

Advent on the Long Paddock

Leader Guide

Welcome to the program 'Advent on the Long Paddock'. Thank you for preparing to lead your group and help them to make the most of this reflection time.

Here are some ideas:

- Prepare your space. Make sure it is quiet and comfortable.
- Seat participants in a circle or in small groups if there are more than 8 people.
- Print off the page for the week's session, one per person. Print double-sided to save paper.
- Create a prayer focus in the middle or front of the space. This could include such things as candle, bible, cross, purple cloth, other symbols of Advent, Christmas or the long paddock.
- You may wish to play quiet music as people come in and this could also be used during the silent reflection times.
- You will need to organise a projector and computer to show the Long Paddock stories. You may wish to download them beforehand so that you do not need to depend on the internet.

Timing

Sessions are ideally 90 minutes. Try to keep to time and warn participants about when it will finish. A nice way to finish is to share some tea and coffee – some 'country hospitality' at the end.

For example, you might work to this schedule:

- 7:30pm Opening Prayer
- 7:40pm Video
- 7:55pm Initial sharing
- 8:05pm Individual reflection and sharing
- 8:20pm Gospel reading
- 8:25pm Individual reflection and sharing
- 8:40pm Closing Prayer
- 8:45pm Refreshments
- 9:00pm Finish

Some other ways to make the most of this experience for everyone:

1. Make everyone feel welcome, especially newcomers. Introduce everyone at each session.
2. Explain the rules (below) at the first session and briefly go over them at the start of subsequent sessions. Everyone should feel comfortable and safe to share, especially with the very personal questions.
3. Gauge how the group is going and adjust where needed, for example cutting down one of the sharing times. However, try not to cut people off mid-share unless they are well off-topic. Ensure that everyone is able to say something who would like to.
4. You can give others the chance to lead or read various parts. For example, you could lead the first two sessions and enable someone else to lead the final two. Rotate roles such as lighting the candle, leading the prayers and reading the gospel.
5. Don't force people to share, but try to make it easy for them to do so. You can rotate the sharing around the group, allowing people to pass if they would like. Or you can invite one person to share and when they have finished they invite another person to share, and so on.

Group rules

Here are some examples of rules or guidelines to help the process work for everyone:

- The focus of this Advent session is our faith interacting with our lives.
- Confidentiality. What's said in the group stays in the group, unless you have the permission of the person who spoke it.
- Stick to the time. Follow the leader who is trying to ensure the timing is fair for everyone.
- Show respect for people, their opinions and stories. Please do not dismiss, put down or laugh at (not with) someone's sharing.
- Share your own story and only speak for yourself. Try not to talk about 'universal' experience or give people advice.
- Everyone is different and it's OK to disagree. This is not a debate but a time of listening.
- Turn your mobiles to silent at the start of the session.