

LEADER'S GUIDE

Celebrate the Journey: The Presbyterian Presence in the U.S.A.

Revised for the Internet, July 2003

J.W. Gregg Meister, President, Interlink Media

The video, **Celebrate the Journey: The Presbyterian Presence in the USA**, chronicles the impact that Presbyterians have had on American culture from the colonial period to our own time. Its message— that Presbyterians have made many critical contributions to American society throughout our history — is relevant to a number of groups within a local church. Newly–elected officers, new members, elders and deacons returning to the boards, adult education classes, as well as people in the pew can gain useful insights about their denomination from the video.

This guide is designed for use with the video. The activities described in the guide may be used as presented or adapted for individual home viewing, new officer training sessions, new member classes, church retreats, officer retreats, special workshops, wills and bequests Sundays, or adult Sunday school classes. It's ok to skip directly to the [activities section](#) below.

This guide is designed to help workshop leaders build on the content of the video and deepen each participant's Christian faith.

For Individuals Viewing At Home

Individuals viewing the video alone or in small groups at home can engage in some or all of the activities by reflecting on their own responses, recording their responses in a journal, or sharing their responses by telephone or in person with others similarly interested. For these viewers, the following sequence is suggested:

1. Read through this guide in order to have this information as a basis for your viewing.
2. Read the Bible passages in one or two of the suggested Bible studies.
3. Reflect on the questions that are included in the several topics in the section, "Activities and Questions Related to Topics in the Video."

For Leaders Facilitating Viewing In Groups

To prepare for using this video in group settings, leaders might follow these preliminary steps:

1. View the 20-minute video twice, the first time to become acquainted with the structure and content of the presentation and the second time to consider how to use it with your particular viewing group.
2. Read through this guide to decide which parts to use, which to omit, and which parts to supplement.
3. Adapt the activities according to the needs, interests, concerns, and abilities of your participants.
4. Make sure all participants will have access to Bibles, note pads, and pens or pencils.
5. Plan carefully for the time, the space, the furniture, and the video equipment, making certain that all the connections work properly. While these arrangements take some time and may seem obvious, they demonstrate your care for your group

Opening the Group Session

The fundamental purpose of Interlink Media videos and the activities suggested in this guide is, in the words of St. Paul, to build up the Body of Christ. While it is important to open every church meeting with **prayer**, it is especially appropriate to ask the Lord of History to bless participants in their efforts to understand both church history and their own personal faith journey.

Showing the Video

As the leader, you will need to introduce the video. You might say something like the following:

"This video pegs Presbyterian church history to broad chronological periods in American history. It begins with an explanation of the biblical context for the word "celebrate." The remainder of the video alternates between highlights of an American historical period (the male narrator) and vignettes of selected Presbyterians in that time (the female narrator). In focusing on individual Presbyterians and their relationship to Christ, the tape does not deal with doctrines, schisms, and mergers. It ends with a triune benediction and an affirmation of faith."

Now, show the video from beginning to end without interruption. Encourage participants to keep track of their questions or comments during the video by writing them on their note pads for later discussion.

If the video is being shown as part of a day long meeting or longer retreat, you may want to make it available for a second viewing later. Many people find that they see and absorb more when they view the video a second time. Some participants may want to take the video home for personal study or for sharing with family and friends as an evangelism effort.

Suggested Activities

The activities below are suggestive of the types of activities which may help groups process the real meaning of the video for themselves and apply those understanding to their own journeys in the faith. The activities are divided into two main groups: personal sharing and Bible study. The activities may be used as shown or changed in any way to suit the needs and constraints of the group. For example, the activities may be followed sequentially or reordered. Feel free to revise, adapt, augment, or omit some altogether.

Personal Sharing

- Presbyterians presented in the video sought to express their faith in Christ within the context of their own historical period. Ask participants to share which persons in the video especially "spoke" to them. How would they characterize those individuals' expression of faith in their own historical periods?
- Ask participants to take a few minutes to sketch personal time lines of their own religious histories, noting significant events or experiences. (This actually could become the basis for an entire session by itself.) Participants can then discuss with one or more partners what they have written, and/or share this with the larger group. Participants could next summarize their journeys of faith by explaining where they see they have come from and where they are going.

- Ask participants to reflect on experiences in their lives which stand out as especially influential or pivotal. With one or more partners, participants can then share how one or two of those experiences have helped them to draw them closer to Christ, or have altered the direction of their journey of faith.
- Ask participants to select an item which they are wearing or carrying to illustrate something important about their journey of faith. This is often a cause for poignant, even tearful, remembrances.
- Using still photos or home video equipment, create a record of your church's (or presbytery's) history or work with a youth group to create such a record. This is another activity that might be prompted by the video but extend over a period of weeks or months.
- Using either a tape recorder or home video equipment, interview shut-ins and/or older members of the congregation to create a "living history" library. This is another longer-term activity.

Bible Study

- The story of the exodus of the Israelites (Exodus 9:1 – 12:42) is a dramatic tale of faith. How is the church of Christ today parallel or similar to the situation in the time of Moses? Do we feel we are moving toward the "promised land" of Christ's reign? Are we "murmuring in the desert" or experiencing miracles at every turn?
- Since 9/11 the church, like other American institutions, is struggling to discern its place in this new era. Unlike other American institutions, the church can directly address matters of belief, and the nature of God. How does an understanding of our church history assist us in explaining and defending our faith to the non-Christian? Is the "Yahweh" of our history the same as "Allah"? Is "Allah" found in the Bible?
- Paul's entire ministry constituted a journey. Use selections from Acts or the introductory sections of his letters as the basis for discussion. Who are the specific "saints" to whom Paul's letters might he addressed today? Reflect on the areas of ministry in which participants and the congregation are called to work.
- Unlike Paul, Jesus never traveled far. Much of His ministry was in Capernaum. Today, technology can greatly expand a ministry, from flying to different countries to participate in mission trips, to videotaping your ministry for cable, to Internet web sites. What and where is the local ministry of your congregation? Is it possible today to have just a "local" ministry?
- In John 4:4 we read that Jesus "had to pass through Samaria," in the sense that He was constrained to do so. Where are the difficult places in our lives we "have" to pass through? Using the rest of the chapter as a guide, how might we find ways to witness to Christ in the midst of our "Samaria"?
- The first chapters of Matthew and Luke contain the genealogy of Jesus. How would participants trace their religious genealogy? Which of the persons in the video represent their special spiritual forebears?

- Hebrews 11 sets forth a history of God's faithful people. After reading this passage, consider those persons, either living or deceased, who have inspired, guided, and supported participants in their journey of faith. Who are their religious heroes and heroines?

Closing

At the conclusion of the meeting, ask participants to stand and hold hands for a closing prayer. Consider allowing a time for participants to offer their own prayers of thankfulness for those persons who have gone before them in the faith.

Additional Interlink Media Resources

Other Interlink Media videos which may be used in conjunction with Celebrate the Journey are Across the Centuries: The Church Constitution Today, In Spirit and In Truth: The Directory for Worship, and A Firm Foundation: The Book of Confessions. These videos are available from Interlink Media. You may contact us at 250 Kings Highway East, Haddonfield, NJ 08033, by calling 1-800-662-1151, or by ordering from the web site, www.PresbyterianChurchUSA.com.

Your suggestions on how to improve both the videotape and this Leader's Guide would be very much appreciated. While changing the video would present a bit of a challenge, adding your suggestions to this Leader's Guide is quite feasible. Please write me at the above address, or e-mail your suggestions to me at meister@interlinkmedia.net. If you don't receive a reply, it means that my browser filter has filtered you out -- for which I apologize. Please call.

In Christ, Rev. Gregg Meister,

President, Interlink Media.