

Opening Prayer: (5 minutes)

See handout for your opening prayer. Have a candle ready and all other religious symbols you might wish to use. Have your readers ready for their helping you to lead the prayer. Lead the group through the prayer adding to it as you wish.

Introduction: (15 minutes)

There are two main parts to this introduction. They are:

- Introduction of participants and facilitators
- An introduction to the rationale for the evening's gathering

We also suggest you share the group guidelines with those gathered.

Welcome everyone to the session. Introduce yourself and any other facilitators assisting you for this evening's session. Depending on the size of the group, ask everyone to introduce themselves. (If you wish, you might use name badges and/or a sign in sheet on which you might capture useful information including email addresses through which additional and/or interesting material might be circulated). If the group is very large, then simply ask people to introduce themselves to those sitting beside/around them.

Use your introductory leaflet to introduce the thinking behind this session.

Share the group guidelines. It's very important that you go through the main points here attending, in particular, to any of them relating to sensitivity, confidentiality and any sharing of additional material outside of what's provided for by the session. Ask everyone's agreement for the guidelines. It would be very important at this session in particular to indicate that these guidelines are to allow for everyone to feel they can participate in and engage with difficult questions and issues with comfort and a sense of freedom.

Moment 1: (20 minutes)

Introduce the next part of the session: (You will need your data projector/laptop here. See green below if you don't have access to these or would prefer not to use them).

As Christians we believe that everyone is made in God's image and likeness. This belief has hugely significant implications for how we care for ourselves, our world and for one another. Let's look now in particular at what it tells us about our care of the unborn child. As we go through these slides, just try to take note of your own personal reaction to what you're seeing and hearing. Where are you with this understanding of every human person as it relates to you and your own understanding of yourself, for example?

If you have a data projector/lap top, go through PowerPoint slides 1 to 10 explaining each slide **using the notes under the slide**. These slides capture the Church's basic teaching on the right to life of the unborn

child with a particular focus on what Pope Francis has had to say. The tone here is important. It is vital to give participants a sense of the 'big picture'; that is God's love for all of humanity.

Ask the group to discuss in pairs the following questions (see Slide 16)

Question for pairs: What touches you personally about this understanding of life that the Church has taught through the ages?

If you do not have a data projector/laptop, photocopy Slides 1 to 10 in colour (and make sufficient copies). Pin them to the walls (or place them on the floor if you're afraid of marking the walls). Ask people to take some time (five minutes to look at the images and the words on the slides and pick one that resonates most with them. Ask them to sit with one other person and discuss the image they picked and why.

Ask people in their pairs to write down their thoughts to the question on a post it and when they're ready, put it up on a flip chart. Feed-back the responses giving your own careful reaction to some of what you read. If you feel the group would benefit from a further wider discussion of the issues emerging, make sure to acknowledge additional challenging questions, for example:

How do we extend this kind of compassion to those with whom we don't always agree on this or other issues?

How do we extend compassion to women who have had abortions? What qualities need to mark our engagement here?

Moment 2: (25 minutes)

If you have a data projector/laptop, you will need them for this next piece. You will also need speakers to ensure the volume is right. If you do not have a laptop/projector see what is below in green for your Moment 2 of the session.

If you do not have a laptop/projector, photocopy the attached handout which is a re-telling of Cliona and Tracy's story from the video.

The same introduction as that outlined below is required but this time to the text. Give the same suggested time for people to pray with what they have heard. Also the same reflection question is required for the pair work:

Pair work: Cliona used the phrase 'treasure you have to really dig for'. What do you think she meant by this? Is this speaking to you in your pair discussion in any way?

Introduce this next part of the session with these or similar words:

Let's move now maybe into some specifics relating to the protection of the unborn baby. We're going to look now at a very particular aspect of this question; it's a very real and very challenging one on lots of levels, and it will really challenge us.

In the weeks and months ahead, and indeed in the last few months, in terms of this issue we've heard a lot about unborn babies being diagnosed with life limiting conditions. The term that you may have heard is 'life limiting condition'. This is an erroneous term, medically, as we'll see now.

We're going to hear from two mothers who've gone through such a diagnosis of their babies. They are both people who've chosen to share their stories really honestly with us. It's important to remember that they do so with great generosity. They've made themselves vulnerable here. They also have something to say to us as people of faith about our role in protecting babies facing similarly difficult realities and supporting parents in this situation also. They challenge us to consider again what compassion is called for in our own responses to their story.

Just one additional note on Cliona and Tracy. It was only when they both saw this video and were reviewing it for us that they realised that both of their babies; John Paul and Kathleen Rose share the same birthday. They were amazed by that coincidence; both children born into love on the 2nd November; the Feast of All Souls.

I'd invite you now to listen to their stories with open hearts. As you listen, what are you hearing, particularly in terms of their understanding of their babies' dignity? What are you hearing about 'the Gospel of Life' in these stories? What is touching your own heart?

Once we've played the video we're going to pause for a moment in quiet prayer just to allow what we've seen and heard sit with us. You might as you sit in silence prayer for Cliona and Tracey and their families. You might also pray for other families going through similarly challenging times. Finally, once again, if you've been personally affected by these kinds of issues, and/or are upset by this in anyone, please do let me know. And obviously, feel very free about leaving the room at any time if you wish, if you're finding the video particularly challenging for what might be many different reasons.

Play video

It is very important after the video is played to give those few minutes of a pause for prayer and quiet solidarity. You may wish to ask someone from the group to light a candle for anyone (mothers, fathers, grandparents, friends – and of course babies) who have found themselves in a similar situation to Cliona's or Tracy's. Silence is probably the most appropriate response in terms of a prayer moment so just allow for a few moments for people to pray in to that silence.

Now invite people, once again in pairs to engage with another set of questions (slide 12)

Pair work: Cliona used the phrase 'treasure you have to really dig for'. What do you think she meant by this? Is this speaking to you in your pair discussion in any way?

Give some time for **pair work** with these questions. Now, depending on your sense from the group, open out the discussion to explore the following kinds of questions: (Feel free to add to these but be careful that the challenge is always to the furthest possible extension of mercy and compassion).

- *The call to compassion is extended out here from the unborn child diagnosed with a serious condition? Who else do you feel is crying out for this compassion?*
- *What makes compassion the most appropriate response in these kinds of situations, in the context of the Gospel of Life?*

Gently allow the conversation to develop to ensure the group gathered have sufficient time with the material. However, should anything be said that veers away from the Group Guidelines or that is clearly not coming from a space of compassion, deal as carefully and as compassionately as you can with this; challenging people but also affirming the right to speak as they feel they need to, within reason.

If anything comes up that is very challenging in terms of the Church's teaching, you can mention the "Two Lives, One Love" leaflet that will be shared. This document outlines in great detail the current situation in Ireland and the Church's teaching.

(Note: If for any reason, you feel a wider discussion is not going to be possible, consider leaving these questions and perhaps just alluding to the importance of understanding the Gospel of Life as encompassing so much more than just the 'life question' as it relates to abortion.)

What next? (20 minutes)

Begin to bring the session to a close using these or similar words:

The call to engage can be understood at three levels; the head, the heart and the hands. We have hopefully had our hearts and our heads richly engaged over the last 50 minutes or so, so now let's look at what we can do.

Flag the **Frequently Asked Questions** pamphlet (don't give it out yet). Invite people to engage with it in their own time, along with the Bishops Conference document, "Two lives, one Love". If time allows, give the group the Q and A sheet and go through the main questions asked and some of the answers.

Take a bit more time with the final 'what you can do' question; things like engaging with reading material, exploring personal attitudes and biases, engaging with media, engaging with advocacy campaigns relating to the rights of people with disabilities etc.

Give some space for the participants at the very end of all of this session (which for many will have been challenging) to just talk together in pairs.

Pair question: Ask participants to share with the person sitting beside them something that they have learned that they will be bringing away with them from this session.

Conclude by inviting participants to come back for Session 3, thanking them for being part of Session 2 and if tea/coffee is being offered invite them to stay for further conversation. Again, re-iterate that if anything came up for anyone during the session, they should come talk with you for further information or to seek further help.

Concluding Prayer: (5 minutes) See prayer leaflet.