Intentional Seekers Are Open

Be opened.

St. Dominic’s
February 2015

I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Luke 11:9
Overview
What do you mean by Intentional Seeker?

Last year at St. Dominic’s we focused on Intentional Discipleship. It was an opportunity to explore what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and to become more intentional about discipleship. Let’s face it, before we can truly be disciples we must acknowledge and engage barriers that prevent us from starting the journey. We all have barriers! The question is not whether or not we have barriers, it is whether we are willing to seek ways to overcome those barriers. This series is a way we can all explore some of the most common barriers present in our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

What is asked of me?

First, pick up a booklet at St. Dominic’s each month and follow along. If you can, attend one of the Explore sessions (everyone is welcome) offered each month. If you want to go deeper, sign up for a Small Christian Community. Small communities will meet twice a month to discuss. We hope to be able to offer committed small communities and drop-in small communities as we get a better understanding of people’s interested. Please see the back cover for specific dates.

When did the Intentional Seeker initiative start?

St. Dominic’s kicked off the Intentional Seeker initiative in September 2014. We are gradually rolling it out to the whole parish. We hope to be able to connect people whenever they learn about the initiative or are ready to get involved.

What if I’m not sure how much of this I’m ready to do?

Pick up a booklet, and try it out. Pray about it.

I’m interested, but I just don’t have the time.

We understand that this will not fit everyone’s interest or schedule. We would like to ask you to pray for this initiative in the parish.

Dear Jesus, grant your way to all who seek you, your truth to all who want to know you, and your life to all who share your love.
Format

Each month we'll have a theme based around a common question or barrier. We'll pick scripture passages and other writings that will help us explore this theme. We'll spend the month going deeper and challenging ourselves. In September and October, we will roll this out to the parish. We will form several small communities. It is not too late to join one if you are interested (see the back cover). We plan to make this a yearlong initiative. Here's the planned format for each month:

**Week 1 - Explore**
Break open the texts and explore the questions and barriers. Our goal here is to recognize that we not alone in our search. Many people today and many people throughout history have traveled this road. What are some of the answers that others have found? What insights speak to me? What difference would it mean in my life if I overcome this barrier? How can I help others who are struggling with this barrier?

You can explore the theme on your own through this book, or you can attend a presentation (see the upcoming schedule on the back cover).

**Week 2 - Share**
Consider joining a small community to discuss the themes and barriers in our lives. There is something powerful about gathering with others to explore our desires and our struggles.

If you can’t join a small community, you can take time each day to pray the texts and reflect on your own journey.

**Week 3 - Act**
This week we’ll challenged ourselves to take some practical step in our daily lives. We’ll do this on our own, so if you’re part of a small community, there will not be a meeting this week.

**Week 4 - Share**
Gather again in your small community or reflect on your own.
INTENTIONAL SEEKERS
Are Open

Starter

What does it mean to be open?

Do you consider yourself an open person?

Are your friends, family, and coworkers open?

Why might openness be important to faith?
People brought to [Jesus] a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man’s ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!") And immediately the man’s ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly.

Mark 7:32-35

“Ephphatha!” The effect of Jesus’ command follow immediately: the man began to hear and speak clearly. I still remember the day I realized that Jesus’ miracles applied to me, too. Sure I’m not deaf or blind, but I am closed in other ways. The first step towards healing and wholeness needs to be openness. Openness to who Jesus really is. Openness to what Jesus can do. Openness to what Jesus desires for me. This month we’re exploring openness.

I suspect that openness isn’t a concept that you spend a lot of time thinking about. Yet openness is essential to growth. How else could we hope to move beyond our childhood understanding of reality? The assumption here is that we’re all closed in some way or another. Let’s explore the concept of openness, and then seek to discover the areas where we need to challenge ourselves to be more open.

To get us thinking broadly, here are a few areas of our lives that might need a little openness (limited to areas of faith, but you get the idea):

- Openness to the existence of God
- Openness to a personal God
- Openness to a God beyond our human understanding
- Openness to responding to Jesus more fully
- Openness to truth
- Openness to the dignity of others (especially the poor)
- Openness to our own call and gifts
- Openness to forgiveness
- Openness to encountering God in our daily lives
Exercises

Take some time to reflect on science and faith:

1) Make a list of areas of your life where you consider yourself open
2) Make a list of areas of your life where you consider yourself closed

e.g., belief in God, religious practices, politics, goodness of others, ...

(1) __________________________________________________________

(2) __________________________________________________________

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How important is openness to me?

When has openness led me closer to God?

Who in my life is a good example of openness?
[Jesus] left the district of Tyre and went by way of Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, into the district of the Decapolis. And people brought to him a deaf man who had a speech impediment and begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him off by himself away from the crowd. He put his finger into the man’s ears and, spitting, touched his tongue; then he looked up to heaven and groaned, and said to him, "Ephphatha!" (that is, "Be opened!") And immediately the man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was removed, and he spoke plainly. He ordered them not to tell anyone. But the more he ordered them not to, the more they proclaimed it. They were exceedingly astonished and they said, "He has done all things well. He makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

*Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?*
Open To Revising Our Map

“Our view of reality is like a map with which to negotiate the terrain of life. If the map is true and accurate, we will generally know where we are, and if we decide where we want to go, we will generally know how to get there. If the map is false and inaccurate, we will generally be lost... If our maps are to be accurate we have to continually revise them... What happens when one has striven long and hard to develop a working view of the world, a seemingly useful map, and then is confronted with new information suggesting that the view is wrong and the map needs to be largely redrawn? ... We may actually crusade against it, and even attempt to manipulate the world so as to make it conform to our view of reality. Rather than try to change the map, an individual may try to destroy the new reality. Sadly, such a person may expend much more energy ultimately in defending an outmoded view of the world than would have been required to revise and correct it in the first place.”

-- M. Scott Peck; The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth; pp. 44-46

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?
Open To Kernels Of Truth We Do Not Have

We used to go to a forum, enter into debate, and then return to our homes, living around the very people with whom we debated. Today we tend to enter into gated discussions with people who already agree with us. We tend to restrict ourselves to sources of information that confirm what we already believe. We’ve lost the ability to disagree and still remain in conversation, open to the reality that another person holds some kernel of truth that we do not have.

-- Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P. (Former Master General of the Dominican Order);
Paraphrased from a talk at St. Dominic’s

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?
Fear Of Openness

If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? ... No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life.

-- Pope Benedict XVI; April 24 2005; Homily at the Mass for the inauguration of his Pontificate

Read prayerfully: What thoughts arise out of this reading?
Key Insights

General
- We all get stuck: stuck with bad answers, stuck with easy answers, stuck with the answers from our childhood.
- How do we open ourselves? How do we grow?
- Do we want to grow?

Open To Healing
- Lack of openness is a sickness.
- We all have areas where we are not open.
- It’s what prevented (and prevents) many people from seeing who Jesus really was (is).
- Do we see openness as a good thing?
- How can openness lead us to God?

Open To Revising Our Map
- We all develop a map of the world when we're young.
- This map helps guide us as we grow and move into the world.
- Our map of the world is not the world, just our understanding.
- The danger comes when we stop revising our map, and start making the world fit our map.
- Have we stopped revising our map?

Open To Kernels Of Truth We Do Not Have
- What sources do we listen to?
- Do these sources confirm our beliefs or lead us to deeper understanding?
- Can we admit when we’re wrong, or when we have bad arguments?
- Can we help others grow through debate, or do we only want to win?

Fear Of Openness
- We can be afraid of openness
- Afraid of the future: What will Jesus ask? What will Jesus take?
- Afraid of the past: What have I done? Will I be rejected because...?
- Fear is a common response to the presence of the Divine
19. ...The life of faith, as a filial existence, is the acknowledgment of a primordial and radical gift which upholds our lives. We see this clearly in Saint Paul's question to the Corinthians: "What have you that you did not receive?" (1 Cor 4:7). This was at the very heart of Paul’s debate with the Pharisees: the issue of whether salvation is attained by faith or by the works of the law. Paul rejects the attitude of those who would consider themselves justified before God on the basis of their own works. Such people, even when they obey the commandments and do good works, are centred on themselves; they fail to realize that goodness comes from God. Those who live this way, who want to be the source of their own righteousness, find that the latter is soon depleted and that they are unable even to keep the law. They become closed in on themselves and isolated from the Lord and from others; their lives become futile and their works barren, like a tree far from water. Saint Augustine tells us in his usual concise and striking way: "Ab eo qui fecit te, noli deficere nec ad te", "Do not turn away from the one who made you, even to turn towards yourself". Once I think that by turning away from God I will find myself, my life begins to fall apart (cf. Lk 15:11-24). The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves, to a primordial gift that affirms life and sustains it in being. Only by being open to and acknowledging this gift can we be transformed, experience salvation and bear good fruit. Salvation by faith means recognizing the primacy of God’s gift. As Saint Paul puts it: "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Eph 2:8).

20. Faith’s new way of seeing things is centred on Christ. Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us...
Recap & Prepare for Week 2

- Reread the text for this week.
  - Underline phrases that speak to your heart
  - Pick a phrase each morning, and write it on a slip of paper
  - Hold that theme in your heart throughout the day
  - At the end of the day, pray an Examen (below)
- Reflection questions:

  What does openness mean to me now?

  In what areas of my life am I the most open?

  In what areas of my life am I the least open?

A Daily Prayer - The Examen

The Examen is an extremely fruitful daily prayer (set aside 5-15 minutes):

1. Take a moment to recognize that you’re in the presence of God
2. Thank God for the many gifts in your life
3. Invite the Spirit to walk back with you through your day, focusing on the specific theme of the day. Take the time to stop and really see that moment with new perspective.
4. Pray for God’s guidance for tomorrow.
Individual Option
- Find 20-30 minutes where you won’t be interrupted.
- (10-15 minutes) Follow the prayer format (Lectio Divina) in the group exercise below.
- (10-20 minutes) Spend time reflecting on the questions outlined above.

Advice For Participating In Small Christian Communities
- The facilitator’s role is to guide the flow of the meeting. They are not in the group to be experts. Help the facilitators by following their lead.
- During the discussion period, there will be multiple questions or topic for conversation. It is best to take them one at a time (i.e., let everyone share about one before moving to the next).
- Don’t attempt to give the “right answer.” Just share your experience, insights, and perspective.
- Please stay on topic (the questions asked).
- Pay attention to time. Keep your answers on the shorter side. You can always add more later.
- Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak (i.e., give others a chance to speak before sharing a second time).
- It’s ok to not share if you don’t feel comfortable, but challenge yourself to share occasionally.
- Give your attention to the person speaking. Please don’t start side conversations.
- Avoid asking follow-up questions. Let people share what they want to share. It is always good to affirm others.
- Avoid answering other people’s questions (i.e., taking on the role of expert).
How To Pray The Scripture Using *Lectio Divina*

- **Goal:**
  - Engage one of the scriptures at a deeper level
  - Allow the Spirit to teach our hearts
  - Provide fruit to lead into the discussion and sharing

- **Steps (Should take 10-15 minutes):**
  - *Lectio* (Reading, 2-5 minutes)
    - A participant reads the scripture passage
    - 30-60 seconds of silence
    - A participant reads the scripture passage
    - As the scripture is being read, the participants are invited to find a word, phrase, image, or idea that resonates with them. We’ll call this the *focus*.
  - *Meditatio* (Meditate, 5-10 minutes)
    - Stay with the focus from above.
    - There are different ways to do this: Why does it resonate? What does it mean in my life today? Repeat it as a mantra. Imagine it. How is this connected to seeking God?
  - *Oratio* (Pray, 1-2 minutes)
    - Whatever comes up in meditation, form into a silent prayer offered to God.
  - *Contemplatio* (Contemplate, 1-2 minutes)
    - After speaking a prayer to God, sit and listen or rest in God's love.
  - This leads into discussion and sharing.
    - Start with insights from the prayer.
    - Transition to sharing about seeking God.

- **Tips**
  - There is no “right way,” do what works for you
  - Embrace the silence
  - Let God find you
Small Christian Community Process - First Meeting
(Suggested timing based on a 60/90 minute meeting)

- Welcome & Check In (5/10 minutes)
- Review Format (5/5 minutes)
  - Review the participant’s advice (page 15)
  - Prayer will be about 15 minutes
  - Review the prayer format: Lectio Divina (page 16)
  - Discussion will follow based on the prayer and the questions (page 18).
- Prayer (10/15 minutes)
  - Transition Passage: “The beginning of salvation is openness to something prior to ourselves.” (Lumen Fidei)
  - Lectio Divina: Mark 7:31-37 on page 8.
- Discussion (30/45 minutes)
  - Begin with insights from the prayer experience
  - Discussing the reflection questions (page 14)
- Action/Request (5/10 minutes)
  - The practical exercise is listed on the next page
  - Participants can share thoughts and plans
  - Review date of the next group session
  - Participants can request prayers from the group
Revisit the exercise on page 6-7

Action: Pick an area where you need to be more open.

Make a list of people you know who are more open in this area. Ask some of them to share their insights with you. If you can’t think of any people, then find new sources of information in that area.

Make a list of some qualities you want to incorporate into your life, and make a plan for developing habits in those areas.
**Week 4 - Share**

**Preparing**
- Continue to use the phrases you highlighted when you prepared for Week 2:
  - Pick a phrase each morning, and write it on a slip of paper
  - Hold that theme in your heart throughout the day
  - At the end of the day, pray an Examen (page 14)
- Week 3 exercise:
  - Plan to share something about your Week 3 exercise
  - If you were not able to do it, plan to share your barriers.

**Individual Option**
- Find 20-30 minutes where you won’t be interrupted.
- (10-15 minutes) Follow the prayer format (*Lectio Divina*) in the group exercise below.
- (10-20 minutes) Journal about the experience of the exercise from Week 3.

**Small Christian Community Process - Second Meeting**
*(Suggested timing based on a 60/90 minute meeting)*

- Welcome & Check In (5/10 minutes)
- Review Format (5/5 minutes)
  - Review the participant’s advice (page 15)
  - Prayer will be about 15 minutes
  - Review the prayer format: *Lectio Divina* (page 16)
  - Discussion will follow based on the prayer the Act exercise (page 18)
- Prayer (10/15 minutes)
  - *Transition Passage*: “Faith in Christ brings salvation because in him our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us” (Charity In Truth)
  - *Lectio Divina*: Pope Benedict XVI’s Homily (page 11)
- Discussion (30/45 minutes)
  - Begin with insights from the prayer experience
  - Discussing insights from the Act exercise
- Action/Request (5/10 minutes)
  - Review date of the next Explore session
  - Participants can request prayers from the group
Three Ways To Get Involved With Intentional Seekers

1. Pick up a booklet, and explore on your own. - or -
2. Attend an “Explore” session to learn about this month’s scripture. Everyone is welcome. - or -
3. Check out a Small Christian Community to join with others to go deeper.

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Upcoming “Explore” Sessions

Sunday, February 1, 10:30-11:30 AM, School Basement

Monday, February 2, 7:30-9 PM, Parish Hall
   Special Speaker: Leah Libresco
   How does an argumentative Atheist wind up Catholic?
   “By cultivating openness to truth!”

Young Adults’ Session*, Wed., Feb. 4, 7:30-9 PM, Parish Hall

* The Young Adults group is a community of single and married Catholic adults in our 20s and 30s; to find out more, visit: http://stdominics.org/youngadults

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Connect With a Small Christian Community

Contact Scott Moyer at scott@stdominics.org

or come to an Explore session to get connected