

# The Wide-Angle Lens Method

## Recommended for Common Lesson Two Year C

**Why this title?** The Wide-Angle Lens Method looks at a general picture and brings into focus the patterns or themes which emerge as important so that threads or series of connections can be explored.

**The basic Four-Source Model** (Action, Position, Culture, and Tradition—see pages 2-10ff) remains the same when working with the Wide-Angle Lens Method. It differs from the Microscope and the Issue Methods in the approach to reflection and the sequence of the steps. The Microscope Method is more introspective. It encourages personal insights and decisions. The Issue Method is also introspective, but tends to be less specific, since Issue statements are wide-ranging in their scope. The Wide-Angle Lens Method urges us to begin with a larger picture, examine it closely, and then turn outward again to the world. There is an additional question at the end which may be used with any method of reflection: Once we recognize the implications of what we have learned, what is the civic and social impact of these decisions?

**Process Note:** The Wide-Angle Lens Method is useful for exploring a large story or group of related stories. These may emerge from tradition, from current events, from history, or from cultural themes. Some use this method to draw together the themes that emerge from EFM students studying different years of the program at the same time.

### Identifying

#### 1. FIND A COMMON THEME FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

There are several ways to begin.

Option 1. The mentor or group selects themes drawn from the week's (or the previous week's) lessons and invites each person to share stories or "on-board" accounts (about two or three minutes) around the theme which has been selected.

Option 2. The group spends time sharing and catching up ("on board" time) and then selects themes which seem most dominant, productive, or full of energy.

Option 3. A theme may emerge from spiritual autobiographies which will serve as the basis for exploration. (This happens particularly in training events)

**Process Note:** It is essential for the group to be clear about which option to pursue.



## 2. FOCUS THE THEME

Using newsprint, brainstorm quickly various threads of meaning found in the stories which were shared. The question to ask is:

What are the common threads or elements which emerge? Is there a burning question, struggle, or issue? These threads may be expressed as simple statements, as an image, as a metaphor, or as an issue.

Select one thread that connects various themes to use in this reflection.

### Analyzing

## 3. BRING IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Focus on **one or two** areas of culture or society so that the discussion will not be too broad. These might come from your local community or the larger world. (How do movies, TV, literature, art, songs, artifacts, architecture, government, education, the press, speak to or about this thread?)

## 4. EXPLORE THE TRADITION

A. Identify biblical passages or elements from Christian Tradition in which this common thread is evoked or brought to mind. Provide time to find passages and read them if possible. Select one particular text that seems to speak most clearly to the thread that was evoked.

B. Examine the passage with these questions:

1. What do you know about the meaning of the text in its original setting?
2. How have others interpreted this text?
3. What does this text mean to you?

You may want to use your textbooks as well as other interpretative documents.

**Process Note:** It is important to narrow the thread sufficiently so that the focus is precise. If the thread remains imprecise, the reflection will quickly unravel losing its way and its energy.

**Process Note:** Do not try to force the text to fit. Let it speak for itself.



## 5. COMPARE AND CONTRAST CULTURE AND TRADITION

### Connecting

When we look at the perspectives of culture and tradition, what kind of a world do we see? Where do these perspectives join or compete? Where do they clash or contrast?

Use the themes of creation, sin, judgment, repentance, redemption, celebration, the doctrine of God, and grace to shape your discussion. Obviously, only two or three of these themes can be used during any one reflection, unless there is time for more exhaustive exploration.

## 6. BRING IN BELIEFS, POSITIONS, AND AFFIRMATIONS

What do you feel about where this discussion has led?

What do you think about it?

Where are you in the conversation?

What positions or affirmations do you hold about this conversation?

## 7. IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

### Applying

What have you learned? What moves or energizes you?

What insights come to mind?

What are you personally called to do differently, to affirm, or to change?

## 8. DECIDE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONSEQUENCES

What actions will you take to carry out the implications you have discovered?

What will you investigate further in your community in order to make a difference?

Whom can you contact to join you or inform you?

What action should you take?

**Process Note:** Theological Reflection is a guided conversation. Comparisons may occur without prompting.

**Process Note:** The expression of beliefs or position statements often is the first step to learning. It helps to identify what one thinks before accepting something new or altering an old conviction.

**Process Note:** Insights may have occurred earlier during the reflection. Help the group recapture them. This is the opportunity to glean the fruits from your group's reflective efforts.

**Process Note:** These questions take the group back to the larger world as we consider the implications of our individual acts.



## Wide-Angle Lens Summary Sheet

### **Identifying**

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1. FIND A COMMON THEME FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

2. FOCUS THE THEME

### **Analyzing**

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3. BRING IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

4. EXPLORE THE TRADITION

### **Connecting**

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5. COMPARE AND CONTRAST CULTURE AND TRADITION

6. BRING IN BELIEFS, POSITIONS AND AFFIRMATIONS

### **Applying**

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7. IDENTIFY INSIGHTS AND IMPLICATIONS

8. DECIDE ON SOCIAL AND CIVIC CONSEQUENCES

