

How to Run the Course Guide

discovering Christ

a seven-week experience

ask.
seek.
knock.



CHRISTLIFE™
CATHOLIC MINISTRY FOR EVANGELIZATION

Discovering Christ: How To Run The Course, 3rd edition

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DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST,

You are about to begin a great adventure that is going to transform individual lives and, over time, your parish or ministry. These are not simply three courses, but an evangelization process. We at ChristLife have heard hundreds of testimonies and, because each of us are also actively involved in the ChristLife process of evangelization at our own parish, we've also witnessed these transformations! Everything we do is for the glory of God and we want to make sure the Lord is included in all of our plans. So before you begin, pray! None of this can happen unless everything we do is rooted in prayer. And know that you are not alone. We are praying for you because we want you to experience the same fruits we have and what we've heard from over 600 parishes across the U.S. and abroad! As of now over 60,000 people have experienced Discovering Christ in the last seven years.

What you are reading is the 3rd edition of our *How To Run The Course Guide*. We are sharing with you our best practices and what we've learned from running the series over and over again. We've made some mistakes that you can avoid by following this guide completely! We like to say "follow the recipe." After you've done the entire process a few times, then go ahead and make a few minor adjustments. We are always here to help you with any questions you have.

In our Lord Jesus,
The ChristLife team

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this guide is to give you all the information you need to set up and run an effective *Discovering Christ* course in your parish or small faith community. There are six parts to the manual:

SECTION I: WHAT IS DISCOVERING CHRIST?

This section gives a brief overview of the course: its purpose, goals, schedule, topics, and the structure of a typical evening. It also includes information on training your team.

SECTION II: DISCOVERING CHRIST AND THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

This section lays the theological foundation for *Discovering Christ* and explains the need for proclaiming the basic Gospel of Jesus Christ (the kerygma). Additionally, ChristLife's three-part evangelization process is explained.

SECTION III: TEACHING TOPICS, GOALS, AND SUMMARIES

This section gives an overview of the subject matter covered in each of the nine talks, which are presented in the seven weekly sessions and the retreat.

SECTION IV: PRACTICAL ELEMENTS AND DYNAMICS OF DISCOVERING CHRIST

This section walks through each part of a typical session—dinner, prayer, teaching, small group discussion—with guidelines for making them most effective. Also included are detailed descriptions of the retreat and final sessions.

SECTION V: PLANNING AND PREPARING FOR DISCOVERING CHRIST

This section outlines the steps involved in planning for the course, gives direction for assembling a team of volunteers, and describes the various roles of the team, including job descriptions, qualifications, and specific responsibilities for each person. Also included is information on how to recruit and train a team.

SECTION VI: RESOURCES

This section includes planning timelines, to-do lists, and a guide to prayer ministry. Also included are instructions for downloading additional resources from the ChristLife website, including logos, bulletin inserts, invite cards, prayer cards, recipes, jokes, and more.

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SECTION I

WHAT IS DISCOVERING CHRIST?

DISCOVERING CHRIST OVERVIEW

Discovering Christ is a seven-week evangelizing course that creates a welcoming environment where members of a parish or small faith community can bring anyone and everyone, the baptized and unbaptized, to hear the Good News and personally encounter Jesus Christ. Each session includes a meal, a brief time of worship, a video teaching, and small group discussion. The high point of the course is a day retreat where guests have the opportunity to make a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and be renewed in the Holy Spirit. Using our materials, a team of lay people can run the entire course.

Discovering Christ is the first of ChristLife's three-part evangelization process, which also includes *Following Christ* and *Sharing Christ*. ChristLife, a Catholic apostolate of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, created this three-part series in response to the Church's call for a new evangelization. At the time of printing this guide, over 60,000 people from more than 600 parishes and small faith communities from 76 dioceses in nine countries have participated in the course. Many have experienced a new or renewed encounter with God's love through Jesus Christ. In this guide you will see quotes from some of these participants, sharing the impact *Discovering Christ* has had on their lives. By spreading *Discovering Christ*, our hope is that thousands more will personally encounter the Lord Jesus in life-changing ways.

GOALS OF DISCOVERING CHRIST

Discovering Christ has two major goals:

1. To help participants enter into or renew a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, experience the love of God the Father, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit to live as God's children.
2. To give participants the relational support necessary to begin to live for Christ within the parish or group that offers the course.

SCHEDULE AND TOPICS

The seven sessions of *Discovering Christ* are best run once a week, on the same day each week. The retreat is usually held on a Saturday or Sunday after the fifth session. The entire course should take seven or eight weeks.

Ordinarily, seven weeks is enough, but if the sessions are held on a day close to Saturday (for example, Sunday night), then it might be best to skip a session rather than have the retreat and a regular session so close together as to place extraordinary demands on the participants' time. The skipped session would then be held the week after the retreat, which would stretch the course to eight weeks.

It is recommended that an additional week be scheduled for the final team dinner, celebration, and debrief. Putting it on the initial team schedule stresses the value of this meeting and obtains a commitment to attend.

Here is the schedule of topics covered in each session:

Session 1	Talk 1	What Is the Meaning of Life?
Session 2	Talk 2	Why Does Jesus Matter?
Session 3	Talk 3	What Does Jesus Want Us to Know?
Session 4	Talk 4	Why Do I Need a Savior?
Session 5	Talk 5	Why Is the Resurrection Important?
Retreat	Talk 6	Who Is the Holy Spirit? (retreat)
	Talk 7	The Holy Spirit and You! (retreat)
Session 6	Talk 8	New Life in the Spirit
Session 7	Talk 9	Our Need for the Church

TYPICAL SCHEDULE

6:45	Dinner
7:30	Welcome and Prayer
7:45	Video Teaching
8:15	Dessert Break
8:30	Small Groups
9:15	End

SESSION STRUCTURE

Each session includes four components, and each component is vital to the evangelizing process of *Discovering Christ*:

1. Dinner
2. Welcome and Prayer
3. Video Teaching
4. Small Group Discussion

DISCOVERING CHRIST TRAINING

Discovering Christ is a unique spiritual and relational course that is different from most faith-formation and education programs. There is no way to impart *all* of the dynamics of the course through a guide. The best way to learn how to run the course is by attending the ChristLife National Conference or a ChristLife diocesan training conference. Visit the “Events” section of ChristLife’s website to learn more about upcoming training events: www.christlife.org.

These training opportunities are crucial for your entire leadership team. Praying together, building community through meal times and fellowship, and learning about the essential dynamic of the Holy Spirit and the role of prayer in the course are much more effectively experienced than read about. Understanding small group leadership and the importance of relationships is, again, something that is better discussed and practiced in person. This is an opportunity for your team to grow united in mind and heart as they experience the dynamics of the course together.

Several of the key talks from the conference are available on *Discovering Christ Team Training* DVD and can aid in training your team. In addition, ChristLife can also provide phone consultation before and during your course. For information about training dates and fees or to plan a special training event for your diocese or parish, please contact us at info@christlife.org or 888-498-8474.

SECTION IV

PRACTICAL ELEMENTS AND DYNAMICS OF DISCOVERING CHRIST

This is the Lord's initiative. He is going to help you.
So, as you are faced with obstacles, just continue
turning to the Lord. He will not disappoint!

INTRODUCTION

This section provides the “recipe” for running the *Discovering Christ* in your parish or ministry. You may be tempted to eliminate a section, but don’t give in to that temptation. A lot of work goes on behind the scenes to produce an excellent course, and every task is important. **Follow the recipe!** Each piece helps create a welcoming and loving atmosphere for your guests who may span the gamut from faithful Catholic to atheist. Every guest is important and you want them to feel special.

COURSE STRUCTURE

The course consists of seven sessions and a retreat day. Each session includes four components, and each component is vital to the evangelizing dynamic of *Discovering Christ*. Here is the structure of a typical evening:

1. Dinner
2. Welcome and Prayer
3. Video Teaching
4. Small Group Discussion

DETAILED SCHEDULE

5:00	Dinner and Hospitality team members arrive and begin preparations. (After the first week, adjust time as needed for preparations.)
6:15	Small group facilitators meet for prayer, training, and discussion. Greeters and other teams are ready to greet guests.
6:45	Welcome the guests, pray a blessing over the meal, and serve dinner.
7:20	Clear the tables and alert guests the program is about to begin.
7:30	Announcements, joke, prayer and worship.
7:45	Play the video teaching.
8:15	Break with coffee and dessert.
8:25	Small group discussions.
9:10	Alert small groups to wrap up the discussion.
9:15	Evening ends in small groups, the large group does not come back together. Hospitality team ensures everything is cleaned up.
9:30	Lights out.

TYPICAL SCHEDULE

6:45	Dinner
7:30	Welcome and Prayer
7:45	Video Teaching
8:15	Dessert Break
8:25	Small Group Discussion
9:15	End

DINNER

Each session begins with dinner, which helps to create a warm, safe, relational environment in which the grace of God can work freely in the lives of our guests. Round tables with seating for eight to ten people are recommended. Each participant sits at the same table with their small group members each week for the entire evening, beginning with dinner. This gives them a chance to get to know each other and grow together socially. The dinner is not intended as a time to focus on the course topics; that happens later in the evening during small group discussion. Rather, dinner is a time to foster personal relationships with their small group members and grow in friendship. Encourage people to talk about their interests, jobs, families, etc. This relational dynamic of the course is critical for the participants.

“SHARING A MEAL MADE US FEEL LIKE FAMILY AND I FEEL IT MADE IT EASIER FOR EVERYONE
TO OPEN UP.” PARTICIPANT TESTIMONY

Greeting the Guests

People will typically begin to arrive before the scheduled time for dinner. Friendly and joyful greeters should welcome them and lead them to the registration table, where volunteers will check them in, give them a name tag, and direct them to their table. Guests who have not signed up in advance will need to be registered and assigned to a table/group. Ideally, the small group facilitators or helpers should arrive at the dinner tables first to greet the guests and make them feel welcomed. When it is time for dinner, the emcee briefly welcomes everyone, say a short blessing prayer, and then directs the groups to the buffet one at a time. Consider letting a different table go first each week.

Food and Donations

For some guests, the meal may be the best part of the course, so it is important to serve high-quality food. Some suggestions are pasta dishes, chili, and casseroles. Sample recipes can be found online at www.christlife.org/discover under “Free Resources.” Serve a salad, bread or rolls, and a simple dessert in addition to the main dish. The food can be prepared on-site or at home by volunteers who bring covered dishes to the meeting. Some groups have the meals prepared by a ministry (e.g., the Knights of Columbus), while others use professional caterers. There is no registration fee for the course, but it is certainly reasonable to accept donations for the meal each evening. Beginning the second or third week, you could simply put out a basket with a sign suggesting a donation of \$4-\$5, or whatever amount helps cover the costs.

WELCOMING

Welcoming the guests is a huge part of the *Discovering Christ* course. This part of the evening unites all of the participants, sets the stage for the video teaching and small group discussion, and introduces the spiritual dimension of the session. The prayer, like the video teachings, progresses over the weeks in length, depth, and the sense of real worship.

Announcements

After dinner, the emcee welcomes everyone again, makes any pertinent announcements, and introduces the video teaching for the evening. To help people relax, the emcee should tell a joke or show a short funny video. Humor is an important part of the course and most participants enjoy a good laugh, even if the joke is less than perfect. Sample jokes can be found online at www.christlife.org/discover under “Free Resources.” Guests need to see that Christians have a sense of humor and that laughter is not incompatible with faith. Finally, the emcee introduces the worship leader.

PRAYER

This part of the session is also very important. Although some participants initially feel uncomfortable with the singing, by the end of the course they often find it is the part they value most. The purpose is not merely to have a sing-a-long, but to lead participants into an encounter with the Lord through song.

Song and Prayer

The worship leader should explain the purpose of this time and invite people to turn their attention to the Lord and let the song become a prayer. Make the lyrics available to everyone. We recommend projecting them onto a large screen so people’s hands remain free, but song sheets may be used as well. At the end of the song, the worship leader prays a brief closing prayer, asking for God’s blessing on the video teaching and small group discussion. The prayer should be simple enough that participants can imagine themselves praying the same way.

Worship leaders should read “Leading Worship in the ChristLife Series” by John Messina for further instruction. The article can be found online at www.christlife.org/discover under “Free Resources.”

Choice and Number of Songs

At the beginning of the course, it is best to sing just one song; ideally something familiar to most people, perhaps a traditional hymn like “Amazing Grace.” It may be appropriate to choose a song that is more objective than subjective (that is, more *about* God than *to* God), since newcomers may not be ready to proclaim their love for God.

But as the course proceeds, and especially by the retreat, the number of songs should increase to two or three, and the worship leader should choose songs that express faith, worship, and love more personally and more directly to God. There are many contemporary worship songs that are perfect for use in *Discovering Christ*. A list of recommended songs can be found online at www.christlife.org/discover under “Free Resources.”

VIDEO TEACHING

While the participants view the video teaching, they remain at their small group tables, and simply turn their chairs to get a better view. The teaching is a proclamation of the good news of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ. The talks are relevant to our contemporaries and progress over the seven weeks with the aim of inviting people to respond to the life-changing message of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. See Part III for detailed abstracts.

BREAK

By the end of the talk, almost an hour after dinner, the participants will be ready for a break. This is a good time to let everyone use the restroom and get some dessert. But keep the break short and tell people to bring the dessert back to their table, so they can give their attention to the small group discussion.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

After the video teaching, participants need an opportunity to reflect on what they heard. Small groups are intended to be safe places where people can talk openly about what they think and feel about the teaching. It is essential that everyone have the freedom to share their thoughts and feelings. They will be talking with the same group of people they ate dinner with, so they should already feel comfortable. In addition, each group has a facilitator and a helper whose job is simply to guide the discussion and give each person a chance to speak. They do not teach or dominate the conversation. Discussion questions can be found in the *Discovering Christ Facilitator Guide*.

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"I ENJOYED THE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION TIME. IT'S INTERESTING TO HEAR WHAT
OTHERS THOUGHTS/FEELINGS ARE AND SOMETIMES YOU REALIZE YOU'RE NOT THE ONLY
ONE THINKING CERTAIN THINGS. IT'S NICE TO BE ABLE TO DISCUSS THESE TOPICS IN
AN OPEN AND NON-JUDGMENTAL SETTING AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS." PARTICIPANT
TESTIMONY
////////////////////////////////////

The small group discussion can be the most powerful part of the whole experience, as participants process what they are discovering. This is where the topics become less academic and more personal. Each participant may respond differently, based on their background and personality, and some may be wrestling with serious life circumstances.

The small group facilitators play a key role in the success of the small groups. Facilitators keep the discussion focused on what was just heard in the video teaching and make sure each person has an opportunity to contribute to the discussion. The goal is to help people enter into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, but small groups also give participants an opportunity to develop lasting friendships with one another. It is imperative that small group facilitators and helpers attend a training conference or parish team training, and hear or watch the "Facilitating an Evangelizing Small Group" video training session. For information on leading small groups, see also the *Discovering Christ Facilitator Guide*.

We discourage the bringing of outside materials by facilitators and/or participants – materials, prayer cards, etc. We don't want to overwhelm our guests or get ahead of where they are on their journey to Jesus Christ. Discussion should be focused on the teaching, not other topics.

Group Assignments

For a large course, the ideal discussion group is 8-10 people, consisting of 6-8 guests, 1 facilitator, and 1 helper. The small group coordinator should be pastoral when assigning people to small groups. As you plan the small groups, consider the ages of the participants. While there can be