglican Prayer Book. The Apostles' Creed is the briefest and most easily memorized of these creeds, and is complemented and enlarged upon by the later Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.

To gather and focus the central truths of apostolic faith is the first task of all catechesis (instruction). That is precisely what the Apostles' Creed does. It is arranged in three paragraphs, which highlight in turn the work of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, thus distilling the teaching of Holy Scripture and reflecting the triune nature of God. It is a summary of biblical truths that is designed to lead inquirers into a grounded personal faith in the triune God.

The Apostles' Creed exists to define and defend this commitment, which is basic to being a Christian. The article on God the Creator (the Father) introduces the Creed; its central article—focused on the Person and Work of Jesus Christ—is the fullest and longest; and the article on the Holy Spirit and Christian salvation follows. As a whole, the Creed testifies to the vital core of God's self-revelation for our salvation. It is a consensus declaration that comes to us with the resounding, universal endorsement of faithful believers over nearly two thousand years. It has been recited by Christian communities throughout the history of the Church. And it is a benchmark of orthodoxy—that is, of right belief—guiding our understanding of God's revealed truth at points where our sin-clouded minds might go astray.

CONCERNING THE CREEDS

18. What is a creed?

A creed is a statement of faith. The word “creed” comes from the Latin *credo*, which means “I believe.” (*Deuteronomy 11:18–23; 26:1–11; John 20:24–29; 1 John 5:9–12*)

19. What is the purpose of the creeds?

The purpose of the creeds is to declare and safeguard for all generations essential truths about God, the Church, and the world, as revealed in Holy Scripture. (*Deuteronomy 7:9-11; Psalm 145:4-13; John 20:30-31; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; Hebrews 2:1-4*)

20. What does belief in the creeds signify?

Belief in the creeds signifies acceptance of God's revealed truth and the intention to live by it. To reject any element of the creeds signifies a departure from the Christian faith. (*Matthew 16:13-20; 2 Timothy 3:14-15; 4:1-5; James 2:10-26*)

21. Which creeds has this church received?

This church believes the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. (*Articles of Religion, 8*)

22. Why do you receive and believe these creeds?

I receive and believe these creeds with the Church because they are grounded in Holy Scripture and are faithful expressions of its teaching. (*Proverbs 13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:3-11; Philippians 2:5-11*)

23. Why should you know these creeds?

I should know these creeds because they state the essential beliefs of the Christian faith. (*Deuteronomy 11:18-19; 1 Timothy 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 1:13-14*)

24. What is the Apostles' Creed?

The Apostles' Creed says:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again.
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. **Amen.**

CONCERNING HOLY SCRIPTURE

25. What is Holy Scripture?

Holy Scripture is “God’s Word written” (*Articles of Religion*, 20), given by the Holy Spirit through prophets and apostles as the revelation of God and his acts in human history, and is therefore the Church’s final authority in all matters of faith and practice. (*Psalms* 19:7–11; *Jeremiah* 36:1–8; *2 Timothy* 3:14–17; *Revelation* 1:1–11)

26. What books are contained in Holy Scripture?

The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament together form the whole of Holy Scripture. (*Articles of Religion*, 6)

35. **What are the Apocrypha?**

The fourteen books of the Apocrypha, historically acknowledged by this church, are pre-Christian Jewish writings that provide background for the New Testament and are included in many editions of the Bible. They may be read as examples of faithful living but “not to establish any doctrine.” (*Articles of Religion*, 6)

THE APOSTLES’
CREED, ARTICLE I

“I BELIEVE IN GOD”

36. **Who is God?**

God is one divine Being eternally existing in three divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is the Holy Trinity. (*Deuteronomy* 6:4–7; *Psalms* 86:8–10; *Isaiah* 44:6–8; *Matthew* 3:16–17; 28:19; *1 Corinthians* 8:6; *2 Corinthians* 13:14)

37. **What does Holy Scripture tell us about the character of God?**

God is both loving and holy. God mercifully redeems fallen creation, while righteously opposing all sin and evil. The Lord Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of God’s holy love. (*Exodus* 34:6–7; *Psalms* 145; *John* 1:14–18; 14:9–10; *Romans* 5:6–11; *Hebrews* 1:1–3)

“THE FATHER ALMIGHTY”

38. **Who is God the Father?**

God the Father is the first Person of the Holy Trinity, from whom the Son is eternally begotten and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds. (*Psalms* 104; *John* 1:1, 14; 15:26; *1 Corinthians* 2:10–16; *1 Peter* 1:10–12; *Nicene Creed*)

39. **Why do you call the first of the three divine Persons “Father”?**
Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only divine Son of the Father. He called God “Father” and taught his disciples to do the same. God gives believers his Holy Spirit and adopts us as his children, enabling us to call him “Father.” (*Deuteronomy 32:4–9; Psalm 2; Matthew 6:6–9; John 5:17–23; Galatians 4:1–7*)

40. **What do you mean when you call God “Father”?**
When I call God “Father,” I declare that I was created for relationship with him, that I trust in God as my Protector and Provider, and that I put my hope in God as his child and heir in Christ. (*Genesis 1:26–27; Psalms 68:4–6; 103:13–14; Matthew 6:25–34; Romans 8:17–21*)

41. **Why do you call God the Father “Almighty”?**
I call the Father “Almighty” because he has power over everything and accomplishes everything he wills. Together with his Son and Holy Spirit, the Father is all-knowing and ever present in every place. (*Psalm 139:1–16; Isaiah 40:12–26; Daniel 4:34b–37; Luke 1:34–37; Revelation 4:8b–11*)

“CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH”

42. **Why do you call God the Father “Creator”?**
I call God the Father “Creator” because he made all things. He creates and sustains all things through his Word, and gives life to all creatures through his Spirit. (*Genesis 1:1–2:3, 7; Psalm 104:24–30; John 1:1–3; Acts 17:24–28; Colossians 1:16–18*)

43. **How does recognizing God as Creator inform your understanding of his creation?**
I acknowledge that God created for his own glory everything that exists. He created human beings, male and female, in his image

and appointed us stewards of creation. God's creation is thus a gift to enjoy as we work and care for it. (*Genesis 1:27-28; 2:15; Psalm 8:5-8; Luke 19:11-27; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2*)

44. What does it mean that God created both heaven and earth?

It means that all things, whether visible or invisible, physical or spiritual, were brought into being out of nothing by the Word of the eternal God. (*Genesis 1:1-8; Psalm 33:6-8; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16*)

45. Was the world that God created good?

Yes. God created all things and called them "very good" (*Genesis 1:31*). However, through sin, evil and death have come into the world and corrupted it. (*Genesis 3:1-8; Psalm 14:1-3; Matthew 15:18-20a; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Timothy 4:4-5*)

46. If God created the world good, why do we sin?

Adam and Eve rebelled against God, thus bringing upon all humanity pain, toil, alienation from God and each other, and death. I have inherited this fallen and corrupted human nature; consequently, I too sin and fall short of God's glory. (*Genesis 3:16-4:26; Psalm 51:3-5; Romans 3:23; 5:12; 7:14-25*)

47. What are the consequences of sin?

Because of sin, those apart from Christ are spiritually dead, separated from God, under his righteous condemnation, and without hope. (*Genesis 3:16-19; Psalm 90:3-12; Isaiah 53:6; John 3:36; Romans 6:20-23; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 2:1-3*)

A Prayer for the Father's Love

Gracious Father, I come to you through the saving work of your Son Jesus Christ upon the Cross. Thank you for adopting