

Introduction to *Landings2*

Welcome back! If you are reading this introduction, it means you have expressed a desire to go deeper in your faith. You have recognized that you have more to learn and more growing to do in your relationship with God and neighbor. This is a sign of spiritual wisdom, for there is always more to explore, always more room to grow in love, when it comes to the mystery of God. After all, being a disciple of Christ isn't a simple matter of registering at a parish. It means following after him and walking with him through the whole of this life's journey.

Landings2 is a program for people like you who have made a commitment to return to the Catholic faith and who crave more of the learning, prayer, and community that drew them back to the Church. It is a program for people who are ready to make the transition from initiation to mature discipleship. In some ways, this new stage in your faith journey is when you learn what discipleship really means. Will you continue to follow after Jesus even after the initial excitement has faded? Will you maintain an attitude of love and compassion toward others in your community now that you have become familiar (perhaps overfamiliar)? Will you have the patience and discipline to remain open to new joys even if they are different from those you experienced when first returning to the faith?

The transition to mature discipleship and the work of ongoing conversion can be every bit as challenging as returning to the faith in the first place. However, the challenges are more manageable and the joys more enjoyable when we experience them within a community of faith, storytelling, and compassionate listening. *Landings2* is designed to sustain just this kind of community. For the next few weeks we will gather together to pray and discuss how we are growing into mature Christian disciples.

Session 1 will lead us into the conversation by prompting reflection on your faith journey up to this point, the journey ahead, and what we can learn from the journeys of our predecessors in faith. A key next step on the road from initiation to mature discipleship is starting to think about not just what you want from a faith community, but also how you can use your God-given gifts to build up the community that has nurtured you. Session 2 will help us to start thinking about this question by introducing the concept of "discernment" and its role in the life of discipleship. In Session 3 we will meditate on the Incarnation, the definitive instance of God's self-gift to the world, and how it reveals why, paradoxically, it is in giving ourselves away that we obtain life in its fullness. In Sessions 4 and 5 we will explore concrete ways in which we can use our gifts to serve our Church community and the wider world. Finally, because one can't give away what one doesn't have, in Session 6 we will discuss a variety of spiritual practices for sustaining faith through the ups and downs of this long life journey.

In each of the six sessions we will experiment with different ways of praying, explore life-giving spiritual practices, and have the opportunity to commit to growing in faith in a specific way. By reflecting on these themes, recommitting to following Jesus, and assuming responsibility for various aspects of this program, you will cultivate the spiritual skills and habits needed to grow as a disciple of Jesus and as a leader in your faith community. This time you are not just a participant. Now it's your turn to lead others closer to God just as others have led you.

It is good that you are here. You have made a promising start on the path to God, but there is much more in this life of discipleship to explore, discover, experience, and celebrate. In the words of Jesus to his disciples, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39).

Greetings from the *Landings* Team!

Thank you for your interest in *Landings2: Living in the Spirit*.

This new program will assist small groups to deepen their commitment to Christ and develop as mature disciples in mission. It follows somewhat the structure of the original *Landings* program with some added features to acquaint the participants with the Spiritual Tradition of the Catholic Church.

The Preview Packet includes:

- **Introduction** - spelling out the flow of the program.
- **Meeting Structure** - detailing step-by-step the dynamics of the process.
- **Meeting Schedule** - providing a timetable for the sessions.
- **Excerpts** - including Session 1 of Catholic Themes and Discussion Questions.

If you choose to purchase *Landings2*, you can pay by credit card online and then have access to the downloads of all the materials, including the ministerial use certificate.

www.landings2.com

In addition, the Landings staff is available to assist you, if you have any questions and concerns about the running of the program

landingsdc@gmail.com

202-635-5818

Best wishes and God bless as you embark on this wonderful spiritual discovery.

May the Holy Spirit guide you as you continue on your faith journey.

Testimonials from the Pilot Program

Landings2 is excellent as it gently draws the returning Catholic into another phase of the returning process. It takes us spiritually beyond the pews to hear God calling us very personally to journey on towards discipleship. Many will discover a deeper sense of purpose and experience a more gratifying fulfillment for our return to our Church.

— Tony See, Singapore

What a wonderful way to share the joy of the Gospel! Landings2 is a great source for sharing our faith and helping our brothers and sisters further our relationship with God as disciples and discover and develop our gifts.

— John Poland, Linthicum, MD

Landings2 will open the door to deeper conversion through prayer, discussion, and suggestions for practical Faith applications. This is the "go to" program for anyone, especially returnees, to build and refine one's life within the Faith community.

— Patricia Watson, Washington, DC

Landings² Meeting Structure

Follow the schedule and respect the timeframe of the participants.

CHECK-IN

This is a time to see how participants are doing, and assess their frame of mind as they enter the meeting.

Allow each participant to take a 2-minute turn. (People can “pass” if they choose.) Be attentive to time limits, and don’t allow anyone to go off topic. If something significant happened to one of the participants since the last meeting, the person can be given a little extra time. The check-in time ends with a moment of silence, to smooth the transition into the opening prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

Prayer gathers the group together and helps them focus. Prayer time should cultivate a peace and calm that leaves the participants ready to receive the upcoming story. Those who lead the prayer should be encouraged to think of it as setting the tone of the meeting, giving careful thought to the prayer. At the beginning of each session, the opening prayer acquaints the participants with a different style of prayer. The Facilitator may lead this prayer or share this role with another member of the team.

SPIRITUAL JOURNEY STORYTELLING

Storytellers find it freeing to share some spiritual joys and struggles with others willing to walk with them, if only for this brief time, on their journey. The group will quickly grow to understand the sacredness of the storyteller’s sharing. During the first meeting, to model the process, the facilitator or another experienced team member may assume the role of storyteller. Others can sign-up for the later meetings, giving everyone in the group a turn to share.

Generally, the storyteller is given about twenty minutes. The timekeeper should indicate in a sensitive manner to the storyteller when five minutes remain, so the story can be concluded.

When the story is completed, members of the group may respond with thanks and affirmation, and the Facilitator should invite the group to indicate what particularly moved them in the story.

(Group members should not use this opportunity to launch into their own story, nor should anyone question, correct, or offer advice to the storyteller. The Facilitator should intervene if this happens. The Facilitator models the spiritual humility of affirming that God works in many, mysterious ways.)

After these initial responses, the storyteller can be asked if he or she wants further response from the group. Then invite the group to break for refreshments, noting that people can continue their responses during that time.

If the story was especially difficult to share, the facilitator might later contact the storyteller, expressing affirmation and appreciation.

CONVERSATION STARTER

The Conversation Starter sets the tone for focused listening on the part of the group members and is an excellent way to learn about each person’s current state of mind. Each person should speak no more than two minutes, telling his/her current well being and/or events that affected his/her life since the last meeting. During the break, individual members may choose to have a follow up conversation with another group member.

REFLECTION ON CATHOLIC THEMES

After the hospitality break, the group reconvenes for Reflection on the Theme for the week. The facilitator selects a reflection question in the Sessions handout. Group members are invited to share their thoughts for up to two minutes. Participants may “pass” if they wish. The Facilitator should not permit crosstalk, stepping in

and gently moving the conversation back to the topic. Each participant's contribution is valuable, and no contribution should be critiqued. There is no right or wrong answer when people speak from the heart, and the facilitator should model this spiritual disposition. If time permits, another question can be introduced, and the process repeated.

Preparation for this part requires reading the Reflection in the Sessions booklet, related Scripture passages, and any additional resources that might be helpful. The Facilitator gives a concluding reflection, speaking from both the head and the heart. To the extent possible, it's desirable to weave the participants' comments into the concluding reflection, affirming participants' comments as valuable.

FACILITATOR'S REFLECTION

During the Facilitator's Reflection the group's Facilitator should draw connections uniting the group's thoughts and ideas. Trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The recommended resources can assist the Facilitator to reflect from both head and heart. The point is not to teach theology, but to acquaint returnees with how their lives can reflect the traditions and teachings of the Church.

HOUSEKEEPING

The Facilitator reviews the assignments and announces the theme for the next meeting, encouraging participants to reflect on the theme and write a thought or two down before the next session.

CLOSING PRAYER

The Facilitator closes each *Landings2* meeting with a prayer, inviting participants to offer their own intercessions, and gathering those prayers together with a concluding prayer.

Meeting Schedule

Check-in time (15 minutes)

Opening prayer (10 minutes)

Spiritual journey storytelling (25 minutes)

Response to story (10 minutes)

Hospitality break (10 minutes)

Conversation starter (5 minutes)

Reflections on a Catholic theme (20 minutes)

Session 1 *What Now? – The Next Stage in Mature Discipleship*

Session 2 *What Gifts Do I Bring?*

Session 3 *Why Share My Gifts?*

Session 4 *Putting Your Gifts to Work – Church Ministries*

Session 5 *Putting Your Gifts to Work – Faith in Everyday Life*

Session 6 *Sustaining Faith over the Long Haul*

Facilitator's reflection (10 minutes)

Invitation to commitment and a new Faith practice (10 minutes)

Housekeeping / Closing prayer (5 minutes)

*Landings*² Preview Packet

SAMPLE (Excerpts)

SESSION 1

Reflections on a Catholic theme: What Now?

In the passage from the Acts of the Apostles (2:32-33, 36-47) with which we begin our session today, we bear witness to the growth of the first Christian community. We see how people from diverse backgrounds get caught up in the power of the Holy Spirit, receive initiation into the Christian community, and then undertake the daily work of living out the call to holiness that they have received. These transformative events are repeated in every new generation. They are being repeated now in your own life.

Like the first Christians, your heart has been touched by Jesus, and you have responded by reentering the community that is the Body of Christ. Like them, you have devoted yourself to studying Jesus' teachings, to fellowship with other journeyers, to participating in the sacraments, and to prayer. It is important to note, however, that this passage from Acts (like many in Scripture) condenses a lot of action into few words. It describes in seamless language the early Christians' transition from inquiry into the Faith to initiation into the Church, to daily life as disciples of Christ; but life changes and this transition rarely occur so smoothly. Having taken the leap to rejoin the Catholic community, you may now find yourself confronted with a new challenge: You are no longer evaluating the Church from the outside; now you are figuring out how to live the Faith within this community. If you are experiencing a desire for something more, or even frustration that life as a returning member of the Church has not met your expectations, know that this is all normal. The spiritual life ebbs and flows for all of us.

Reflection questions

- How is your reintegration into the Catholic community and Faith going?
Are you encountering new blessings? New challenges?
- How have you grown in Faith since returning to the Church?
- As you continue working to be a better Christian disciple, consider who might be one fellow Catholic whom you admire. What do you admire about that person? How would being more like her/him make you a better disciple?