

E: Spiritual Formation

E\2

“You are my friends”

(John 15:14-15)

Adapted from Lumko No. 15M&P

TOPICS OF AsIPA TEXTS:

- A: GOSPEL SHARING(7 Steps)**
- B: SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES**
- C: A PARTICIPATORY CHURCH**
- D: TRAINING FOR PARISH TEAMS**
- E: SPIRITUAL FORMATION**
- F: FORMATION AND TRAINING OF LEADERS**

AsIPA E: Community Training Series

Spiritual Formation of Leaders

E\2

“You will be my witnesses”

Prepare beforehand:

Newsprint

Bibles for all participants

Copies of this text

Picture of revealing Christ (holding a book)

Note to facilitators:

When welcoming the participants we announce the theme: leaders of a Christian community should be intimate friends of God.

Introduction

In this session we will reflect together to understand that leadership in the Christian community must grow out of an intimate relationship with God.

Each and every Christian is invited to live with God in the same way as we live with a close friend. But those who are leaders among the community will make more efforts than others to develop this spirit of friendship between themselves and God.

A friend knows what his friend wants. He does not wait until he is forced to go to his friend. He will join his friends undertaking without being offered a reward. He likes to speak to his friend at any time.

Often we do not fully realise how big the difference is between the attitude of a friend and of a servant. Therefore let us take the next step:

Step 1. THE BOSS AND THE FRIEND

We all know the difference between being a friend to somebody or being a servant of a person. But since we want to understand the deeper implications of this difference, we will study two short stories.

1. Work in small groups of 3-5 people.
2. Study the following two stories A and B

3. Discuss the five questions below the stories.
4. Put your answers on the newsprint provided.
5. Report to the whole group after 20 minutes.

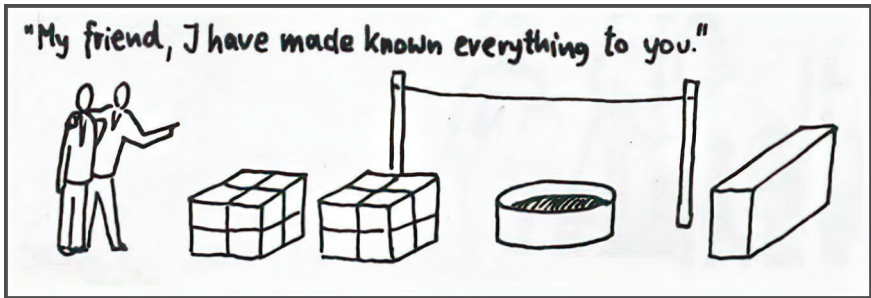
Note to facilitator:

For the Reporting-back: the answers will be similar in content, but we want to look for the clearest and most detailed answers.

STORY

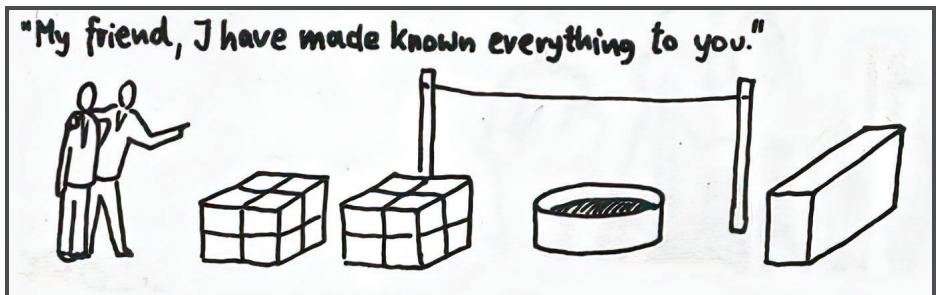
The master's business.

A man had a shop. He was clever and found out where he could buy very fine material in a cheap way. Moreover he himself invented a special dye which gave this cloth a beautiful colour which no other shop could offer. It attracted big crowds of customers. He hired somebody to open the boxes, somebody to dye the material, and somebody to do the selling.



One day the one who opened the boxes asked his master: "Sir, from where do you get this fine material?" The one who dyed the material asked: "How do you make this dye?" and the one who was selling asked: "How can you sell so cheaply?"

Years later that owner of the shop had a very good friend, who was not only very honest and reliable, but also a very able business man. He decided to let him share on an equal basis in his shop. When he introduced him into the business, he told him every detail and kept no information from him.



Questions for reflection:

1. What do you think will be the reaction of the master in story A to the questions put to him by his workers?
2. If you were offered such friendship as in story B, what would you feel?
3. In which ways could you show gratitude?
4. If you were the generous master, what would you expect from your friend?
5. Some people might fail to fully acknowledge such an invitation to friendship. They might fail to react like real friends. How would they behave? List several possible faulty reactions.

Step 2 WHAT CHRIST MEANS BY INVITING US TO FRIENDSHIP

We read John 15:9-15

1. How many times is the word "friend" used?
2. How many times the word "love"?
3. The love mentioned in those verses is a love between whom?
4. We compare the verses. What do we find? ...
5. How often is the word "command" used? ... What kind of "command" does Jesus mean? ... In which verses can we see that he does not mean the command of a boss? ... What other words could we use to translate the word "command" which sound so different from the way a friend speaks to a friend?...
6. In verse 15 Jesus gives the reason why we can now be called "friends". What is this reason?

Supplement

3. We will find love between the Father and Jesus, between Jesus and us, and between us ourselves.
5. If we compare the words "plan", "intention" or "way" with "command", we will realise that God does have a firm will, and yet invites us to free co-operation.
6. Jesus has made known everything that he himself knew from his Father.

Step 3 IS GOD NOT TOO GREAT TO BE A FRIEND TO US?

We must ask: have we not gone too far in our example of the master and the friend? Is such friendship possible between us and God in all his greatness? To illustrate how radical this idea is, let us remember two important scenes of the Old Testament.



At Mount Sinai Moses and his people experienced fear before God. They felt his presence through lightning and thunder. They had to keep distance from him



When the fullness of time came, God revealed himself deeper than at the time of Sinai. He has led us beyond the master-slave relationship.

Look at this picture of the Last Supper and reflect on the following question:



Did God change? Is he no longer the great and powerful God as Moses and his people had experienced him? ...

Note to facilitator:

Let the group freely discuss this question. Do not take part yourself, but make sure that the opposite opinions get a fair chance and are taken seriously. After some time, if there is need to do so, we can guide the discussion to the following insight)

Summary

(Read in the whole group)

- God has not changed, but he has revealed himself gradually. In the Old Testament his majesty and "otherness" were more emphasised, although even at Sinai he

had invited people to love him with their whole heart. God had always aimed at inviting mankind to friendship and mutual love, not only in the New Testament. But in Jesus he revealed his eternal intention to the full.

- Christ lived like anybody else. "He was like us in all things except sin." (4th Canon of Hl. Mass)
- He told us everything. He revealed God's life to us, as a friend reveals all he knows to his friends.
- At the "sermon on the mount" he did not speak from the top of an inaccessible, steep mountain, but sat among his friends on a hill.
- At the last supper he sat at the same table with his friends. He gave them his own body and blood as food.
- He gave his life for his friends. No one has greater love. The spirit of love is the new guideline for his community.

Question for reflection (in the whole group)

Do you think that the majority of our congregation feels before God as the Jews did at Mount Sinai or do they think of God as a friend?

(Everyone should feel free to say what they think.)

Conclude this discussion as follows:

What about ourselves? Do you think that in us, too, traces of slave attitudes can be found? To find an answer, let us go to the next step.



Step 4. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD DEPENDS ON THE WAY WE LOOK AT HIM

Note to facilitator:

Explain the task – to fill in many answers in sections C and D on the newsprint. Give an example of the type of answer expected; form small groups of 3-5 people

Do we imagine God as a bossy master or as a friend?

If we imagine God as a boss and master,

Then we will think that he acts in this way:

...and our reactions will be:

A. Christ invites us to friendship with him.

Therefore his actions are:: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	...and our reactions will be: <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Supplementary answers:

He emphasis distance	We feel we are far from God.
He gives commands, but no reasons.	We obey blindly.
He punishes hard	We keep the law outwardly only
He wants blind obedience	We fear him always
He insists on respect.	We try to cheat him
He is not interested in conversation with us	We do nothing without command. We do just as much as necessary.
He tells us everything	We think about his plans
He sits among us	We seek close friendship
He is like us in all things but sin	We do more than commanded
He leaves many details to our own free decision	He gives his life for us

Step 5 HOW CAN WE BECOME BETTER “FRIENDS OF GOD”?

Let us discuss together some suggestions as to what we can do. We are in some way leaders of the community and yet we find in ourselves traces of master-servant attitudes. What can you and I do to change this wrong outlook and

to let friendship attitudes grow in us? (Allow for open discussion and only add on if needed.)

It is important to note that meditation on the New Testament, alone and in groups, is important for deepening our friendship with Jesus; also free individual prayer without any hurry and "I-must-do-it" feeling; It is also very helpful to read the lives of Saints; and share in small Christian Community groups.

CONCLUSION

We close with a hymn and spontaneous prayers.

We could also spend some minutes of silence before an icon (picture) of the revealing Christ (holding book) or the risen Christ.

*As servants and witnesses of his community we will never give up in
our efforts of making this Spirit grow:
in our lives
in our relationship with other leaders
in our relationship with all members of the community.*

*I will try to find out what my friend wants, what his ideas are,
what his plans are with us.*

I want to speak with him as often as possible.

*If I realize that I neglected him, or even offended him,
I will immediately return to him.*

Note to facilitator:

During the following weeks the gospel sharing can be on one of these texts which have a similar message,

e.g. John 14:5-12; 14:13-21; 14:23-31; 15:1-8; 15:9-15. 1 Jo 1:1-5; 2:3-11.

At the same time private bible reading should be encouraged, and the leaders should be reminded of the importance of praying spontaneously alone, besides the prayers they say in common with others.

METHOD OF AsIPA TEXTS

AsIPA TEXTS are compiled for Christian men and women at grass root level of the parish. They can be conducted most fruitfully in Small Christian Communities, Neighbourhood Communities, Parish Pastoral Councils or any other small groups in the parish.

AsIPA TEXTS can also be used with larger groups, e.g. in the parish hall - provided the "participatory method" is maintained in smaller working groups.

Features of the "AsIPA approach"

1. AsIPA TEXTS adopt a "participatory approach" in which all participants of a group search and discover for themselves as far as they are able to.
2. The texts are compiled in such a way that the facilitator can use them with a minimum of preparation.
3. The facilitator is requested to follow the text as closely as possible and allow the participants to contribute when indicated in the text.
4. The facilitator is not content with one answer to a question but he/she encourages as many participants as possible to search for an answer. "Buzz groups" of 2/3 are helpful to achieve maximum participation.
5. The SUPPLEMENT can help add to the findings of the participants and summarize them.
6. The SUMMARY is meant to be used as 'input'.

AsIPA: As-ian -I-ntegral -P-astoral -A-pproach

The Asian Bishops declared in the Final Statement of their Fifth Plenary Session in Bandung: The Church of 1990s has to be a "Participatory Church", a "Communion of Communities", a Church that "witnesses to the Risen Lord" (FABC5,#8).

The question was, how to promote this "new way of being Church". Therefore, late in 1993, jointly sponsored by the FABC Offices of Human Development and of Laity, a consultation meeting was held in Malaysia. It was during this consultation that the pastoral process for promoting a "Participatory Church" in Asia was termed AsIPA: Asian Integral Pastoral Approach.

AsIPA TEXTS (training programmes) follow this directive:

ASIAN

They want to implement the vision of the Asian Bishops and help Asian Christians face Asian life in the light of the gospel.

INTEGRAL

They aim at achieving a balance between the "spiritual" and the "social", between the individual and the community, between hierarchical leadership and the co-responsibility of the laity.

PASTORAL

They train the laity in their pastoral mission in Church and world.

APPROACH

The process of AsIPA TEXTS can be described as a pastoral approach which is "Christ- and Community centred". It involves the participants of workshops to search for themselves and allows them to experience a "New Way of Being Church."