

No. 3A

# The Fraternity of Christian Doctrine

## Publications Department



1312 Massachusetts Ave., N. W., Washington 5, D. C.

Copyright, 1941, by Fraternity of Christian Doctrine

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION CLUBS

"The needs of our times, then, require that the laity . . . procure for themselves a treasure of religious knowledge, not a poor and meager knowledge but one that will have solidity and richness, through the medium of libraries, discussions and study clubs." Encyclical of Pope Pius XII to the American Hierarchy, Oct. 20, 1939.

#### Purpose of Religious Discussion Clubs:

To inform the laity, particularly on religious subjects, and to develop the power of self-expression on the part of all members. Leadership among the laity is a great need of our day; through the discussion club, latent talent is often discovered, and recognized talent is developed.

The discussion club offers *all* members an opportunity to obtain useful knowledge of the subject studied, without very great expenditure of time.

The discussion club is not merely for exceptional laymen, experts and college graduates, but for all persons of high-school years and over, quite regardless of their degree of formal education. It is for busy men and women who come together to obtain exact information, a readiness in expressing it, and an opportunity to translate it into action.



*The Discussion Method* is preferable to the lecture or stereotyped question-and-answer method. Discussion encourages individual thought and expression, stimulates quick thinking and extemporaneous speaking, fosters toleration for the opinions of others and trains leaders in thought and action.

*Small groups* are informal, and therefore promote freer expression from all members. The discussion club ordinarily has a membership of eight to twelve persons.

#### Organization:

Primarily within all societies of the parish, as they supply both leaders and members. Non-members and non-Catholic parties of mixed marriages are invited to join. This has resulted in increased membership in many societies, and in a number of converts.

#### A Parish Chairman of Discussion Clubs:

A man or a woman (or co-chairmen, a man and a woman) is appointed in each parish who, under the guidance of the pastor:

1. Assists in the organization of clubs, and obtains the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the leaders, secretaries and members of each discussion club in the parish, together with the day of the week, hour and place of meeting;
2. Obtains materials and information and disseminates them to all clubs within the parish;
3. Visits clubs and stimulates interest in the formation of new ones;
4. Arranges for the holding of leaders' preparatory classes. The parish director, the parish chairman of discussion clubs or the person best qualified for the task leads the lesson from the text which the leaders are to direct in their specific groups, within the en-

suing week or weeks. This not only provides an opportunity to suggest methods, but does so practically by demonstrating them in the presentation of a specific lesson. These classes develop confidence and assurance, in addition to presenting methods and advantageous use of materials. Many parish groups conduct the leadership course for four or six weeks before the opening of the regular semester. The weekly preparation of a specific lesson within the regular semester is sometimes more practical.

5. Prepares a written report of all discussion-club work in the parish immediately after the close of each discussion-club session.

*Junior Groups:* In very large parishes, it is advantageous to appoint a chairman to organize junior groups: high-school and college students.

### Officers:

*The Parish Director*, a priest under whose guidance discussion clubs are promoted and to whom questions that arise are submitted for decision.

*A Leader*, who is also a learner. The leader directs the discussion, and therefore acquires a clear knowledge of the subject matter and should hold the discussion to the topic assigned. He should use to advantage the outline of suggestions and questions in conducting the discussion. Every member should be given an opportunity to take part, and his or her opinion on the subject should be considered and respected. A tactful leader can keep the discussion free from personalities. If the leader is called upon to render a decision which he is unprepared to make, he should say so frankly and endeavor to obtain a decision by the next meeting. Parish directors are an unfailing aid

in such instances. If unrelated matters are introduced, the leader requests that discussion of them wait until the conclusion of the meeting. Leading is a drawing-out not a filling-in process. A good leader does very little talking. Leaders should attend regularly each semester the leaders' preparatory classes.

A *Secretary* calls the roll, gives a brief summary of the previous assignment and records briefly points that are not agreed upon by the group and refers them in writing to the parish director for a decision.

### Members:

The individuals in a discussion club should realize that success depends largely upon the responsiveness of each member. Every member should obtain the textbook adopted as it supplies accurate information for discussion. Where discussion-club aids appear in the diocesan weekly they should be used regularly. Each member finds it advantageous to read and to prepare to discuss each lesson; however, this is not essential for active membership. All should feel personally responsible to attend each meeting; one gets returns in proportion to his personal effort and participation. As the objective is learning to think about and to discuss religious subjects, every member should consider the subject matter and express his thoughts, not leaving discussion to the few.

### Dues and Expenses:

No *dues* are collected. Each member purchases his own text, which becomes his property (the cost is usually from 5 to 25 cents). The leader's outline, and inexpensive materials for general use, may be taken care of by the group or organization sponsoring the club, or the leader may purchase these and own them personally. All members are asked to collect and bring to meetings materials that will

enrich study: charts, maps, pictures, magazine articles, poetry, and any other related material.

Where there is a local public library, see what books relating to the subject being studied are available; ask the librarian to obtain listed references not in the library. If there are sufficient calls for a book, it is usually ordered; ask members to call for the books listed.

### Meetings:

*Where Held:* Meetings may be held in private homes, the church hall, or any centrally located, suitable place. It is well to draw membership from an area in which regular attendance is not made difficult by great distance from the place of meeting. In rural sections the parents and high-school students of two or three families form a club. Families too remote from neighbors study within the family group.

*How Often:* Weekly meetings of an hour or an hour and a half should be held for a period of eight or ten weeks. Meetings should begin on time, even though only a few are present. When all members know that the lesson will begin promptly at the hour designated, they will endeavor to be on time. Beginning and closing the meeting as scheduled contributes to the success of any club; members can then plan for other appointments more satisfactorily.

### Order of Meeting:

1. Begin promptly.
2. Open with prayer.
3. Roll call and brief review of previous lesson by secretary.
4. Leader opens discussion and keeps it within bounds of assignment, giving all members an opportunity to express themselves.

5. Assignment of subject matter for following meeting. If the meetings are held at different homes or places, the place of the next meeting is announced.
6. Adjourn on time, closing with prayer.

Note: Benefit is derived from writing papers, but assignment of them sometimes deters members from joining the study club, and discussion clubs may be profitably held without papers. Study assignments, papers, essays, reports on related topics, etc., are additions to the discussion method which may result tragically except in groups of outstanding zeal or scholarship.

#### Joint Meetings:

At the close of each autumn and spring discussion club session, all clubs within an area of easy access may assemble jointly. Brief reports may be given by parish chairmen of discussion clubs. An appropriate program relating to the subject of study may be presented: addresses, dramatizations, tableaux. Materials used to enrich study may be exhibited. Difficulties and points of unusual interest may be discussed. The parish or district meeting sometimes takes the form of a joint review of the semester's work.

#### Report Forms:

(Order from the Diocesan Office or have them prepared in the parish by a volunteer.)

1. Discussion-club leader's semester report.
2. Semester report of parish discussion-club chairman.

For additional information see *Proceedings* of National Catechetical Congress, articles on Discussion Clubs; also *The Religious Discussion Club*, a practical reference for leaders, \$.05.

DISCUSSION-CLUB LEADER'S  
SEMESTER REPORT

(Write spring or autumn)

Date .....

Text used .....

Pastor .....

Town .....

Leader .....

Address .....

No. of members ..... Lessons finished .....

Average attendance ..... No. of meetings.....

Materials used besides text .....

.....

.....

Chief interests .....

.....

.....

Difficulties .....

.....

.....

Will your same group continue study during the next  
Diocesan discussion-club session? .....

Name of club ..... Adult  
Junior

(check here)

Signed .....

Secretary

Address .....

*Kindly fill in this form and give it to your Parish  
Chairman of Discussion Clubs the week your course  
is completed.*

*Above and on the next page are suggested forms. Copies may be ordered  
from the Diocesan Office or prepared by a volunteer in the parish.*

**SEMESTER REPORT OF PARISH  
DISCUSSION-CLUB CHAIRMAN**

..... Parish

Number of groups to continue study during the next  
Diocesan discussion-club session .....

Please list all Discussion-Club Leaders below:

Name	Address	Lessons finished	Average attendance
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....
.....	.....	.....	.....

Date .....

Signed .....

Parish Chairman of Discussion Clubs

Address .....

Countersigned by Pastor .....

*Kindly fill in this form and send it to the Diocesan  
Office of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine  
within ten days after the closing date of the present  
discussion-club session.*

Nihil obstat. Henry J. Zolzer, Censor librorum.  
Imprimatur. † Thomas H. McLaughlin, Bishop of Paterson.

This and other literature issued by the Confraternity  
of Christian Doctrine, Publications Department, 1312  
Massachusetts Avenue, N. W., Washington 5, D. C., may  
be ordered direct from the St. Anthony Guild Press,  
Paterson 3, N. J.

The cost of this leaflet is \$2.00 per 100. In ordering, designate  
form No. 3A