



Welcome to via media

What follows is some easy information to help you plan for, and run via media in your congregation. We hope that you will find via media easy to use, and that you'll adapt it to your congregation's needs. If you have any questions about the curriculum, please do not hesitate to email us at davey@everyvoice.net.

Contents of this CD-Rom

- “Read Me” document with tips on planning and running via media.
- *Small-Group Training* document: a ready-to-go training you can use with your small-group facilitators.
- *Design Team* information
- *Sessions 1-8* in MSWord format and in .pdf.

Planning for via media

Introduction

What is presented here are only a few of the ways and some of the ideas for running **via media** in your congregation. Nearly 70 congregations piloted **via media** and helped us with their feedback to pose these recommendations. We know that as you use **via media** in your congregation that you will find other ideas. Please feel free to depart from our suggestions, and let us know how they work.

Philosophy

Running **via media** in your congregation is an intentional decision, which requires intentional thought, preparation, and lead-time. We are providing the following information to help you think about when to run **via media**, how to recruit volunteers, and how to engage participants inside and outside your congregation. We hope that these materials will be helpful to you. You will find evaluation materials in this binder; as with all pieces of **via media**, please make certain you help us to continue to improve by letting us know what worked and did not work in your congregation.

Timeline

Choosing the optimum time to hold **via media** in your congregation will contribute to the success of the program. Clergy, Christian education staff, and volunteers should come together to brainstorm the most effective time to begin an eight-week evangelism program in your congregation. Some things to consider:

- When does your congregation experience its largest influx of newcomers? Do your pews seem more full in the Autumn? Around Christmas? In the Spring? Plan **via media** to begin four weeks from that time
- Is your congregation used to Christian Education series in Epiphany? Lent? Eastertide? An 8-week program lasts longer than most liturgical seasons, so you might have to consider this when running **via media**
- If your congregation is thinking of using this as a part of Confirmation classes, then time it to make sense with your Episcopal Visitation

via media is an evangelism tool, and as such, it is designed to be used again and again in your congregation. It can be used to incorporate new members, to refresh your congregation with an Anglican primer, to build community in existing small groups or leadership teams and vestries, or as Christian formation and Confirmation / Baptism classes.

*When do I hold **via media** in my congregation?*

There are two factors which impact the time of day or the day of the week on which you run **via media** in your congregation. There should be a time to gather and share a meal or some food, and you will need two hours per session with a longer time for celebration (4, 6, or 8 hours) in the eighth week. The meal is up to your discretion: breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, or brunch. We have left these details to your discretion because the “best time” will differ depending on the group with which you work.

*Where will I hold **via media**, and what will the space look like?*

If your church is like most churches, your parish hall and classrooms are all overused and perhaps in need of a good cleaning. You can’t take care of all those details before you begin **via media** in your congregation, but you can be intentional about the space you pick, and how you set it apart from the other activities happening in your church on a given day or night. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- You’ll need a space that can accommodate the entire large group comfortably. This is where you will have meals and watch the videos.
- Use a TV or other projection system that is big enough, and loud enough to be heard and seen by all people in your large group.
- If you have a choice between round and rectangular tables, round is better.
- Use simple tablecloths, flower arrangements, candles, or other things to make the space special.
- Make certain you have space to break out into small groups. Some congregations may use one large room, and move into corners for small-group work, while others may use other classrooms or worship space. Whatever you do in your church, make use of signs and give clear directions so that people know where they are welcome to be. Make sure you clear room usage with your sexton or with your administrator.
- Clean up your space when you are finished. Make life easy on your sexton or janitorial staff.

Job Descriptions and Volunteer Coordination

Coordinator

Because the coordinator is so important to the process of each session, we recommend that you share this work with a co-leader. If one of you needs to be absent, you have coverage for a session.

- Pray for each of the facilitators and participants by name every day.
- Work with your clergy and Christian education staff to know the evangelism needs of your congregation and your neighborhood.
- Attend all **via media** sessions in their entirety.
- Consider floating from group to group, to hear what people are saying – don't just be the host of the evening, be active.
- Come to each session prepared to facilitate a small group if one of your volunteers is absent.
- Faithfully engage in the evaluation process.
- Use the checklist provided to make sure you don't miss any steps.
- Attend regional **via media** training given by the Every Voice Network.
- Participate in ongoing discussion about **via media** at www.everyvoice.net/viamedia.

Small-Group Facilitator

- As facilitator, you don't have to have all the answers. It's ok to say "I don't know," or "What do you think?"
- Pray for each member of your group every day by name.
- Attend all **via media** sessions in their entirety.
- Come to each session having prepared your small-group questions. Know which questions you might ask. Be prepared to help your small group form or stay on track.
- Participate fully in all aspects of small-group sessions.
- Faithfully engage in the evaluation process.
- If your church is having a small-group facilitator training, make sure you make the time in your calendar to attend it.
- **via media** reinforces the truth that it is OK to ask questions. Ask questions and ask them again until you are comfortable with facilitating your small group. Draw on the support of your Coordinator, Clergy, or others who have been trained in **via media** by the Every Voice Network.
- Use the checklist provided to make sure you don't miss any steps.
- Participate in ongoing discussion about **via media** at www.everyvoice.net/viamedia.

Volunteer Coordination

Volunteers are essential in the life of your congregation. The word ‘volunteer’ comes from the Latin *voluntas* which means “free will”, or “desire.” That is important to know because it calls to mind the intention of a volunteer. People volunteer because they *want* to work, because they desire to be a part of a mission. It is vital that volunteers be treated as ‘unpaid’ staff, receiving the same attention, the same respect for time, and the same training as paid staff on your team.

Running **via media** in your congregation will require the skills, talents, and cooperation of several people. People who set up tables, people who cook food, people who help you promote the program in the neighborhood. Remember to respect their time, and to put them to work quickly – nothing is more disheartening to a volunteer than to be idle. Finally, remember to recognize your volunteers. This is the ‘payment’ they receive for their time and efforts. Whether it’s thanking them during announcements at your principal service, or putting their names up on a poster; whether it’s buying them a cup of coffee, or giving them a small token, recognition will keep your volunteers coming back for future events.

Use the job descriptions provided to help your volunteers know exactly what it is that you will expect from them. Stick to it – volunteers don’t work well with an “other duties as required” clause. Be as clear with your set-up and clean-up volunteers so that they know how much of their time and heavy-lifting you expect of them up front.

Other items

Some groups running **via media** bring small items for participants to take home. Ranging from simple crosses and prayer cards, to small notebooks and candles, these items are less than \$2 a piece, and add another level of radical hospitality to the experience of **via media** in your congregation. See the “best practices” heading for more ideas.

Journaling

In the take-home materials there is a *Reflection for the Week*. This is a passage taken from the video or from another source related to the topic of the week. Journaling is a good way for participants and facilitators to continue learning and praying during the week, and to put into practice some of the learning from the small-group time. Journals should be purchased for each participant; these can be simple notebooks, or more elaborate journals, depending on your budget.

via media Session Checklists

We have provided checklists for you to use to make sure that you don't miss any steps. These checklists are:

- Planning checklist
- Weekly checklists for the coordinator for each session
- Weekly checklists for the facilitators for each session

*Before **via media** begins:*

- ☐ Attend regional **via media** training given by the Every Voice Network.
- ☐ Decide when and where to hold **via media** in your congregation.
- ☐ Develop a marketing plan that will reach people inside and outside your congregation.
- ☐ Decide how people will register for **via media** in your congregation.
- ☐ Recruit people to set up the space for each session.
- ☐ Recruit people to provide or coordinate the food for each session.
- ☐ Recruit people to help with the liturgy for the end of each session.
- ☐ Recruit small-group facilitators.
- ☐ Provide training for all your small-group facilitators at least one week before the first session using the format provided in your Curriculum CD-Rom.
- ☐ Get your small-group facilitators all of their prep materials for each session.
- ☐ Decide how you will show the videos, so they can be easily seen by the participants.
- ☐ Will you provide small take-home trinkets?

Before the First Session:

- ☐ Plan how you will divide participants into small groups. Allow for last-minute arrivals.
- ☐ Watch the first video with your facilitators. Hand out facilitator materials.
- ☐ Decide how you will distribute the participant materials, and when.
- ☐ Prepare a copy of the Glossary for each participant. Make a few extra copies for people who join the group later.

Before Each Session:

- ☐ Confirm with the set-up and food volunteers.
- ☐ Watch the video before the session with your facilitators. Hand out facilitator materials.
- ☐ Prepare the icebreakers that will be used in the large group as people arrive.
- ☐ Print out and copy all the participant and facilitator materials.
- ☐ Make sure you have nametags and markers available for participants.

Running via media in your Congregation

Flow of a Standard Session

- 0:00 Welcome and blessing over the meal
Have icebreakers on each table for participants to work on during their meal
- 0:30 Introduce the video, show the video (it is possible to show the video while people finishing their meals if appropriate)
- 1:00 Transition into small groups
- 1:45 Hand out take-home materials
- 1:50 Closing liturgy

Coordinator Role

The coordinator plays an important role in running **via media**. Working with Christian education staff or volunteers, clergy, and members of the community, the coordinator's job begins sometimes weeks before **via media** with promotion and advertising. During the sessions themselves it's best if a coordinator is a part of the action. As the host of the session, the coordinator sets the tone for radical welcome.

Short speaking bits have been scripted for use by the coordinator to introduce the videos and to transition from one part of the evening to another. It is usually best if the coordinator leads the worship. Remember not to take on too much yourself – involve volunteers in the sessions to help.

Printing and using the Curriculum

The curriculum exists in both Microsoft Word format, and also in .pdf. If you have Adobe Acrobat Reader on your computer, you will be able to open up a .pdf. Likely, if you've ever downloaded a document from the internet before, Adobe has been installed on your computer.

The advantage to having the curriculum in Word format is that you can change out particular pieces in the worship or other places as needed. If you want to change the order in which things are presented, or the occasional 'troublesome' word, we want to give you the option to do that within the Microsoft Word.

If, however, you do not want to change anything, you might find it easier to download the .pdf and print it from your browser.

Icebreaker

As participants come into their experience of **via media**, and get settled with food, if provided, it's helpful to have a simple activity at the tables to get conversation started. Some groups might be very social and chatty – hardly needing to break the ice. The icebreaker can still serve to focus the conversation away from 'catch-up' to the topic of the day.

Small Groups

The small-group experience is one of the greatest strengths of **via media**. It is in the small group that the topics introduced in the videos can be expanded, modeling the dialogue and discussion style of the video participants. As the weeks progress, community and trust can really build in the small groups. For that reason, we suggest that, as much as is possible, small-group assignments are fixed, rather than flexible.

Facilitator Role

The small-group facilitator's role is essentially to guide the small group into the discussion. Following the video presentation, participants will be experiencing various emotions: some might be shocked by what they have seen or heard, while others might be ready to jump right in and tackle the hard questions. Once the conversation starts, keep it moving.

Discussion Questions

It is important that you prepare each week by deciding which question to use to begin your discussion. It is also important to guide, not control the conversation by letting the group discussion progress naturally unless they veer off the session's topic. Also, not every question may be of interest, or appropriate, in your small group. Use what feels right to you.

Journaling Activity

Each week, the small-group time may conclude with a "Going Forth" that is designed to help connect participant's **via media** discussions with the rest of their lives. As the small-group facilitator, you will need to reinforce this by reminding them that they will get out of **via media** what they invest, and it is our hope that they will invest time and thought through out this next week.

Worship

Worship is an important end to the time a community has spent in dialogue together. As Anglicans, our prayer is shaped by our experience and encounter of God in each other. It is essential that you look the worship over before you gather for your **via media** session. We have provided an appropriate liturgy that relates to each topic, but as liturgical practice differs from one community to the next, the selections we have made from our traditions might not be appropriate in your congregation. The reason you have these documents in Word format is so that you can swap in or take out the pieces that resonate with your community.

Take-Home Materials

Each week, participants will be given written material to take home that will include a theological content summary, the scripture chosen for the session, a piece from our traditions, and a prayer from the Book of Common Prayer. This material should be given to the participants as they leave their small group to go to worship. Encourage your group members to use the *Reflection for the Week* in their journaling, prayer, or meditation.

Evaluation

Following the last session, we ask that the coordinator fills out a short evaluation about the process and experience of **via media** from training and marketing to implementation and conclusion.

Participant Perspectives

In preparing the **via media** program, we imagined at least three types of participants whom you may encounter. Please make sure everyone in leadership in your program is familiar with these descriptions:

Those who are returning to church

This includes people who were raised in a Christian tradition, perhaps even the Anglican tradition, but who stopped attending church at some point in their lives. Some of these people had negative experiences that caused them to leave the church; others simply became bored and ‘outgrew’ their church community. Whatever the reasons, these folks thought they had left the church behind. By attending **via media**, they are indicating a willingness to reconsider Christianity. They are hoping that your congregation can be a place of welcome where they can reconnect to the Christian traditions and find healing and meaning in their lives.

Those who never attended church

This includes people raised in other religious traditions as well as those who have no formal religious background of any kind. These may be folks who are discovering a void in their lives, experiencing a longing for meaning and purpose in their lives, or becoming aware of God’s presence in their life but don’t know how to respond. They are looking for a relationship with God in community, and need a safe place to share their questions without embarrassment.

Those who currently attend your congregation

Whether ‘cradle Episcopalians,’ converts, or newcomers, these are folks who want a deeper understanding of the Anglican way of being Christian. They may be very integrated into the life of the community; they may deeply appreciate the sense of welcome they have experienced there; but they need a way to articulate their faith. They are looking for a language to explain what it means to be an Episcopalian, greater confidence in their ability to say why they believe what they believe and why they do what they do. They need a welcoming space to examine and share their faith with others.

No one perfectly fits these descriptions, and the questions and concerns of one type of participant may often overlap with those of other types. These descriptions are offered as an aid in clarifying the perspectives of the participants with whom you will work. **via media** is not a “one size fits all” approach, and we invite you to tailor the program as appropriate to your participants. This is one reason why we suggest a variety of sample questions for each small-group discussion. In addition, for each session we suggest a central idea or message that you might wish to communicate to each of these three types

of participants. These diverse perspectives will enrich your discussions and allow for a learning experience that no one person or perspective could possibly provide.

Best Practices

The following suggestions expand upon some of the information and ideas shared in the pages above. They are the practices that have been used by congregations around the United States that piloted **via media** from January through June 2004.

- Put participant binders together, photocopying all the materials at once, and handing out the entire curriculum. Put a copy of the Glossary in the binder.
- Many congregations have found the community formed in **via media** strongest when small groups stay together from week to week.
- Coordinators should ask if couples or close friends wish to remain together in small groups, or if they would prefer to be in separate groups, where possible.
- Small trinkets or take-home gifts are a very nice touch. Making them thematic is fun, and also helps to support the topic each week. Some examples include:
 - Anglican Overview: St. George's Cross; postcard of your cathedral
 - God: small globe magnet or eraser; prayer card; polished stone
 - Jesus: wooden cross; iron nail; small loaf of bread
 - Holy Spirit: scented votive candle; feather
 - Bible: bookmark; note cards with a favorite verse
 - Sin: short Bible passage; chocolates
 - Hope: lottery ticket (if you have a group with a sense of humor)

These are just suggestions. You know your group better than we, use these ideas to spark your imagination.

Sample Small-Group Facilitator Recruitment Letter

Dear [name of potential facilitator]:

After the crucifixion of Jesus, those who followed him were plunged into darkness, confusion, and fear. One day, while making a journey, they were joined on the road by the Risen Jesus, who walked with them. Not knowing whom it was, they invited him in for a meal and to rest when they had reached their destination. How amazed they were to discover that their friend and teacher sat at their table with them! Their hospitality and generosity were rewarded with a glimpse of the Messiah.

Who is on our journey here with us in our community? Who lives nearby who could be our traveling companions? Who are we missing on our **via media**, the superhighway of Anglican Christianity?

Shortly, our community will be running a new Christian formation program called **via media**: an Invitation to Christian Community. It is an eight-week evangelism program that serves to build community within our congregation, which welcomes newcomers into our family, and which helps share the Good News with those who are not yet in our congregation. Centered by a meal and time for true theological conversation and discussion, **via media** presents videos, liturgies, and a chance to learn from theologians, clergy, seminary professors, and engaged laity from across the Episcopal Church. I am very excited about this approach to evangelism, and look forward to seeing how it brings growth to our congregation!

One of the biggest gifts of **via media** is its power to teach us that we, too, can think theologically. We don't have to have an advanced degree in theology, we don't have to be ordained, we don't even have to be cradle Episcopalians in order to wrestle with Christianity. We do it in conversation, we do it in our lives of prayer, we do it with our justice and passion in the world. We do it not by answering questions, but by asking them. I am asking you to become involved with **via media** in our community, and to join with me in leading this conversation in our congregation.

I am asking you to join me on this short, but powerful journey through our Anglican heritage and theology, and help me to spread the Good News of Jesus' inclusive and radical love. So, what are your responsibilities? I am attaching a copy of the job description for the small-group facilitator, and I think that you'd be perfect to facilitate a small group. Please pray about this, and consider becoming involved in **via media**. I look forward to discussing the details at your earliest convenience.

In Peace,

[congregational coordinator]