

## 8. The congregation with a faith course

*Courses also draw non-church members*

**The basis Christian faith courses draw many people, church members as well as non-church members. At series of meetings an introduction to the bible and faith is offered, in a number of different ways, often after a joint meal. Small groups are formed to discuss a subject and to give people an opportunity to ask questions. Is that something for your congregation?**

There are many different courses on the market, such as ‘7+1, Meetings with God’<sup>1</sup>, the Alpha course, ‘Getting going with Emmaus’<sup>2</sup>, the Christian Faith Orientation Course’<sup>3</sup>, ‘Scopus’, ‘Searching for the secret’<sup>4</sup> and the ‘Atlas of Meaning’<sup>5</sup>. More information is available on [www.pkn.nl/missionai](http://www.pkn.nl/missionai), under model 8.

Such a course can be part of the Education and Training programme, but it can also be a spear point of the congregation’s missionary policy. In the latter case the course will be supported more and more by the congregation. Many people will be involved, in particular if it involves a meal, in which case you will need:

- Hosts and hostesses
- A cooking team
- People who will help with the washing up
- Music and musicians
- People who help with the organisation (getting things ready and putting things away)
- People who will take care of getting the room ready (no phosphorescent lights and plastic flowers)
- People who will ensure that there is good PR
- People who will introduce the evenings
- Discussion leaders
- Congregation members who invite guests and are involved in their prayer
- A minister who will provide ideas and will introduce at least one of the evenings
- People who will think about a follow-up trajectory: what if people want more or want to go further?

In other words: an orientation or basic course can be carried by the whole congregation.

Experience has shown that the congregation members join in, particularly at the first courses. That does not mean it was a ‘failure’. It deepens and refreshes the members’ own faith experience. When you persevere you will find that the church members will become more confident to invite guests from outside the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Ontmoetingen met God

<sup>2</sup> Met Emmaus op weg

<sup>3</sup> Oriëntatiecursus Christelijk Geloof

<sup>4</sup> Het geheim zoeken

<sup>5</sup> Zinatlas

Choose a course that is suitable for your congregation.  
(In this context also see [www.izb.nl](http://www.izb.nl) for the ‘test’ IZB developed.

### **A number of suggestions**

- Make sure you know the level of the course. Some courses are of quite a high level, they are marked as suitable for people with higher education but not for people who are not used to reading and abstract thought.
- Take note of the content and intention of the course. Is it mainly concerned with information or does it also contain a lot of perception? Is the aim of the course getting to know without strings attached or does it steer towards making a choice?
- How intense is the course? How many evenings? Does it also include a weekend? With or without meals? What else is involved and how many people are needed?
- Take note of what is and what is not discussed. A beginners’ course does not offer a nuanced image of what has been going on in faith and in the church for centuries. Nor is there a need for that. But make sure you know what you want to add and what kind of follow-up is needed.
- Have a practice session with the course first, in particular if you want to involve outsiders. Practice first of all with a number of trusted members of the congregation.
- Take your time to create the support base. Leaders must be behind it. Such a course will determine the image for your congregation.
- Think beforehand about the follow-up: what will you or your congregation have to offer after such a course?

### **Possible approach for the church council**

- Make a start as church council: do we want to set up and organise such a basic course on the platform of our congregation? Is this something we want to make into a policy, something we will carry through together, as a congregation? Which course are we thinking of? What could the possible follow-up be?
- Ask congregation members involved to set up a ‘trial course’. Give a number of church council members time and space to participate.
- Make sure you have good PR and involve outsiders in this.
- Communicate clearly and frequently with the congregation about this course, so that many members are not just informed, but will also get involved. Ask them to invite people to take part in the course.
- Organise the course at reasonably regular intervals, every year or every two years. Do not give up too soon if there are not many takers.
- Involve as many members as possible by giving them each a small task.