Christianity 101

As part of our Lenten discipline for 2008, we are being invited on a journey – a journey back to the basics. The challenges of faith are considerable; and it is important that we understand the depth and riches of the Christian tradition. Each week there will be a little pre-reading, an opportunity to reflect on some of the central questions at home, as well as a discussion lecture during the Adult Ed hour.

Syllabus
10\textsuperscript{th} February: Finding a way in to faith. Leader: Ian Markham
17\textsuperscript{th} February: Science as a reason for faith Leader: Ian Markham
24\textsuperscript{th} February: The Word of God as a life. Leader: Bishop Mark Dyer
2\textsuperscript{nd} March: Understanding God as Triune. Leader: Ian Markham
9\textsuperscript{th} March: Humanity Fallen and Redeemed. Leader: Bishop Mark Dyer
16\textsuperscript{th} March: Easter as the Christian response to the problem of evil. Leader: Ian Markham

Structure
On one level this is simply an Adult Ed program. Hopefully, you will enjoy the program. If one chooses, then one can just to the regular Adult Ed program. However, for those who are interested, you can move it to the next stage. For each week, there is a reading and reflection sheet. On this sheet, there are two suggested readings (one from Ian Markham, \textit{Understanding Christian Doctrine} and the other from the Bible). There are then three reflection questions with space to write a short response. At the bottom of the sheet, there is a short prayer.

Reading
The relevant chapters of \textit{Understanding Christian Doctrine} are on the St. Paul’s website.
For February 10th

Fill in this sheet with your thoughts on these questions:

1. Of the six problems described, which one do you think is the greatest?

2. Can you think of any other major obstacles to faith, which are not considered in this chapter?

3. ‘Faith is the opposite of certainty: Faith is linked to doubt.’ Is this true?

Prayer: Loving God, as I start this Lenten discipline and revisit the basics of my faith, don’t allow me to fear the difficult questions. Allow me to bring to you all my doubts, fears, and moments of questioning. In Jesus Name, Amen
For 17th February: ‘Science as a Reason for Faith’.
Pre-reading: Ian Markham, *Understanding Christian Doctrine*, pp.35-45
Scripture reading: Genesis one.

Questions for reflection

1. Imagine explaining the ‘Anthropic Principle’ to a friend. How would you do so?

2. Does your faith depend on arguments? Are you the sort of person who doesn’t ‘have reasons’, but just knows?

3. Have you had an experience when God encountered you? If so, describe it. Do you find it difficult to share with others?

Prayer:
Loving God, we marvel that we are able to come into the presence of the Creator through prayer. It is such a great privilege. We thank you that there are pointers to you in your Creation. Teach us to see the divine everywhere we go. In Jesus Name, Amen
24th February: The Word of God as a life.
Pre-Reading: Ian Markham, *Understanding Christian Doctrine*, Chapter 7
Scripture reading: John 1

Questions for reflections
1. Do you think the doctrine of the Incarnation makes sense?

2. In what sense does Jesus show us God?

3. Did the Early Church get it right?

Prayer: Loving God, we thank you that you have revealed yourself in your Son Christ Jesus. We understand that we are called to imitate that life. Help us to meditate on that life and learn of you from that life. In Christ’s Name, Amen
Reflection questions:

1. Why do Christians bother to affirm that God is triune?

2. Which person of the Trinity do you find it easiest to relate to? Why is this?

3. What would you say to a Christian who says he or she has problems with the doctrine of the Trinity?

Prayer: Loving God, we are small creatures in a vast universe. We do not expect to understand the complexity of the divine. Help us to live with mystery. Help us to struggle to understand the best we are able. And grant us faith to cope with the uncertainty of it all. In Jesus Name, Amen
9th March: Humanity Fallen and Redeemed.
Scripture Reading: Genesis 2 and 3

Questions for Reflection:
1. How do we reconcile the Fall with the modern account of the origins of humanity emerging from modern science?

2. “Jesus died for our sins”. What does this mean to you?

3. “The beauty of Christianity is that God has done the hard work of redemption”. Do you agree with this?

Prayer: Loving God, thank you for creating us and redeeming us. Give us the resources to live as we should. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen
16th March: Easter as the Christian response to the problem of evil.
Reading: Ian Markham, *Understanding Christian Doctrine*, Chapter Five
Scripture reading: Mark 15

Questions for reflection
1. What would you say to the person who doesn’t understand why ‘bad things happen to good people’?

2. In what sense is Mark 15 part of the Christian response to the problem of evil?

3. How do you cope with tragedy and problems in your life?

Prayer: Loving God. We live in a difficult world. Grant us the capacity to see you through our pain and to trust in the hope and promise of the resurrection. In Jesus Name, Amen