

JPG PARENT READING GROUPS

Structure, Guidelines & Discussion Questions



Introduction:

The purpose of our reading groups is to encourage great conversations about the culture we are fostering in some of the most important areas of our lives: faith, family, parenting, work, personal growth, literature, art, politics, and so much more.

For reference, I've included below the three big areas of questions JPG families are thinking about this year. They pertain to the formation of the **culture** of our families, our school, and our wider community. Please keep them in mind as the conversations unfold.

CULTURE CULTIVATES

Questions for forming the culture of our families, our school, and our wider community here in Acadiana

- How are the habits and attitudes of my family fostering a culture of wonder, intellectual inquiry, and academic excellence? Are we reading as a family? Are we demonstrating interest in or discussing literature, art, or science as a family? What obstacles prevent me from better engaging in the intellectual life of my children?
- How is my prayer life and that of my family echoing and confirming the spiritual formation offered at school? Are we praying and frequenting the sacraments as a family? What obstacles prevent me from better engaging in the faith life of my children?
- How am I embodying the virtues and qualities I hope to see in my own children? Am I asking the saints to intercede for me and to show my children how they too can become saints? In short, how can I join with other parents and teachers as together we shape the culture in which our children can grow, learn, and discover God's will for their lives?

Principles of Discussion:

1. Spread around the conversation - avoid one or two people doing all the talking.
2. Try to read quotes from the text as you comment on the ideas. If someone offers a thought and you can find a reference to it in the text, share that text to connect with the other person's ideas. (In classes at JPG, we always say that in a seminar discussion the author deserves to have a seat at the table.)
3. Please, please, please, feel very comfortable agreeing or disagreeing about the ideas in the text. There is not only one way to approach these ideas. We specifically chose a text that takes a variety of stands on current events and issues, stands that should get us thinking, whether we agree or not with a particular point. Comments that are encouraged and welcome in the discussion:
 - a. "I saw that differently..."
 - b. "I wasn't as persuaded as I read that part..."
 - c. "I was wishing that he would have said..."
 - d. "I think another perspective on this point is..."
4. Remember that the goal is to foster and continue the conversation within our community, not to resolve every question - so any topics you don't get to should offer a springboard to ongoing discussions on the sidelines of soccer games and everywhere we bump into each other in coming months.

Meeting #2: Chapters 4-7

The Benedict Option - By Rod Dreher
6:30-8:00pm

Order of Discussion:

Gather quick first impressions - very general, overall perspectives, and reminders of topics from the first meeting: trends towards secularization of our culture and the life of a monastery as a model for our lives and families today.

These chapters for this discussion deal with (chapter 4) politics, (5) religion, (6) the idea of a "Christian Village," and (7) education. I am going to recommend you discuss these chapters in reverse order, beginning with the seventh chapter on education.

Note: During this past week, Mrs. Mahan, Mrs. Menard, and Mr. Fletcher visited St. Jerome Academy near Washington, DC, whose story is shared on page 163 of The Benedict Option. Mr. Fletcher also visited with Mr. Chris Currie, who works at St. Jerome and whose insights are shared on page 133. They are amazing people doing very good work, and we'll be sharing more of what we learned there in coming months.

Chapter Seven Questions: Education as Christian Formation

1. What does it mean to have a "Rightly Ordered Education?" (p.147)
2. Why is history, especially the history of Western Civilization, critical to the renewal of education? (p.152)
3. How is the classical education movement an answer to the mistakes made in the progressive / factory model of education? (p.160)

Chapter Six Questions: The Idea of a Christian Village

4. What did you find helpful from "Turning your home into a monastery?" (p.124)
5. Why does he suggest that it is so important to pay attention to our children's friendships? How is the example of first generation immigrant children instructive? (p.127-8)

Chapter Five Questions: A Church for All Seasons

6. Here, Dreher focuses on the renewal of Christian churches. He discusses the recovery of lost traditions in the liturgy, with all of the smells, bells, and sounds that engage our senses and help us to worship God. He also recommends a return to asceticism (fasting and making small daily sacrifices). He ends this chapter by asking us to “Evangelize with Goodness and Beauty” (p.117). What does he mean by this? Of his many suggestions in this chapter, are there any that you found especially important or challenging? Are there any that you need to keep thinking about?

Chapter Four Questions: A New Kind of Christian Politics

7. This chapter discusses the ways in which our political parties have been influenced by the growing secularization. Perhaps it could be summarized as “Think and vote nationally, *but act locally*.” Regardless of whether you agree with his assessment of our national political scene, consider and discuss the quote:

“Faithful conservative Christians cannot rely unreflectively on habits learned over the past thirty years of political engagement... Above all, though, they require attention to the local church and community, which doesn’t flourish or fail based primarily on what happens in Washington.” (p.83)

8. Dreher suggests re-defining politics to focus on those *local* areas where we have the greatest impact. Discuss the quote from Scott Moore (not the JPG dad!) which begins, “Politics is about the how we order our lives together in the polis...it is about how we live together...” (p.91)
9. Read and discuss Dreher’s summary of chapter four where he makes practical suggestions for renewing the culture, beginning with “Here’s how to get started...” (p.98)
10. Dreher here describes the wonderful work being done in pro-life circles with crisis pregnancy centers as a model for how we can live as active, responsible citizens in all areas of American life. Would following Dreher’s view make us less engaged in American politics? Or would it make us more engaged in American politics?

Prep for the final meeting - Wednesday, February 7

11. What questions would you like your group to think about for the final Reading Group Discussion? We will be focusing generally on chapters 8 to the end. The topics in those chapters include work, sex and marriage, technology and the “Benedict decision.”