

Faith And Society Files: Re:focus - Preparation

Re:focus is an updated, more flexible version of the BUGB Mission Consultancy scheme developed in 2003. It has been developed in modules to make it suitable for a wide variety of churches. User-friendly, it assumes two external facilitators will work with each church on the re:focus journey that may take 6 to 12 months. This resource contains the modules to assist churches in preparation for re:focus.





celebrating who you are and
developing your **crossing**places

Introduction

re:focus is a journey to help your church:

- focus on its life as a Christian community
- develop new and existing *crossingplaces*
- share the Christian message in actions and words.

Using a selection of the **re:focus** modules, the church will:

- listen to each other and to God
- be guided by experienced external facilitators

Should our church go through re:focus?

Many churches find themselves in changing circumstances. People move on to live elsewhere; sometimes the community changes around where the church meets. Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, living life as children of God and impacting the community in the power of the Holy Spirit is the ongoing task. But the task may need to be done differently. Using **re:focus**, facilitators will help you look at your church and community realistically. They will guide you in setting an Action Plan for the next few years.

By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is
established;
through knowledge its rooms
are filled with rare and beautiful
treasures.

Proverbs 24:3-4

What are *crossingplaces*?

People you meet regularly who are not Christians provide your *crossingplaces* opportunities. These people may be antagonistic towards hearing about your faith, but more likely they are spiritually open and somewhere on a journey of faith. **re:focus** will help you develop your personal *crossingplaces*. It also helps build on the *crossingplaces* activities your church undertakes.

What will happen?

There will be a couple of months of preparation during which five sermons need to be preached and five sessions of small groups run for adults, young people and children. All the notes are provided. In this time the minister(s) and leaders and everyone in the church completes a questionnaire. This leads on to the main meetings for the leaders and then the congregation with the facilitators. From this information and the mission issues and opportunities charts drawn up together, the facilitators report back and then help make the Action Plan.



re:focus

Who will help us?

Your Baptist association or network will provide experienced facilitators to journey with you through this process. Ministers and church leaders will be involved throughout. Importantly the whole church is fully involved at key points. The journey of discovery and discernment may last from six months to a year. The **re:focus** modules provide the preparation, various discovery tools, as well as guidance about resources. These are listed at the end of this document. The facilitators will discuss the timetable with you early on.

What helps re:focus work well?

Although there is much talking and listening to each other, **re:focus** is only effective if you also talk and listen to God. Pray about whether to do **re:focus** and, as you move ahead, keep on praying. Throughout, commit to being open about the church and the community of which it is part. Don't insist on personal agendas. If you have gone through a process similar to this in recent years, go through **re:focus** now before the previous benefits diminish.

Does re:focus work in a small church?

re:focus works equally well in all sizes of church. It is flexible to suit each individual church. The experienced facilitators will guide you in this. However for smaller churches (say up to 40 to 50 members) there is an additional resource called *LIFEsize* that can be undertaken as a five-week small group study and which will provide an excellent beginning. Electronic copies can be obtained by contacting the Faith and Society Team on faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk

How much does re:focus cost?

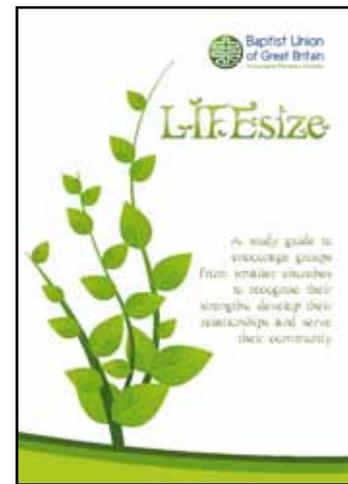
All the material required is free and can be downloaded from the BUGB website. The church should offer hospitality to the facilitators on their visits and cover their travelling costs. Facilitators give their time freely, so a parting gift is appropriate. Check with your association about any registration fee they may require to cover some of their administration and training costs for **re:focus**. This is a small financial outlay across a year.

What should we do next?

When you have decided to go ahead with **re:focus**, contact your association. The association will provide you with appropriate facilitators who will contact you to sort out a timetable with you and answer any further questions.

The church went through a full consultancy six years ago. But life doesn't stand still and there have been changes ... so we have welcomed the opportunity to review our church life and mission again and see what God is saying to us right now.

*Fleet Meadow Baptist Church,
Oxfordshire*



It was helpful in showing us as a small church not to overstretch ... they didn't come to beat us down but came to encourage us ... all in all we found it useful.

*Becontree Avenue Baptist Church,
Dagenham*

crossingplaces

A church that commits to giving its time to the surveys and sessions, to participating and to praying, will gain a renewed mission focus and a deeper level of discipleship.

*Kathryn Morgan - BUGB Mission
Adviser and facilitator (retired)*



re:focus modules

1 **Sermons:** To provide five weeks of preparation for **re:focus** in services

Preparation

- 2 **Small Group Studies:** To provide five weeks of preparation for small groups. Separate courses for adults, youth and children (to 11yrs)
- 3 **Leaders' Questionnaire:** To enable the church leaders to provide useful information to the facilitators
- 4 **Congregation Questionnaire:** To enable the church congregation to provide useful information to the facilitators

Main Meetings

- 5 **Main re:focus Meeting with Leaders:** To reflect on the history of the church and explore its hopes for the future
- 6 **Main re:focus Meeting with Congregation:** To go through a process together to discern the local mission issues and opportunities
- 7 **Crossingplaces:** To help develop people's *crossingplaces* and to discover how the church might support them
- 8 **Exercises for the Main re:focus Meetings:** To provide a variety of exercises, in classified groups, which the facilitators can select

Action Plan and Resources

- 9 **Developing an Action Plan:** To give help the in creating an Action Plan that will guide the next 3 - 5 years
- 10 **Sowing, Reaping, Keeping:** To provide a way of developing a framework for mission in the church
- 11 **Local Community Research:** To offer ways to understand the community better through research
- 12 **A Welcoming Place:** To ensure that the building is welcoming, suitable for the mission of the church
- 13 **Resources:** To point to Baptist and other resources that will resource *crossingplaces*
- 14 **Evangelism Resources:** To suggest resources suitable for evangelism for different stages of the faith journey
- 15 **Discipleship Resource: LIFE MOT:** To offer a personal discipleship scheme to be promoted in a church

Suggested books:

Resourcing Mission by Helen Cameron

Published by scm press ISBN 978 0 334 04146 7



re:focus

Contacting your local Association

Central Baptist Association

www.centralba.org.uk

East Midland Baptist Association

www.embaptists.co.uk

Eastern Baptist Association

www.easternbaptist.org.uk

Heart of England Baptist Association

www.baptist-heartofengland.org

London Baptist Association

www.londonbaptist.org.uk

North Western Baptist Association

www.nwba.org.uk

Northern Baptist Association

www.thenba.org.uk

South Eastern Baptist Association

www.seba-baptist.org.uk/welcome.htm

South Wales Baptist Association

www.southwalesbaptistassociation.org.uk

South West Baptist Association

www.swbaptists.org.uk

Southern Counties Baptist Association

www.scba.org.uk

West of England Baptist Association

www.webassoc.org.uk

Yorkshire Baptist Association

www.yba.org.uk





celebrating who you are and
developing your **crossing**places

Module 1: Sermons

re:focus is a journey to help your church:

- focus on its life as a Christian community
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- share the Christian message in actions and words.

Using a selection of the **re:focus** modules, the church will:

- listen to each other and to God
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Sermon Notes

To prepare and inspire the congregation for the **re:focus** process.

There are five sermons to be preached before the main **re:focus** meetings.

There are notes provided on each, not to be used verbatim but as guidelines for the preachers to raise and reflect on issues that are significant for churches today.

Feedback

To help people start to hear God on these issues, you should set up a feedback board with sticky notes, or make cards available each week, so that those in the congregation can record anything that has stood out for them from the sermon. These comments should be kept by the minister or a leader, and then shared with the facilitators.

1 Getting a grip on reality

Based on Acts 17 this sermon seeks to help congregations to begin to understand the changes in our culture today and their significance. The ultimate aim here is to help churches to respond wisely in this ever-changing context.

2 Recovering your focus

Based on Matthew 22:33-40, the content of this sermon is nothing new, but an important reminder of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

3 Discovering your place in God's plan

Based on Matthew 5 this sermon explores what it means to be 'salt' and 'light' in our contemporary world – particularly in terms of developing the character of Jesus.

Appreciation is expressed to Alisdair Longwill who developed the original outlines from which these sermons and the group studies have been developed.

4 Sharing the Message of Jesus

Based on John 4:1-30 this sermon shows how sharing the good news of Jesus can be a 'normal' part of our everyday living, welcomed by many people because God is already at work in the world.

5 Re-imagining the church

This sermon seeks to help us learn some important lessons from a great leader – Nehemiah. It aims to help churches to consider and take some important steps en route to re-imagining and re-organising themselves in a more missional way.



Module 2 contains three sets of five small-group studies - for adults, for young people, and for children. They follow the same themes as the sermons but can be used independently, recognising that churches have varied patterns of meeting in small groups.

If you are setting up new groups for **re:focus**, then they could meet after the corresponding sermon, enabling your church to explore more fully, discuss and engage with the material.





1 Getting a grip on reality

To recognise the significance of, and begin to understand the changes in our culture.

Introduction:

(It may be helpful to introduce this sermon by showing a few photographs of 'old' images of your village/ town/ community – to demonstrate the physical changes that have taken place over the years.)

This first sermon has the title 'Getting a grip on reality'.

In this sermon we want to:

- Identify some of the changes taking place in our culture
- Begin to understand the significance of these changes
- Ask God to show us how he wants us to respond in this new context

We live in an ever-changing world; change is taking place all around us.

Every year the government produces a document called *Social Trends* – it reports statistics on population; households and families; education; health; crime.... all sorts.

Year on year the changes are probably not that drastic – but if you compare last year with 30 years ago, the changes are massive, eg

- twice as many people live alone now – compared with 30 years ago
- just over half the number of people got married in 2007 as compared with 1972 (60%)
- in the past 20 years the number of people co-habiting has doubled
- in 1971 the average age of a woman giving birth was 24 years; In 2007 it was 30 years

There are loads of other changes we could mention – the important thing is that the UK landscape has changed dramatically in the past 30 years or so.

It's not just social changes – technology has developed at an incredible pace. Historians tell us that there have been more inventions in the last 100 years than there were in the whole of history preceding it – that demands rapid change.

Fifteen years ago the mobile phone was quite a luxury – now nearly everyone above the age of 10 years has one!

Social changes; technological changes...

Financial changes: in recent history there's been a credit crunch - now a global financial crisis, and the demise of several large financial institutions. Our world is constantly changing – every day is a surprise!

If someone had suggested this three or four years ago – people would just have laughed.

Changes everywhere...

It may sound a bit hi-falutin' but there have also been what we might call philosophical changes. The way people understand and view the world, and the way they make decisions; the way they view authority figures; the way people view matters of faith. These have changed greatly in the past 30 or so years.

Sociologists say that we're now living in a post-postmodern world – a world of multiple choices and values, and with no over-arching purpose and direction. Post-modernism seems to be moving on before many of us understood it was, and already scholars are arguing about the meaning of reality after post-modernism.

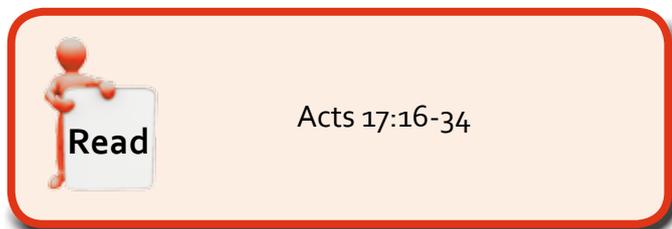


We're told that people today are more spiritual, but less religious. And although we are constantly lured by social networks like Facebook and Twitter and drawn by the ringtones of incoming texts and instant messaging, digital culture is said to be intensifying our sense of isolation and aloneness not decreasing it!

All these changes have consequences – one of which is that church attendance is significantly lower today (although stable just now in Baptist churches) and socially isolated, spiritual but not religious people are less willing to attend church than they were, say 30 years ago.

You might say that the 'change' we face is erratic and unpredictable. That means that simply repeating what we used to do and what used to work will most likely not produce the same results as before. It was Albert Einstein who defined 'insanity' as: 'Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.'

If Einstein is right, this makes our calling to share God's grace even more challenging and difficult. Helpfully, the New Testament provides some guidelines about the challenge before us.



Background and context:

The apostle Paul finds himself in an unfamiliar and foreign context. In Athens, his God is unknown and his master, Jesus, is just another name. What can he do? How can he share the truth about his (unknown) God? These questions and their answers help us to explore what we might do as we face an unfamiliar context.

1 Paul observes the culture surrounding him

(Acts:17: 16, 22)

He notices that the people are very religious and that the city is full of idols. He studies their beliefs and their (religious) habits. This simple, yet very important technique gives him the introduction that he needs to begin to share the message of his God.

Paul's method in Athens must become a regular practice for us as we face a 'foreign' culture in the UK at the beginning of the 21st century. We must seek to understand 'where people are at'. We can no longer assume that we know what they think, how they feel or even what they will do. And due to postmodern thinking, we also can't assume that they understand anything of the Gospel message.

The Tearfund report on church attendance, *Churchgoing in the UK* (2007) identified some very interesting things. For example, do you know that in the UK:

- two out of every three (66%) people pray as individuals,
- a third (38%) pray every month and
- a quarter (25%) every week.

Even among those who never attend church, 41% pray!

ACTION No 1

We need to observe and study our culture and the people in it.

2 Paul preaches in a different way for a different context

Paul uses a different method according to the context he finds himself in. In Acts 9:22 we read that Paul baffled the Jews living in Damascus by 'proving that Jesus is the Christ'. In Acts 13:14ff Paul and his companions entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, where Paul preached the gospel using the Old Testament as the basis of his message.



However, in Acts 17, in the Areopagus, he doesn't mention the Old Testament and he doesn't refer to any aspect of Israel's religious history (eg Abraham, Moses, King David etc). When you think about it, he would have been foolish to do so – as it would have 'gone right over their heads'.

Instead he makes a connection with them ("I see that you are very religious"). Perhaps today we might say, "I see you are very spiritual." Then deepens the connection, "...I found an altar to an unknown God," and then begins to share his message in a way they can understand, "...now I am going to tell you about him..."

Just as we can learn from Paul's observation of his culture, we can also learn from his contextualising of his message. In other words, he puts his message in terms that those who are unfamiliar with it can understand. Not only that, but we note his effort to connect with them and be on the same wavelength before he begins to share his message. Those of us who are wise will not just reflect on this, we will seek to make it the practice of our lives.

ACTION No 2

We need to get on the same wavelength as others as we seek to share God's good news. We need to express our message in terms that others can understand.

3 Our God is Lord of the 'different' context

In the 21st century we may be daunted by this new post-postmodern context we find ourselves in – and see mission as being a well-near impossible task.

But God has been responding to new contexts all throughout human history – he is Lord of the 'different' context. The Gospel message is just as relevant to the post-postmodern culture as it was to post-modernity, modernity and enlightenment thinking which came before it. This is nothing new to him.

In the Old Testament God speaks to his people (in yet another context) - Isaiah 55:8-13 (ANIV)

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

4 This is exactly what happens in Athens with the apostle Paul:

Acts 17:34 (ANIV)

A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

We are aware of only two people who became Christians that day following Paul's 'unusual' sermon:

- Dionysius, a member of the council of the Areopagus (the highest governmental council in Athens) who was, at the very least a significant member, maybe leader, in that community. There is a legend/tradition that this man became the first bishop of Athens – although we can only really speculate about that.
- Also, the woman Damaris.



We can't be sure but we're probably on safe ground to say that these people becoming disciples made an impact on their community and were undoubtedly the first members of the church in Athens.

Our God is the same God who called these two people to follow him in this 'different' context. Our God is an awesome God who reached into 'different' contexts in the past and continues to do the same today.

This gives us hope as we develop relationships and appropriately reach out to others in the 21st century.

(NOTE: Depending on the situation there is also a pastoral point to be made here about God being the God of the changing contexts of our lives.

He is God when we are fit and enjoying good health; he is God when we are faced with uncertain health.

He is God in our youth; he is God in our middle and old age ...

Preachers will need to discern for themselves whether it's helpful/ necessary to develop and use this aspect of the sermon.)

5 Conclusion - Getting a grip on reality...

It would be easy to think of this merely as an interesting lesson from church history and yet do nothing about it. However, let's not forget the words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel, powerfully expressed in *The Message*:

"... if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach". (Matthew 7:26).

If we treat God's word seriously then we must act on what God has been saying to us today: How might we develop a clearer understanding of 'where people are at' in our community?

What do we need to do to make some progress here?

- Through **re:focus** we'll do a survey within our local community. We'll pray into this research as we listen to God and to each other, and to the local community.
- Some of us will be greatly encouraged by getting to know the not-yet Christians in our *crossingplaces*. *Crossingplaces* are where we meet people regularly, as individuals and as churches, who have not yet discovered the joy of being a Christian for themselves. We may have been taught to be cautious about making non-Christian friends, when what we really need to do is develop a close and strong relationship with Jesus so that we can be 'salt' and 'light' to our not-yet Christian friends.
- In your small group you'll have an opportunity to reflect upon how you and your church family can best reach out to these different groups in your community. You can talk about your existing *crossingplaces* and begin to pray about how God wants you to use them.

Let's now spend a few minutes in silent reflection as we invite God by his Spirit to show us what he wants each of us to work through after having heard his word today.

FEEDBACK

If you have a feedback board (see page 2) or some other system to record what God has been saying to people in this sermon series, this would be a good time to give a reminder.





2 Recovering your Focus

To help us develop a clear and biblical understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

Introduction:

There's a story of a rich man who was determined to give his mother a birthday present that would outshine all others. He read of a bird that had a vocabulary of 4000 words, could speak in numerous languages and sing three operatic arias. He immediately bought the bird for £50,000 and had it delivered to his mother. The next day he phoned to see if she had received the bird. "What did you think of the bird?" he asked. She replied, "It was delicious."

She obviously missed the point! When it comes to understanding our purpose in life (as individual Christians and as churches) it is so easy for us to miss the point.



Matthew 22:33-40

What matters most in life?

- Family?
- Security?
- Money?
- Health?
- Happiness?

When Jesus was asked this question (or a very similar one) he said that what matters most is to: "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*", and to "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*"

Jesus distils the purpose of life right down to two things:

- Loving God (as the priority of our life) – a vertical relationship
- Loving others (as much as we love ourselves) – a horizontal relationship

It's amazing – Jesus doesn't talk about going to church or prayer or reading our bible. He talks about relationships. He talks about loving God and serving others.

These relationships have always been vital and central to the Christian experience, they always will be. Interestingly, in our culture today – these two things resonate loudly and clearly with postmodern men and women. For them, the spiritual aspect of life matters – people want to experience the spiritual, maybe even God himself, and they also want to experience real community, relationships that count.

We don't focus on these things because they are trendy – we focus on them because Jesus says they are most important. However, we recognise here the potential for connecting with those who are not-yet Christians as we share some common ground together.

The point of your life is to love God...

If the point of life is to love God, then the first thing we need to do is...

1 Recover our focus - put God at the centre

We have been made for God's pleasure - or to put it another way, to bring a smile to God's face.

Revelation 4 says:

*"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you **created all things**, and by your will they were created and have their being."* (Rev 4:11).



Colossians chapter 1, expands this further:

*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him **and for him**. (Col 1:16)*

So, according to the bible we have been created by God for his pleasure; or to put it another way, our purpose on earth is to bring a smile to God's face.

A previous generation were taught that 'man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever'. (*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*). But for many, indeed for most people today, this has long been forgotten. This is not said with the aim of being critical, but simply to state a fact.

Our society today, largely, marches to the beat of a very different drum. We are consistently bombarded with adverts telling us, "You're worth it!" "You deserve it!" These 21st century cultural messages taken to the extreme suggest that we only exist for our own benefit and pleasure.

Messages bombard us at every opportunity and from every direction encouraging us to acquire newer and better material things, to fit in with a crowd carefully crafted by advertising companies, or to emulate a 'celebrity' cultivated by the media. As followers of Jesus, we need to recognise this clash of world-views and remind ourselves which of the two we have 'bought into'. This is the kind of thing the apostle Paul was getting at, when he wrote to the Roman Christians back in the 1st century AD:

Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2 (NLT)

This is one of the most important challenges for 21st century Christians. If we 'blow it' here, it pretty much affects everything else.

The bible says that we were created by God and for his pleasure; we've been created to bring a smile to God's face. It thrills God's heart when we love him with all of our heart, soul and mind. When we recognise that and live our lives accordingly, we begin to experience what Jesus described as 'life in all its fullness' or as *The New Living Translation* says, 'a rich and satisfying life'.

ACTION No 1

Reflect quietly for a couple of minutes – ask yourself

- How do I view my life?
- With me at the centre?
- Or God and his purposes at the centre?

Is there something(s) that I need to sort out in my/your life – so that God might begin to be more central?

2 Recover our focus – serve our neighbours

If the point of life is loving God, the second most important thing (according to this passage) is loving your neighbour.

So our second task is to discover to whom God wants us to be neighbours, and how we might serve them showing God's love.

In Luke's account (Luke 10), when Jesus speaks these words, he is asked, "*Who is my neighbour?*" Jesus answers with a parable – the one about the Good Samaritan. From what he says it seems that our neighbours are the people around us, the people we encounter from day to day, people in need, people (to use the use the language in Luke) that we might 'have mercy on'.

Jesus' words about loving our neighbour take at least 50% of our focus into the area of what is going on outside of the church building. He takes half of our focus out of what one writer calls 'sacred space' into the domain of 'secular space'.

One of the great themes in the bible is the incarnation – of how God became man and was born into the world he created. In Matthew 28 Jesus passes on this incarnation principle to his disciples and tells them to "Go!", out into the



world and make more disciples. Again in Acts 1 he says to his disciples, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and in every part of the world".

For hundreds of years in Christendom the Christian Church has invited people to 'come to church/ to our sacred space/ holy place', creating what's become known in mission thinking as the SSD – the Sacred/Secular Divide. We'd never want to discourage anyone from coming to church, but this all seems a bit back-to-front, when we consider that God 'went' to people and Jesus commanded us to do the same. Jesus never had SSD's!

In a culture where attending church is 'off the radar' for 60% of the population, being alongside people, getting alongside people is vitally important. Not only that, but this means that for some people you and I are the only 'bible' they will ever read; we may be the only authentic Christians they will encounter.

Think of how this works? A not-yet Christian who is never going to attend church encounters you or me and we show/share God's grace to them – they (God-willing) get some sense of the reality of God. After all, they've experienced God's grace through someone. However, if the Christian, ie you or me, doesn't show/share God's grace to them – they continue on their way (most likely) unaware of the reality of God. Romans 10:14ff, *'But how can people call for help if they don't know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven't heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it?'*



This is the thinking behind the Baptist *crossingplaces* initiative, where we are all being encouraged to consider where we go and who we meet on a regular basis, both at church events and in whatever we do for the rest of the week, who have not yet discovered the joy of being a Christian for themselves. These people may be antagonistic towards hearing the good news of the gospel, but it is more likely that they are spiritually open and somewhere on a journey of faith.

We are encouraged to pray about these *crossingplaces* situations and ask God how we might support and encourage those people to take steps on a journey towards Christian faith.

There are ideas and resources that can help us, but the essential thing is to invite God to work in the situation, so that the Holy Spirit can do the transforming work, both in the person concerned and probably in us too! It's going to be in our *crossingplaces* that we really get to know those whom Jesus says are our neighbours.

It may be that some of us have a particular affinity for loving our neighbours. If so, let's celebrate that, but let's not assume that loving our neighbours is just for the 'gifted' few or for those who have time on their hands. The **re:focus** journey will help you discover where your *crossingplaces* are in life – we all have them!



There's a website called helpothers.org – they post articles about simple acts of kindness. They have a project called the SmileCard project – it's basically a game of kindness-tag. You're 'it' when someone does something 'nice' for you – then it's your turn to do something 'nice' for someone else (and so on). In the process you pass along a 'Smile card'. It's not especially Christian – but the ethos is.

In the film *Pay it Forward* a teacher on the first day of the new school year gives his class of 10/11 year olds an assignment for that school year – “Think of a way to change the world”. One boy takes him seriously – he thinks, ‘what if I show special kindness, kindness that really costs something, to three people?’ And then they show special kindness to another three people, and then they do the same... and so on.

One of the people he shows kindness to is a homeless drug-addict. He feeds him on breakfast cereal while his mother is out working in the evenings; he lets him sleep in his mother's broken-down pick-up truck in the garage (unknown to his mother); and he gives him money so that he can get some new clothes that enable him to get a job. The mother discovers the 'stranger' in her garage one day while the boy is at school – she goes berserk. Just before she's about to shoot him (after all it's an American film) he explains everything – including the bit about the money. The mother says, “So when are you going to pay it back?” And the 'stranger' says, “I'm not allowed to pay it back – that's the point. I've got to pay it forward” (to another three people).

Conclusion

As Christians we have received God's grace – which has touched and changed our lives. Just imagine if those of us who have received God's grace 'paid it forward' to others. Might that not just begin to change the world?

Around 2000 years ago Jesus was more or less teaching people to 'pay it forward'. To be like the good Samaritan – and love your neighbour as you love yourself.

And even more importantly love God with all you've got.

That's getting your life re-focused. That's what Jesus asks of you and me. That's his calling upon your life and mine.

ACTION No 2

- Where are you at with 'loving your neighbour?'
- Where are your *crossingplaces* where God is asking you to make a difference to others, walking with them on a journey of faith?
- What is God asking of you right now?

Take a moment or two to reflect on that in silence.

crossingplaces

FEEDBACK

If you have a feedback board (see page 2) or some other system to record what God has been saying to people in this sermon series, this would be a good time to give a reminder.





3 Discovering your place in God's plan

Aim

To help us understand or rediscover our place in God's plans for the world.

In this third sermon – we want to find out how you and I can be involved in God's plans for the world.

Introduction:

Illustration: [note: you might prefer to use a local football team or a contemporary illustration from the current news eg the Olympics or other sporting event]

Many young lads dream of playing for their local football team.

A few years ago in March 2008 – that dream came true for 18 year old Freddie Sears when he heard the words he'd only dreamt of when Alan Curbishley, manager of West Ham United said, "Freddie warm up, get ready". Only two days earlier, he had discovered that he had a place in the boss's plans, and now on his full-team debut his dreams come true when he steps on to the pitch and minutes later Upton Park erupts as he scores the winning 80th minute goal against Blackburn Rovers. What a day! What a memory!

Hopefully it's not too crude an analogy, and you see the point - you too have a place in the 'boss's' plans.

What are God's plans for the world?

God's plan is to reconcile the world to himself – and to make us right with God! (In fact it is to reconcile all things to himself. But for today our focus is on how this affects people). God's desire is to bring men, women and children into a good relationship with himself once again. That's God's agenda for the world! That's what God is doing. (2 Corinthians 5:19,21)

And what about us, ordinary Christian men and women - what's our place in God's plans?

Again, the apostle Paul helps us here:

God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" (2 Corinthians 5:19,20 (NLT).

The 'boss' has a place for us in his plan. Our role in God's plans is to be ambassadors for Jesus. That means we are a kind of 'go-between' with Jesus and people. Our job is to communicate God's desire for ordinary men, women and children to be reconciled again with God. Our task, our role, our mission in life is to engage with others, encouraging them to, "Come back to God!"

This week, we want to explore what this means – and see how it works out in practice.

How do we go about this? How can we best fulfil this task in the 21st century? What kind of ambassadors are we talking about?



Read

Matthew 5:1-20

The answers to these questions are found in Jesus who is **our role-model for life**.

John 8 tells us,

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life". John 8:12 (NIV)

This is a powerful image, try to visualise it. Jesus breaks into our dark world, radiating God's brilliant, illuminating light, changing the future, helping us to see our way forward. What an amazing message for a contemporary world that has lost its way! That's why Jesus came to earth.



The linguist, Frank Laubach, brings a helpful perspective to this. He says, "When Christ was here on earth, he was limited to performing his ministry in one place and at one time. He was one man walking beside one sea in one little corner of the earth. He healed whoever he touched, but his touch was necessarily limited by time and space. Now does it make sense that the Father would send his Son for this limited ministry? I don't think that is tenable. He made provision to carry on the work through the Holy Spirit; we are his multiplied hands, his feet, his voice and compassionate heart. Imperfect and partial to be sure, but his healing body just the same."¹

This is pretty much what Jesus is saying in Matthew chapter 5. He's not satisfied with referring only to himself as the light of the world, but now he's saying that **we too are the** (much needed) **light of the world** and the **salt of the earth**. Think about it, try and get your head round that one. You, me, the people in your home group, the Christian friends who made sure the toilets were clean before the service and will make tea and coffee afterwards – we are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

Jesus commissions and calls his followers, to share in his mission, his life-project. He calls ordinary Christians to bring light into dark places, so that people might 'see' more clearly and have the opportunity of being reconciled to God.

The Message puts it this way:

"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven."
(Matthew 5:13-16)

1 Frank Laubach quoted in *A Past with a Future* by Jim Graham, Kingsway, 1987, p58

Remember the illustration about the 18 year old footballer [or other illustration]. Just like him, the boss says to you and me, "Freddie (or Susan or Michael or whatever your name is...) warm up, get ready you're going on. I want you. You have a place in my plans. Don't sit on the benches – join in the action, be a player. I want you to be light in the world and salt on the earth."

Being salt and light in the 21st century

Some of us were taught that being salt and light meant that we shouldn't smoke or drink or appear to enjoy ourselves in any way. It's not that those instructions were always inherently wrong – it's just that the whole emphasis was misplaced. It tended to produce Christians who were known for what they *didn't do* rather than for what they actually represented and *did do*.

Today, we want to live lives that please our Father in heaven, but this has more to do with our looking like Jesus and loving others (who know, or don't-yet know, Jesus) than it does our avoiding tobacco or alcohol.

Being the salt of the earth and the light of the world can be demonstrated in lots of ways, including these three, which we are going to think about in connection with ourselves today:

- 1 Developing the character of Jesus**
- 2 Showing the compassion of Jesus**
- 3 Sharing the message of Jesus.**

1 Developing the character of Jesus

On 5 October 2008 a journalist for the *Belfast Telegraph* wrote:

'Interviewing Gordon Wilson was nearest I'd ever get to being in presence of a saint.'

Gordon Wilson's 20 year old daughter, Marie, a trainee nurse was killed in the Enniskillen bomb in November 1987. Mr Wilson, spoke of the last words between himself and his dying daughter in a famous BBC interview:

"She held my hand tightly and gripped me as hard as she could.

"She said, "Daddy, I love you very much".

"Those were her exact words to me and those were the last words I ever heard her say.

"But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge.



"Dirty sort of talk is not going to bring her back to life.

"She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession.

"She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again.

"I will pray for these men tonight and every night."

Someone once said that 'character is what you are in the dark'. If that's so, Gordon Wilson had character. As a Christian man he showed the character of Jesus. He didn't just ask, "What would Jesus do?" He got on and did it. The journalist from the *Belfast Telegraph* wrote that Gordon Wilson was 'the most inspiring and caring man I ever met'.

He was salt and light.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes the character of Jesus being produced in the lives of Christians in these terms:

...the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT))

This is a vital part of what it means to be salt and light. It means that we begin to look and behave more and more like Jesus.

2 Showing the compassion of Jesus

Illustration: Tell the story of Ted Stallard, or show a video of Ted's story².

Ted Stallard was not an attractive child. He was turned off by school, sloppy in appearance, expressionless and unattractive. Even his teacher, Miss Thompson, enjoyed bearing down her red pen - as she placed X's beside his many wrong answers.

If only she had studied his records more carefully.

² www.makeadifferencemovie.com

They read:

Age 6-7 yrs: Ted shows promise with his work and attitude, but (has) poor home situation.

Age 7-8 yrs: Ted could do better. Mother seriously ill. He receives little help from home.

Age 8-9 yrs: Ted is good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.

Age 9-10 yrs: Ted is very slow, but well-behaved. His father shows no interest whatsoever.

Christmas arrived. The children piled elaborately wrapped gifts on their teacher's desk. Ted brought one too. It was wrapped in brown paper and held together with sellotape. Miss Thompson opened each gift, as the children crowded around to watch. Out of Ted's package fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half of the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume. The children began to snigger. But she silenced them by splashing some of the perfume on her wrist, and letting them smell it. She put the bracelet on too.

At day's end, after the other children had left, Ted came by the teacher's desk and said, "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks real pretty on you. I'm glad you like my presents." He left. Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her and to change her attitude.

The next day, the children were greeted by a reformed teacher - one committed to loving each of them. Especially the slow ones. Especially Ted. Surprisingly - or maybe, not surprisingly - Ted began to show great improvement. He actually caught up with most of the students and even passed a few.

Time came and went. Miss Thompson heard nothing from Ted for a long time. Then, one day, she received this note:

Dear Miss Thompson:
I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class.
Love, Ted

Four years later, another note arrived:

Dear Miss Thompson:
They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it.
Love, Ted



And four years later:
Dear Miss Thompson:

As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, MD. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year.

Miss Thompson attended that wedding, and sat where Ted's mother would have sat. The compassion she had shown that young man entitled her to that privilege.

Compassion is a powerful 'weapon'. Jesus turned people's lives upside down all the time as he showed God's compassion:

- Jesus touches and heals the leper (Mark 1:41-42)
- Jesus has compassion on the five thousand, he shares God's truth and feeds them (Mark 6:34)
- Jesus heals Simon Peter's mother-in-law and many others (Mark 1:29-34)

And so the list goes on. Time and time again we read of Jesus interacting with others and showing God's compassion. We read of how their lives were not only 'touched' but changed. God-willing, we'll meet some of those people in eternity. And God-willing we'll meet some in eternity **whose lives have been changed through God using you and me.**

That's part of the wonder of God's missionary project. The Almighty God shows his compassion through ordinary Christians - touching and changing lives. But this time - it's in the 21st century!

Another way we can be salt and light is by...

3 Sharing the message of Jesus

We could define or describe the message of Jesus in various ways. But Jesus' message is basically one of loss, love, reconciliation and purpose.

Loss: because God created mankind to be in a relationship with himself but our independent spirit, our waywardness, what the bible calls sin, steered us away from God and his ways. This is true for you, for me, for everyone!

Love: because the wonderful truth of the Christian message is that God chose not to give up on us, but rather pursue us in the hope that we might be reconciled to God again.

God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life. (John 3:16 - NCV)

Reconciliation: The amazing thing about the Christian message is that our being reconciled to God doesn't depend on our good behaviour, being religious or attending church. But it does require us to say, 'sorry'.

... if we admit our sins - make a clean breast of them - he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing. (1 John 1:9 - The Message)

A new purpose in life:

We might be forgiven for thinking that our being reconciled to God is the end of the process. Maybe now we can sit back and chill out? No! not according to Jesus. With God in our lives then we start living the Jesus life, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and sharing this good news in all the ways Jesus did.

We shall talk more about sharing this good news in next week's sermon, looking at how this can work out in practice in straightforward ways as we connect with people we encounter week by week.

ACTION:

For now, let's be quiet and pray how we might be salt and light in the situations we know we shall be in this coming week, remembering the three aspects we have spoken about:

- 1 Developing the character of Jesus
 - 2 Showing the compassion of Jesus
 - 3 Sharing the message of Jesus.
- Prayer ...

FEEDBACK

If you have a feedback board (see page 2) or some other system to record what God has been saying to people in this sermon series, this would be a good time to give a reminder.





4 Sharing the Message of Jesus

To show that sharing the good news of Jesus can be a 'normal' part of our everyday living and would be welcomed by many people because God is already at work in the world.

Introduction:

[You may need to update this when the results of the latest census become available.]

The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) is the largest social survey ever produced by the Office for National Statistics. The survey contains information from over 420,000 individual respondents - the biggest pool of UK social data after the census. The survey information collected in 2011 included questions on religion and produced the startling headline, '69% of people in Great Britain stated that they had a religious affiliation with Christianity'.

The actual question asked was 'What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?' The 69% people who said 'Christianity' produced some surprised headlines in the press, where an assumption is often made that Great Britain is now a secular country that has set aside its former Christian identity. To reinforce this seemingly surprising statistic, notice that other responses were that just 4% were Muslim and only 23% stated that they had no religion at all.

Breaking down the respondents by age, nearly nine in ten over-65s say they are Christian, and even in the least religious age-group, the 25 to 34 year-olds, more than half (55%) profess allegiance to Christianity.

This should be a great encouragement to us as we think about sharing the message of Jesus in that we can expect the majority of people we meet to be receptive in some way – as long as we share in a natural and cringe-free way!

God is at already at work in the world

Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!"

Matthew 4:19 (NLT)

When we read this invitation that Jesus made to his first disciples, and reflect on the fact that it is an invitation to his present-day followers too, we may feel either despondent or alarmed. 'Evangelism' or 'witnessing for Jesus' often strikes us as something for the professionals to do and a bit too scary for the 'ordinary' Christian.

Of course those first disciples were with Jesus, learning and practising with him for three years, and that's why we are going to look at one biblical account of Jesus talking to someone shortly and consider how Jesus did share the good news he brought.

But before that let's just remember that when we take an opportunity to share something about Jesus with someone who is not a Christian, we are not starting with a blank sheet, neither are we all alone in the conversation. The responsibility for the outcome does not rest with us!

All mission, including evangelism, flows from the character and purposes of God. Mission is the activity of God. God defines, directs, energises and accomplishes mission. God is the one calling people, like Jesus did on earth, and as God's people, we are to join in the process.

The late David Bosch, in his famous book *Transforming Mission*, says:

'to participate in mission is to participate in the movement of God's love towards people, since God is a fountain of sending love.' (p 390)



Mission needs to be shaped by the character and nature of God, so as we think about God as creator, we see that mission activity will be varied, creative, imaginative, and generous. As we think of God as our redeemer, we see that our mission activity should be characterised by grace and showing all the compassion and other qualities of Jesus.

God is already at work in the world, in our town, in our community. Some stories in the Old Testament tell us that God even uses people who are not his followers to be 'people of peace' to do good in a community and that we are called to co-operate with them. Missionaries going overseas to places where there are few Christians, rightly speak of finding God at work already in the place where they are going, rather than taking God with them to a new place.

Since God is a missionary God, God's people are to be a missionary people. Much of the time we are just required to have our spiritual eyes and ears open and to join in with what God is already doing in someone's life. That does require us to have spiritual eye and ears! Putting it another way we need discernment.

Early on in his ministry, we find Jesus at the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11). The host faced social disgrace in running out of wine. It was Mary the mother of Jesus who had discernment on this occasion and facilitated the process by which the servants followed Jesus' instructions. The result was the first of Jesus' miracles – water turned into good wine – and the hospitality of the host family affirmed in their community.

As the Christian church took root around the Mediterranean, we read in the scriptures of God guiding the early Christians as to where they should go and to whom they should speak. This was, and still is, the work of the Holy Spirit, guiding and empowering the followers of Jesus to continue what he did on earth.

The gospel came to Europe because the Holy Spirit prevented the apostle Paul from following his original travel plans on his second missionary journey and instead led him and Luke to cross by sea to modern-day Europe. The Spirit took them on to Philippi and into conversation with Lydia (Acts 16). God was already working in Lydia's life and so the conversation with Paul led her to become the first European Christian.

Let's look at the way Jesus spoke with one person when he was here on earth...



John 4:1-30

Jesus talks to a Samaritan woman at the well

This is an amazing story on many levels: Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, actually spoke to someone who was a Samaritan, and a woman! Jesus entered into a theological discussion with her when she raised the matter of where to worship. Jesus knew her unusual and culturally difficult situation regarding her husband, and yet still offered her the greatest gift – living water – a new life filled with God's Holy Spirit. And the outcome was wonderful in that many Samaritans from her village became followers of Jesus (Acts 16:39).

But this was also a very ordinary encounter: Jesus was genuinely thirsty and had no means of getting water. He asked the woman at the well to draw the water and got into a conversation with her. Jesus could have continued on his way after having a drink, but he knew that he it was important to carry on sitting there and have a longer and deeper conversation. The rest, as they say, is history.

Our experience of speaking about Jesus

When we think of speaking about Jesus to other people, then perhaps we become fearful not only because we are not sure how to do it, but because we think that the response will not be good. It is doubtful if one-third of the world's population would be Christians today if the disciples of Jesus had not told others in their day. We are ongoing links in a 2000 year-old chain.



According to the book, *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way*¹, the secret is to see how Jesus did it himself. The author, Jim Currin, reminds us that we should be grateful for Billy Graham, but that the gospel has travelled down the centuries mainly by ordinary Christians doing ordinary things made extraordinary by the Holy Spirit.

[Share a personal story here or get a story from www.faith-journeys.com]

Christians often find it harder to 'say' something than to 'do'. But we need to develop ways of talking with friends, family and people we meet in our church *crossingplaces* and in our personal *crossingplaces* at work and in leisure activities. Currin says that Jesus' way was not to preach at people so much as to engage in dialogue. So we should develop a dialogue, even if it is short. Sharing our Christian faith today involves three stories. There is your story, the story of the other person, and there is God's story in Jesus. The interaction between these stories forms a 'triangle of relationships' – between you, the other person and God. In practice this relationship will be different in every situation.

In speaking to the woman at the well, Jesus was never judgmental, but listened attentively and responded to her as a person whose life was of enormous value – and he transformed it! Just as Jesus accepted her, he accepts us as we are and so we can relax when it comes to sharing our faith with others. We can be ourselves – and our story is unique.

The organisation Christian Research tells us that 64% of Christians in the UK today have had a gradual experience of coming to faith. This means that there have been many significant conversations with them, on average over four years. We very rarely get the opportunity to share all the aspects of the Christian faith with someone, unless they've been on a long journey of seeking and exploring Christianity and we have been alongside them throughout. Remember that some people are starting with little knowledge of Christianity today.

[Share your own story of coming to faith or another appropriate one.]

Taking the fear out of being an effective witness for Jesus

In addition to looking at Jesus' style of dialogue described in *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way*, another book of help in this area is *More Ready than you realize*² by Brian McLaren.

He encourages his readers to develop 'spiritual friendships' and become 'people who engage others in conversation about important things such as faith, values, hope, meaning, purpose, goodness, beauty, truth, life after death, life before death, and God'.

He says that good evangelism is the process of being friendly without discrimination and influencing all of our friends towards better living, through (our) good deeds and conversation.

McLaren reckons that one of the most important skills in spiritual friendship is learning to respond to questions with more questions. So that, instead of telling your friend what to think, you help them to keep thinking by asking appropriate questions (while continually praying for them and for wisdom for yourself) so that you might respond with 'helpful' questions.

McLaren suggests eight factors that can help us grow and develop in this area...

1 BRF (July 2011) ISBN: 978 18410 1862 1

2 Zondervan (2002), ISBN: 978 03102 3964 2



1 The Relational Factor: he says count conversations, not just conversions

'If you are willing to get out, relate to, and be willing to be a neighbour, a friend, a decent human being, you are more ready than you realise to be used in God's purposes.

You don't start by being religious; you start by being human, relational, neighbourly and friendly – normal!

See evangelism as a relational dance, not a win/lose conquest.

In many places today, people will not become Christians unless they meet and get to know a Christian and Christian community which inspires them with curiosity and hope.'

2 The Narrative Factor: Listen to their story, share your story, share God's story, not just propositions or formulas

He encourages his readers to begin to 'notice' the people around us rather than simply rushing through life. We all have *crossingplaces* with others. To try to imagine the 'stories' behind the faces we see. To remember that we are 'stories in progress' surrounded by other 'stories in progress' and begin to realise that at any moment our story might begin to interact with the 'story' of someone else if we are willing to allow God to direct us in this way.

It's about their story, your story, and God's story.

When Christian faith presents itself as a system of belief, postmodern and post-postmodern people are often sceptical. But when it presents itself as a redemptive way of life within human history, they see something unique and hopeful.

3 The Communal Factor: expect conversion to normally occur in the context of authentic Christian community not just in the context of information

Jesus spoke of the powerful effect of Christians genuinely loving one another and of love's ability to make an impact on the lives of those who are not-yet Christians. We need to remember that the opposite is also true - when Christians don't love one another and have poor relationships - it will drive people away from Jesus and his claims.

Our churches must be converted into missional communities of disciple-making where belonging precedes believing and becoming. When we become a truly welcoming community, helping anyone who joins us to feel truly accepted, then we shall be able to journey with them into faith in Jesus Christ.

4 The Journey Factor: to see disciple-making as a holistic process and unending journey, not just a conversion event

We're not just seeking to get someone to pray a prayer – but rather to commit to a life of on-going journey of discipleship and spiritual formation (which is true of ourselves too). How do we integrate processes with milestones? patience with urgency? exploration with decision and more exploration?... As our stories dance with the stories of our non-Christian friends, sharing in those meaningful conversations, then the Holy Spirit will draw us into significant faith moments.

5 The Holy Spirit Factor: believe that God is at work 'out there' in everyone, not just 'in here' in the church

McLaren reminds us that many people are experiencing the Holy Spirit but just don't realise it. God reaches them through beauty; humour; joy; rest; excitement; justice and mercy. Our task is one of helping people interpret their spiritual experiences.



6 The Learning Factor: see evangelism as part of your own discipleship – not just the other person's

Have you had the experience of sharing about Jesus with someone else and getting a response? If it has been negative, it has probably sharpened your prayer life! If positive, then you have been encouraged to do it again. Either way, your life as a disciple has grown.

(Share a personal experience, or a story such as those on Baptist evangelist Chris Duffett's blog³).

7 The Missional Factor: see evangelism as recruiting people for God's mission on earth and not just people for heaven

Remember the Lord's Prayer: 'your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. In this way we contribute, one life at a time, to changing the world. The next person whose life you speak into might in turn influence a whole family for God, or a whole group of people in their workplace.

8 The Service Factor: see evangelism as one facet of our identity as servants to all

McLaren says that just like a good waiter in a restaurant, our (everyday, all-day) attitude should be, 'who needs my help, who can I serve?' or 'who can I be a blessing to today?' The words of the gospel must be accompanied by the deeds and spirit of the gospel.

In a confusing world full of mixed messages and many questions when people don't know where to turn or who to listen to, we need people who are willing to be salt and light; people who will show and share the hope and the grace of God in what we say, and in what we do and what we are. God calls you and me to play our part in his plans for the world he made and he loves.

³ <http://duffett.wordpress.com>

Conclusion

During these weeks when we're reflecting on how we can be more effective as individual Christians and how this church might more effectively build God's kingdom, we want to make it a priority to reflect on our own lives and how we relate to the people we meet regularly.

As we conclude today, let's reflect on our life situations for a couple of minutes.

Jesus calls you and me to show his compassion and share his message of reconciliation.

Can you think of any opportunities you've had recently in your *crossingplaces*, to guide conversation around to things that really matter, to ask questions that might help others in their spiritual journey?

Are you yourself willing to commit to being a spiritual friend and allow God to 'train' you to help you to be a companion on the way for those around you, so that you become someone who is intentionally seeking to help others in their spiritual journey?

After a time of silence, lead in prayer for God's help in sharing the message of Jesus.

FEEDBACK

If you have a feedback board (see page 2) or some other system to record what God has been saying to people in this sermon series, this would be a good time to give a reminder.





5 Re-imagining the Church

Aim

To help us begin to re-imagine and re-organise the church in a missional way.



Read

Nehemiah 2

Introduction:

History is punctuated with great men and women of the past; people who in one way or another made a significant impact on others. Among them we might list people like Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Edison, Mohandas Ghandi, Henry Ford, Martin Luther-King Jr, Nelson Mandela and Bill Gates. They were all people who left their mark on the world.

Mother Teresa is known throughout the world for her compassion. Leonardo da Vinci, according to Wikipedia (not always fully accurate), is renowned as 'an Italian polymath; scientist, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, painter, sculptor, architect, botanist, musician and writer'. Quite a CV. Great people who in one way or another made an impact on others.

The bible too is filled with such history-makers, among them the central character in our passage today – Nehemiah. He is presented to us as one of the most strategic thinkers in scripture and has become a bit of a role model for many church leaders today.

He stands out as a man of purpose and more importantly, a man with God's purposes at his heart. Nehemiah is someone we in the 21st century western church need to learn from.

Lessons from a great leader:

1 Listen to the voice and heart of God

On hearing that his 'home-town' (the city of Jerusalem) had been ransacked, Nehemiah unburdens his heart to God. For several days he shares his dilemma with God – his pain, his disappointment, and his developing hopes and dreams.

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said: "O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night". (1:4-6)

As Nehemiah spends time with God he gets a renewed sense of who God is (the 'Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God') and of what God is like (the one 'who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands').

This was important for Nehemiah and it is just as important for us today! We can have the best strategy in the world, the most dynamic leaders in town and an eagerness that is unrestrained. But if God is not setting our vision and 'calling the shots' and we are not responding to his heart for our community, we are, as it were, climbing up a slippery pole.

It is important in our mission (which is actually God's mission) that we seek to remember (time and again) that God cares and knows more about our community than we do or ever will. It is God's heartbeat that we want to pick up on and his voice that we need to hear.



LESSON No 1

To find a way to live out this principle in your current circumstances. How can you get a greater sense of God's heart and longing for your community? How can you, practically, listen to what God is now seeking to do in your community? (Remember, that it is actually God's church and community!)

LESSON No 2

We need to identify a clear, God-given sense of purpose and build and develop our own life and the life of our church around this. In the journey of **re: focus** we shall be helped to work this out for ourselves both for times when we are apart from each other and for what we do together as the church.

2 Establish a clear sense of purpose (2:5)

Having allowed God to set his focus, Nehemiah begins to crystallise a plan born out of a clear sense of purpose.

*"If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried **so that I can rebuild it.**" (2:5)*

Nehemiah's 'home-town' is in ruins. (For Nehemiah and other Jews this symbolised national and religious disgrace, rather than God being honoured and worshipped as he should be).

*They said to me, "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and **disgrace**. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:3)*

God's honour was at stake and the way to begin to restore this was for someone to begin to rebuild the city. Having allowed God to set his focus, Nehemiah now senses the call of God upon his life and ultimately upon his fellow Jews. Out of this a new, clear and personal sense of purpose develops – to rebuild the city.

A clear sense of purpose is necessary for us if we are going to make an impact on our community for God. It is not wrong to be purposeful. It is not unspiritual to be purposeful. It is vital – for God's sake and for the sake of the people in our community.

3 Develop a practical strategy for achieving his purpose (2:7-8)

For Nehemiah this amounted to very practical and mundane matters – safe-conduct and resources to complete the job.

"If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" (2:7-8)

It's not exactly what you'd call spiritual, but without this step no further progress would be made.

We've already seen that it's vital for us to have a clear sense of purpose, but once we've established that, we then need to work out a way of achieving it; a practical way of making that a reality.

This will no doubt mean reflecting upon important questions, like:

- As we develop our lives (individually) and life (collectively) around our sense of purpose, what specific things are we trying to achieve?
- How can we best achieve those things?

To ask through prayerful reflection:

- Do we need to begin to do some new/ additional things that will achieve these aims?
- Do we need to reflect upon and consider ceasing some of the things we currently do?
- Do we need to be developing our Christian character to help us achieve our aims? If so, what might help us to do this?



(This is not an exclusive list, simply an idea of what we may want to reflect on at this time).

LESSON No 3a

We need to set aside time to work through this. **re:focus** provides this time and will bring some focus here.

Research our community – to identify the ACTUAL needs (2:13ff)

One day a commuter, while travelling home from work, saw a dad and two small children on the tube. In looking closely at them he could see that the two small children were running wild and that the father was either oblivious to this or just didn't care. Concerned for the welfare of the two children the man plucked up courage to speak to the father. The father's response, "I'm, sorry, we've just left the hospital and my wife has just died".

Sometimes we misunderstand or assess a situation wrongly. That's not an unusual thing to do – not least of all because on occasions we lack an adequate amount of information.

This can happen in pretty much every area of life: in personal relationships, in business life and even in the context of the local church. For us in the local church it is relatively easy to assume certain things about our community only to discover, later on, that we had wrongly assessed the situation. In Proverbs 24:3-4 we read:

*By wisdom a house is built,
and through understanding it is established;
through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare
and beautiful treasures.*

Good research is the basis for any successful plans for mission purposes.

We will be wise to model ourselves on Nehemiah who took time to research his situation so that he could identify the actual needs:

By night I went out through the Valley Gate towards the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I... (2:13-15).

This is one of the pillars of **re:focus** – a survey of the local community to find out, eg, who lives here, the age profile of our community, who's around during the daytime, who works outside the local community, what the community resources are / are lacking and so on.

This gives us an opportunity to be aware of many of the needs within our community so that we can then begin to pray, "Lord, **which** of these needs do you want us, collectively or individually, to respond to **at this time?**"

LESSON No 3b

To act on this principle of godly wisdom and pray that we might practically respond to the needs in our community that are on God's heart.

4 Action – individual steps that enabled his purpose (2:9, 11, 12...)

Some people are procrastinators – you may be one, you may be married to one. You may have considered becoming one, but just never got around to it! If we are speaking honestly – churches are pretty good at procrastinating.

One of the great things about Nehemiah is that he wasn't much of a procrastinator. God had placed a burden on his heart and he was going to get on and so something about it. Not just anything, mind you, only those things that helped achieve his purpose.

*So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king's letters.
I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men.*



By night I went out through the Valley Gate towards the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down...

Then I moved on towards the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool

Finally, I turned back and re-entered through the Valley Gate.

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace".

Here is a man with a clear sense of purpose, a strategy to achieve it, a person who not only 'talks the talk' but also 'walks the walk'. He takes the steps necessary to achieve his aims, because his desire is to honour God and thrill his heart.

LESSON No 4

To do what we need to do so that we can achieve the purpose that God has place on our hearts because we want to thrill his heart.

CONCLUSION

The book of Nehemiah doesn't tell us if Nehemiah re-imagined how Jerusalem might look as a result of his 'ministry'. But he certainly applied himself to do what he could about the needs there. God gives us a similar challenge: what will we do about the needs in our community? Are we willing to listen for the voice of God – to get a sense of God's agenda for our church and community? Will we commit ourselves to God's purposes in our situation? Will we respond with godly wisdom and plan prayerfully to do and to be all that God asks of us so that we might thrill his heart and build his kingdom in our community.

Having come to the end of this series of sermons in preparation for our journey over the next few months, using **re:focus**, let's now spend a few moments in silent prayer and reflection. Let's invite the Holy Spirit to help us imagine what our church might look like (in say, 18 or 24 months times) and how our individual lives might look if we follow these lessons from the life of Nehemiah.

NOTE

There are a number of video stories about Baptist churches involved with their communities that can be used as examples at www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220847/Video_and_Podcast.aspx

FEEDBACK

If you have a feedback board (see page 2) or some other system to record what God has been saying to people in this sermon series, this would be a good time to give a reminder. The small groups are also another opportunity for feedback, even before the main meeting that the facilitators will be holding with the congregation.

Remind the congregation of the date(s) of the congregation meeting(s) or weekend, and of the importance of being there to contribute to the **re:focus** journey for the church.





celebrating who you are and
developing your **crossing**places

Module 2: Small Group Studies

re:focus is a journey to help your church:

- focus on its life as a Christian community
- develop new and existing *crossingplaces*
- share the Christian message in actions and words.

Using a selection of the **re:focus** modules, the church will:

- listen to each other and to God
- be guided by experienced external facilitators



Small Group Studies

To provide five weeks of preparation for small groups of all ages: adults, youth, children (up to 11 years).



Small Group Themes

Before the main **re:focus** meetings begin, there are five small group sessions that will help us understand more about churches sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. In the groups we can also start the process of listening to each other and to God about our own church.

Module 2 includes three separate sets of material designed

- for adult house groups
- for youth groups (in the week or during Sunday services)
- for children's groups (in the week or during Sunday services)

The questions and bible readings provided for each session should be printed or photocopied for everyone in the group. The group leader can decide whether each question is used. The themes for the adult and young people's groups are the same as the sermons in Module 1, so the leader may want to read those sermon notes.

The leader should keep key responses and share them with the church leaders and re:focus facilitators.

For Adult House Groups

The groups follow the themes of the sermons in Module 1, although they may also be used independently of them.

1 Getting a grip on reality

To recognise the significance of, and begin to understand, the changes in our culture.

2 Recovering your focus

To help us develop a clear and biblical understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

3 Discovering your place in God's plans

To help us understand or rediscover our place in God's plans for the world.

4 Sharing the message of Jesus

To show that sharing the good news of Jesus can be a 'normal' part of our everyday living and would be welcomed by many people because God is already at work in the world.

5 Re-imagining the church

To help us begin to re-imagine and re-organise the church in a missional way.

Appreciation is expressed to Alisdair Longwill who developed the original outlines from which these group studies have been developed.



For Young People's Groups

The youth work sessions are presented as more of a menu than an outline – a range of activities that you can choose from to fit your setting rather than a timed outline you must follow. This allows you to tailor the session to suit your setting, for example depending on the size of your group, the time you have available and what you know works for them.

Each session therefore will have a number of suggestions of, for example, film clips, conversation starters, guest speakers and a bible base. You should pick and choose from these to make the right session for you.

The sessions make no reference to times of worship etc, as it is assumed you will continue with whatever format you usually use, whether a small group in a back room during the main church service, or a separate youth event with a larger group. Use your discretion for dividing in to smaller groups as appropriate for discussion etc.

- 1 **Getting a grip on reality**
- 2 **Recovering your focus**
- 3 **Discovering your place in God's plans**
- 4 **Being salt and light in your world**
- 5 **Re-imagining the Church**

For Children's Groups

1 This is me!

This session helps the children to look at their own individual identity; who they are, what they like to do and why they go to church.

2 These are my friends!

This session helps the children to look at the people that they spend time with; who they are and what they like to do together, including whether or not they go to church.

3 In the team (Part 1)

This session helps the children to understand their place in God's plans for the world. Using the football analogy from the adult sermon 3 they will find out how to play their part on God's team; tackling sin and scoring goals (developing the character of Jesus).

4 In the team (Part 2)

This session picks up on the football theme from the previous week to help the children to understand their place in God's plans for the world. This time the focus is on the need to listen to the coach (God) and work together as a team (the church).

5 Join the party

This session encourages the children to think about the sort of things that they enjoy about going to church and the things that they would like to share with their friends.



Module 1 contains five sermon outlines for adults, which follow the same themes as the adult housegroup and young people's group materials.

If you are setting up new groups for **re:focus**, then they could meet after the corresponding sermon, enabling your church to explore more fully, discuss and engage with the material.



Small Group Study Notes for Adult Groups



1 Getting a grip on reality

To recognise the significance of, and begin to understand, the changes in our culture.

Introduction:

We live in an ever-changing world; change is taking place all around us. In the wider UK culture, moral values have changed, 'normal' Sunday activities are different today than twenty years ago, church attendance and the average person's understanding of what takes place in church is minimal now, at best. And this is to say nothing of technological development, uncertain employment, and the need (for many) to work increased hours to pay a large mortgage repayment. In retirement, new opportunities for travel have emerged, but also new responsibilities for some who may be caring for both a very elderly generation and for grandchildren, whose parents are working.

Deep-rooted changes at the 'gut-level' of individuals are also taking place: the way people make decisions, the way authorities and authority figures are regarded and the way people view matters of faith. All these and more are in a state of flux.



Introductory Questions:

- 1 Identify the changes have you seen in our society in the past 20 years or so?
- 2 Which of these changes has made the greatest impact on your life?



Acts 17:16-34
(This is the main bible reading used in Module 1, sermon 1)

- 3 Recall the Apostle Paul's background. How did his background differ from the culture of Athens?
- 4 What challenges did Paul face as he sought to communicate the gospel message in Athens?
- 5 Some people in Athens became Christians. What aspects of Paul's approach to them were helpful in that context?

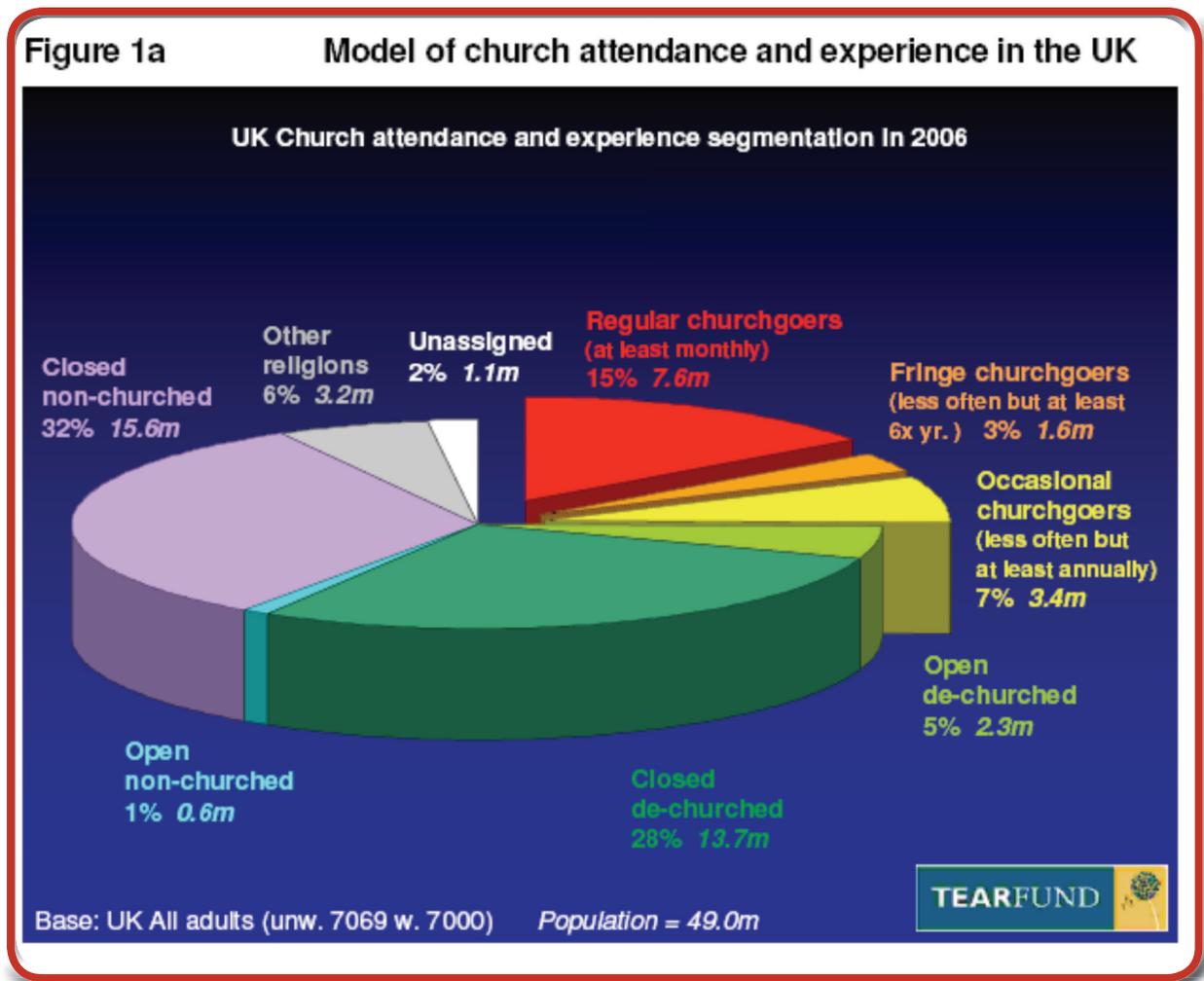


Look carefully at the diagram below, based on an extensive UK survey conducted by Tearfund in 2006.

In this context:

- 'De-churched' means they used to go to church but no longer attend
- 'Non-churched' means they have NOT habitually/regularly been a church-goer ever
- 'Open' means willing to consider coming to church if invited appropriately
- 'Closed' means UNWILLING to consider coming to church if invited appropriately.

- 6 What negatives and positives do you see in these survey results?
- 7 As a group, briefly consider each segment in the chart in turn. Apart from the 'Regular churchgoers' segment, identify people you know well for each segment as you do this.
- 8 Quietly think through your own typical week. Where do you regularly meet people who are not yet Christians? As we work through **re:focus**, we shall be calling these our *crossingplaces*. In prayer, focus on your *crossingplaces* and ask God to show you
 - who you should be coming alongside to help them move on in their faith journey
 - any situation that you should become involved in as a new *crossingplace* for you.
- 9 Note down what God has said to you personally and share any aspects of this where you would appreciate others in the group praying for you as well.



Small Group Study Notes for Adult Groups



2 Recovering your Focus

To help us develop a clear and biblical understanding about being a follower of Jesus.

Introductory questions:

- 1 Think back over your own life. Can you remember an early ambition?
- 2 Were there any factors that determined your 'purpose' in life?
- 3 Describe how your guiding principles for life may have changed for you over the years.



Matthew 22: 33-40
(This is the main bible reading in Module 1, sermon 2)

- 4 Summarise the answer that Jesus gave to the Pharisee in this passage. (Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.) Put the reply into your own words.
- 5 If we take seriously '*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind*', what does that do to the focus of our lives?
 - a Describe ways that you, or people you know about, express such love in practice.
 - b What more could we be doing individually or together as church to show our love for God?

- 6 Jesus also said, "*Love your neighbour as yourself.*"
 - a We often speak about love being shown in actions and in words. Give examples.
 - b If as human beings, God has created us with body, mind and soul, describe ways that we can show God's love ministering to the whole person.
- 7 In Jesus saying, "*Love you neighbour as yourself*", he may be telling us to give special Godly attention to our immediate next-door neighbour, but equally it may be to the people we thought about in our *crossingplaces* in Week 1, or in the new *crossingplaces* yet to be opened up to us. Remember that our *crossingplaces* are where we meet regularly with non-Christians - friends, relatives, colleagues or strangers.
 - a Think back to Week 1 and what God was saying to you. Share if you have seen God at work in a *crossingplace*, or if you have had any further revelation about your personal *crossingplaces*.
 - b Does the church have *crossingplaces* ie events, groups or projects that the church runs that involve non-Christians? Describe how these show God's love. Are there opportunities for people to explore faith in Jesus connected to these *crossingplaces*?
- 8 Jesus described at least part of his purpose for coming to earth in Luke 4:18 and 19 when he quoted the prophet Isaiah. Describe Jesus' 'focus' for his earthly life. What does this say to us?

Spend time reflecting and praying about your discussions and for each other.

Small Group Study Notes for Adult Groups



3 Discovering your place in God's plans

To help us understand or rediscover our place in God's plans for the world.

Introductory discussion:

- 1 Some people, or groups of people, in this country and overseas, seem far away from God. Who would you put into this category? Share stories of people becoming Christians in unlikely circumstances.



2 Corinthians 5:18-20

- 2 Summarise the role God has given to each of us in bringing others to Jesus Christ. How do you feel about having a part in this?



Matthew 5:13-20
(part of the main bible reading in Sermon 3)

- 3 What does the bible mean when it says that Jesus is 'the light of the world'? (Think about Jesus' mission – what he came to do.)
- 4 What does the bible mean when it says that we (also) are the 'light of the world' and we are the 'salt of the earth'? (Look at the remainder of Matthew chapter 5 and also 6 and 7).

- 5 It could be said that three main ways of being 'salt and light' are
 - a Developing the character of Jesus
 - b Showing the compassion of Jesus
 - c Sharing the message of Jesus

In what ways can we work this out in our lives day by day?

- 6 Have you ever met anyone who lived in this way and had an impact on your life? Share this with the group.

To live as the 'light of the world' and the 'salt of the earth' we must begin to be like Jesus in character. (Think of the irony of someone who is not remotely fit trying to lead an aerobics or keep fit class). So spend five minutes quietly reflecting on your life values and your character and pray that God will 'fine-tune' your character as needed.

Consider forming a regular prayer couplet or triplet to talk and pray about God making you more Christ-like, and for your *crossingplaces* where Jesus wants you to be an ambassador for him?



Small Group Study Notes for Adult Groups



4 Sharing the message of Jesus

To show that sharing the good news of Jesus can be a 'normal' part of our everyday living and would be welcomed by many people because God is already at work in the world.

Introduction:

An extensive survey from the UK Office of National Statistics in 2011 revealed the fact that 69% stated that they had a religious affiliation with Christianity. The actual question asked was 'What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?' This came as quite surprise to some people, especially to the media, because atheism is often assumed to be the typical view in this country. The statistic should encourage us in our task of sharing the message of Jesus.

Introductory quiz:

- 1 Name the last five winners of the Eurovision song contest.
- 2 List the five richest people in England.
- 3 Name five recent Nobel Prize winners for science.

(Note to leader: You will have to check your own answers on the internet, unless you have a quiz buff in your group!)

More questions (you can answer these privately):

- 4 Name five friends who have helped you in times of difficulty.
- 5 Think of five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
- 6 Which five people do you enjoy spending time with?

Each share the name of one of these people and say why you selected this person.

Charles Schulz, the creator of the *Peanuts* comic strip, said,

"The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money ... or the most awards. They simply are the ones that care the most."



John 4:1-30

(This is the main bible reading used in Module 1, Sermon 4)

- 1 Re-tell this event to each other in your own words. What was extraordinary about this story? In what ways was it ordinary? Can anyone in the group speak about the way they came to faith in Jesus, highlighting the ordinary and extraordinary aspects of that?
- 2 Thinking of the way Jesus talked to people he met, how would you describe that? Preaching? Teaching? Dialogue? Chatting? What were the characteristics of his conversation? What lessons are there for us about sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with people we meet?



- 3 Jim Currin in his book *Sharing Faith the Jesus Way* says, 'Sharing our Christian faith today involves three stories. There is your story, the story of the other person, and there is God's story in Jesus. The interaction between these stories forms a 'triangle of relationships' – between you, the other person and God. In practice this relationship will be different in every situation.' How do you feel about this way of evangelism? Give examples from your own experience.
- 4 Think about the people you meet regularly who are not-yet Christians – the people in your *crossingplaces*. How 'connected' do you feel with those who are your family members / neighbours / immediate colleagues / those who actively share in and practise your hobbies and interests alongside you? Discuss ways to become more 'connected' with them?
- 5 Think of someone you know who seems far from God. For a couple of minutes reflect on the fact that God the Holy Spirit is working in that person's life. Then thank God for that and ask him to show you how you might better share God's grace with them and 'bless' that person. Write the name down for your own reference, and if you can share the name and brief information without breaking a confidence, share the names for ongoing prayer in the group.
- 6 Plan one day during the next week (tomorrow's probably best!) when the whole group will make a special effort to serve and bless all the people you meet in whatever way (deed and/or word) is appropriate. Before leaving home that day, pray that God will help you to do this in a way that thrills his heart.

Spend any remaining time practising 'deep' listening. Pair up with someone that you don't know particularly well. Tell some of your life story when, for any reason, you experienced God, or your life was blessed by a Christian. Set a time limit. Share back with your partner two things from their story that made an impact on you in some way as you listened.

As a group pray that God will help you to grow into people open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, willing to serve and bless others. Pray for your *crossingplaces* and the 'blessing' day.



Small Group Study Notes for Adult Groups



5 Re-imagining the Church

To help us begin to organise the church in a missional way.

Introduction

Last week we were all going to have a day when we were going to especially 'bless' people. We also prayed for someone in our *crossingplaces*. Share your encouragements and disappointments and future hopes in this area.

Having thought about how we can be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ right through the week when we are often apart from each other, this session is going to focus on when we are doing things together as the church. To do that we are going into the Old Testament book of Nehemiah.

God's people had been in exile in a foreign land. At the beginning of the book of Nehemiah, two groups had already returned to Jerusalem, but news came to Nehemiah in Persia that the wall and gates of Jerusalem were still in disrepair. Nehemiah was distressed and spent days fasting and praying about the situation.



Nehemiah's prayer
in Nehemiah 1:5-11

- 1 For Nehemiah the first step on the road to fulfilling God's purposes was to get a proper sense of who God is and what God is like. Summarise Nehemiah's description of God. What words would you use to 'describe' God?
- 2 What things prevent us from having a proper sense of who/what God is like?
- 3 Share with the group one of the 'special' things God has done in your life. How does that help you 'describe' God?



Nehemiah 2

- 4 Summarise Nehemiah's actions in this chapter.
- 5 The idea of having a strategy to achieve a purpose might seem a bit mechanistic. Is it wrong or un-spiritual to have a strategy? Why does Nehemiah 2 seem to applaud Nehemiah for having a strategy?
- 6 Nehemiah would not have been able to serve God in Jerusalem without a clear sense of purpose. We don't always find this an easy thing to achieve in church life. Reflect on the activities and services of your church. Where is the majority of energy and focus directed? How does this square up with your desired purpose as a church?



- 7 Nehemiah surveyed the situation of the walls well and had many discussions with the community 'stakeholders'. Are there matters in your community that God has asked you to become involved in as a church? Might God be saying something new about this at this time?
- 8 In a culture where 60% of the population are currently beyond the reach of our church services we need to give thought to how we can reach such people with the reality and message of God's grace. This means that we need to explore ways of connecting with people. Have you ideas of how this might be done? (The ongoing journey with **re:focus** will help you further in thinking about questions 4 and 5.)

The rebuilding of the wall and gates of Jerusalem was a huge task but Nehemiah had involved many people, utilising their gifts. Glance through Nehemiah 3 to see the names! There was opposition and hardship, but with further prayer and the setting up of a rota of guards, the task was completed and God glorified.

Reflect on how you relate to the characters this biblical story. Spend the rest of time in prayer together for the church and the community. Pray about the activities of the church, perhaps the opposition, the energy needed to go on, maybe the courage to stop something. Pray about your own skills and God-given gifts and offer them to God for his service. Pray for the ongoing journey of **re:focus** over the next few months.

Within your group, some key insights from God may have been shared over the five sessions which will be of help to the facilitators. Please pass these on via the church leaders.





Youth Leaders' Notes

Introduction

These youth work sessions are presented as more of a menu than an outline – a range of activities that you can choose from to fit your setting rather than a timed outline you must follow. This allows you to tailor the session to suit your setting, for example depending on the size of your group, the time you have available and what you know works for them.

Each session therefore will have a number of suggestions of, for example, film clips, conversation starters, guest speakers and a bible base. You should pick and choose from these to make the right session for you.

The sessions also make no reference to times of worship etc, as it is assumed you will continue with whatever format you usually use, whether a small group in a back room during the main church service, or a separate youth event with a larger group. Use your discretion for dividing in to smaller groups as appropriate for discussion etc.

Please consider how some of the views expressed by the young people can be shared at the main **re:focus** congregation meeting (Module 6). If some of the young people will be there, then you could give them the responsibility of sharing. Otherwise you will need to pass on key comments. There are also further exercises in Module 8 pages 15-17 that can be done if young people are going to present at the **re:focus** congregation meeting or weekend.



Module 1 contains five sermon outlines for adults, which follow the same themes as the adult housegroup and young people's group materials.

If you are setting up new groups for **re:focus**, then they could meet after the corresponding sermon, enabling your church to explore more fully, discuss and engage with the material.

Appreciation is expressed to Robin Smith who developed these Youth Leaders' Notes.

Youth Groups

1 Getting a grip on reality



To help the young people understand the differences between cultures within and beyond the church between their generation and that of their parents/grandparents in the church. With this information, they can reflect on why their friends might not come to church.

Warm Ups

Play a game where one person is sent out of the room, and the rest decide a 'code' which they have to work out, for example:

- **Follow the leader** - In a circle, have one person designated the leader who everyone has to copy. The 'outsider' stands in the middle and has to work out who is starting the actions.
- **Wink Murder** – One person (the detective) is sent out of the room, a second person is secretly designated the killer. When the detective comes in, the murderer starts knocking off the group by winking at them without the detective working out who they are. When you are winked at, you must die in the most spectacular way possible.
- **Big Blue Train** – Each person in the group says "I went on a big blue train and in my suitcase I packed a ...(insert object)". The leader should decide a 'code' by which you differentiate whether they are right or wrong. This has nothing to do with what they say, but may be, for example, whether their legs are crossed – crossed = right, uncrossed = wrong. Or whether they're wearing glasses or are male or female. Gradually the group will work out the code, but some will not (be sensitive to this and stop the game in time to avoid humiliation).

Link – what does it feel like to be the outsider, when everyone knows what is going on except you.

Listen/Watch/Think

Avatar

- when the soldiers arrive on the blue planet Pandora and are amazed at the new things they see.
- Alternatively, later on Jake Sully is attacked by a pack of viperwolves and Neytiri saves him by killing them. In the conversation following, Jake thanks her for the great thing, and she tells him off because of the awful thing that happened – it is about how Sully doesn't understand the culture of Pandora.

Toy Story 3

- In the clip when the toys arrive in the children's home they are amazed at the beautiful place where everything is different.
- You could also use *Toy Story 1* when Woody and Buzz end up next door at Sid's house where toys are tortured.

There's lots of other options – you could show something like the *Railway Children* or something where childhood is represented very differently from today's culture.

Link – the point is to help them understand what it might be like living in a different culture.



Guests

One possibility might be to prepare a visiting guest who is older to come and answer questions about their childhood – a parent or grandparent – to help them think about the fact that life has not always been full of computers, music, jeans, university etc.

Or invite someone from a different country to talk about comparisons between UK and other parts of the world.

General Discussion

It might be useful to record answers to this on big sheets of paper

- Have you ever been abroad? What was different? What was the same?
- What is normal for you, but new to your grandparents / parents / older brothers or sisters?
- Imagine you were going to a new situation – a new country, or planet, or school etc. Would you try to fit in, to become like them, or stick out and stay true to yourself?

Main Point



Acts 17:20-33

This is Paul standing in front of the 'Areopagus' to talk about this new thing called 'Christianity'. The Areopagus were a group of wise people who discussed new ideas about religion and philosophy – a bit like standing up in parliament to talk about church.

The church in the UK has been around for hundreds of years, and in British culture it used to be really important – in government, in every local community, education, schools etc.

Is that still the case? What has changed?

What are the most important things in our world? (money, appearance, education etc)

Why do lots of your friends not come to church?

In what ways is God relevant to your friends, even if they can't understand it? Relate this back to the Areopagus where they need things in life (security, happiness, love) but don't know it comes from God.

Depending on your group you could have a conversation about where God is active in their lives without them knowing it – creativity in culture, love in communities/families, beauty in creation, support in trouble. This is the 'made in God's image' bit from Gen 1:26





Youth Groups

2 Recovering your Focus

Aim

To help the young people explore their relationship with God and with other people round about them.

Warm Ups

Ask the young people to bring with them something special to them (and ideally not valuable/fragile!) - for example a photograph, toy, CD etc. Spend the first few minutes talking about these, focusing on what makes them special.

Discuss

If your house was burning down, what three things would you save and why? After a bit of discussion ask if their life would end without these three things.

These activities start us thinking about our priorities along the lines of Mt 6:21 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'.

Listen/Watch/Think

Find a current song about 'stuff' – where money/cars/women etc are seen as the goal; eg Lily Allen 'The Fear', Kanye West 'Gold Digger', Linkin Park 'in the end'.

Play the music, or watch the video from Youtube.

Discuss what people look for in life – what are our priorities.

Main Point

In Mt 22:33-40, an 'expert in the law', or theological genius, asks Jesus which of the 613 or so commandments in the Old Testament was the most important. What is the priority?

He quotes two: love God with everything you've got and love other people as much as you (should) love yourself.

There's a vertical and horizontal element here. On a big piece of paper draw a vertical line with arrows, representing our 'vertical' relationship with God. You can perhaps think of more colourful or creative ways of doing this with post it notes / drawing etc.



Read James 1:17 and at one end of the line write things that come 'from above' – think beyond created order, what good gifts do we get from God.

Then from Rom 12:1-2 write at the other end of the line things we can do to please God.

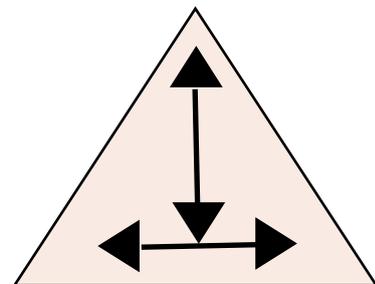
At the bottom of the sheet draw a horizontal line with arrows on. This represents our relationships with others.



At one end write/draw/stick the things that we 'get' from others – love, friendship, team mates etc.

At the other end, what is it we can do to bless others? (Gen 22:17)

The four points of this triangle(!) match back to Mt 22:33-40 – love God and love your neighbours. These two lines should be our focus in life.





Youth Groups

3 Discovering your Place in God's Plans

Aim

To help the young people consider how to be salt and light in the world, and become more like Jesus in their character.

Warm Ups

Influence:

Prepare a selection of edible items (being aware of potential food allergies) and hide them in the room. Blindfold one member of the group and pick two others as persuaders. As each food item is revealed silently to the group ask the two persuaders to try and convince their blindfolded friend either to eat or not eat each food. The blindfolded person has to decide who to trust.

The Impersonators

In groups of two or three, come up with a number of impersonations of people that the group has to guess. This might be celebrities or characters from films or cartoons, or it could be people within the church that everyone knows. This can be made easier through catchphrases, or hard through banning the use of words, depending on your group.

(It is wise to exclude people within the group to avoid picking on traits that young people dislike about themselves).

The idea behind these games is picking up on copying someone or being influenced by them – to do what they would do.

Listen/Watch/Think

Find a video clip of someone either learning a new skill, training for an event or trying to become like their hero, for example a clip from *Chariots of Fire*, *Rocky*, or more recently the *Harry Potter* films have lots of scenes training for quidditch, 'worshipping' a new professor, welcoming visiting students for the tri- etc.

Similarly many Disney cartoons would work – Dumbo learning to fly, "I wanna be like you" from the *Jungle Book* or the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* is ideal because Mickey Mouse actually dresses and acts like the wizard.

The linking point is either what do you do to become like someone else, or what do you invest to become better/different?

Fashion Magazines

Bring along a few magazines which show current trends and celebrities: *Hello*, *OK* etc. Make sure you check them for any inappropriate content first!

Spend some time going through those thinking about who is 'hot and not', what styles are in and out, who are the fashion icons that everyone copies.

You'll probably also find adverts for beauty products which imply 'use this product and becomes as successful/beautiful as me'.

Magazines can be cut up and turned in to a poster, titled 'copy cats' or something similar showing who we are 'supposed' to be like ... or become their disciples.



Paper Hero

Using a big sheet of flip chart paper or similar, draw the outline of a person, and create your ideal 'super hero'.

- What powers would they have?
- What costume/name would you give them?
- What particular body parts would be emphasised (X-ray eyes, super muscles etc).



Discuss what Jesus said he had come to do.

Create a new 'paper hero', this time of Jesus – what 'super powers' did he have? Healing, feeding hungry, teaching etc. Bring in other passages you're aware of, eg including the outsiders (Samaritan soldier, Roman centurion, cripple, tax collector); turning tables and challenging leaders; going to pray, worship, learn etc.

Discuss

What do we do to become like other people? – copy clothes, spend time with them or reading about them, imitate them.

What can we do to become like Jesus? (Remember the vertical line from last week)

Partly about being 'holy' with prayer, worship, and listening to Jesus' teaching. One passage we're going to look at further next week is Mt 5:13-16. Becoming like Jesus, imitating or copying him, is not about being super-holy, giving up on your friends to spend all the time reading the bible or singing hymns. It's about starting to transform the world you and your friends live in to make it better.

Next week is about making a difference in the world we live in. (The horizontal line from last week.)





Youth Groups

4 Being Salt and Light in your World

Aim

To help the young people see that they are part of what God is trying to do in this world. It's not just about us being 'holy', but about making a difference in the world they live in.

Depending on where and when you hold your session, you could perhaps start the meeting in near darkness, and have a torch hidden under a bowl which you reveal to start the session.

Start the session with a scary story, or asking about other people's scary stories.

Repeat one of those stories once the light goes on to break its power.

Warm Ups

Blind Objects

Either blindfold one person, or make a box with holes that someone can feel through but not see the contents.

Bring along a variety of objects for the blindfolded person to guess what they are – a mix of obvious, obscure and ideally gross!

Link – how useful is being able to see (light) in life.

Discuss

Have you ever been in a group telling ghost stories? Where/when? Why do we always tell scary stories at night?

Were you ever scared of the dark? Why?

Perhaps you can tell a story of something that scared you in the dark that became less scary when a light went on, eg a noise outside the window, or shadow on the wall.



Matthew 5: 14-16

- Why does Jesus say that we are the light of the world?
- What can we do that makes life less scary or more obvious for other people?

How can we help people who are scared of the dark, or bad events, or death? Or perhaps thinking about the future (job or course after school etc) is scary for some – how can God help there, and how can we help others going through that?

Craft Activity

If your group is crafty and you have time, you could decorate jam jars as a tea light holder with glass paint or pens, using words or a picture that reminds us that we are the light of the world.

There can be a reminder that we don't need to be scared because God is with us – using Josh 1:9 or Rom 8:31ff; however the main point of this session is not that God is the light of the world, but that we have become the light, so don't make this the main point.

The group could perhaps leave this candle holder in their windowsill at home, visible to those outside.

(Usual precautions should be passed on about not leaving candles burning in their windowsill when they go out!)



Food Tasting

Bring a variety of food products with you (remembering possible allergies in your group), and ask individuals to guess what things are either blindfolded or holding their nose.

Alternatively make some food with one key ingredient missing, which will make it dull look poor or taste nasty, eg cupcakes with no sugar or eggs, ginger or chocolate cookies without the key flavour, etc.

All About Salt

Explain the use of salt in the bible as a preservative in the days before fridges and freezers (you should be able to find pictures of this on the internet), or as improving the taste of something. This meant food could be kept for longer through the winter and transported across long distances.

- Roman soldiers were sometimes paid in salt because it was so valuable – they were 'worth their salt' is an old phrase.
- The word 'salary' comes from the word salt. (Sel in French, Saltz in German)

So salt can be used to preserve things for longer.

We now use salt on our roads at winter which makes ice melt more quickly, which can link back to the light analogy of taking away fear.

It also makes food taste better – salt is usually used in the preparation of most cooked food to bring out flavours. Imagine chips without salt, but also in most food.

We need limited amounts of it to survive because it helps our cells use the water we drink – athletes will often take a drink with salt and sugar after exercise to restore the balance again quickly.

So it's about preservation, but also makes things taste better, and work better.

Discussion

Reflecting back on light as taking away fear, and salt as preserving, protecting and making things taste better, what do you think Jesus means when he says we are to be light and salt?

How can we make other people's lives 'taste better'? The covenant God made with Abraham in Gen 12:2,3 talks about us being a blessing to all nations.

This can be in terms of bringing people to church and talking about God with them, but also in 'less spiritual' areas – being kind, caring, defending the bullied, speaking to the lonely, campaigning for justice. All of this is bringing the light of the world out from under its bowl, or adding salt to the bits of our world which are 'less tasty'.

Reflection

Using a central lit candle to represent God, and distributing lots of individual candles or tea lights to each member of the group, have a few moments of quiet when people can think about what they can do to illuminate or flavour their friends, family or community.

Ask them each to light their own candle from God's flame and hold it for a moment while they ask for God's help to do this, before blowing it out and taking it home.

If you and they want to, ask people to share what they are going to do over the next week as part of this.





Youth Groups

5 Re-imagining the Church

Aim

To help the young people imagine how their church could be different, and be more like salt and light in the local community.

Go explore

If it is suitable, spend a bit of time going round your church building and asking the question 'why is this bit like that?' It might be useful to have the minister or someone with more knowledge of traditions with you.

This might help the young people understand why, for example, there is a choir gallery, or why you have glass doors or why they can't paint the youth room black. The idea should be to think of elements of the church design that are either aimed at being more welcoming, or a better witness to God's goodness or glory, even if the young people can't see or understand it.

You might also get ideas from the young people about how things could be improved.

Discuss

Who are the most important people in history? What did they do that changed the world? This could be a discussion or a poster activity.

Nehemiah

In the Old Testament, the people of the nation of Judah were taken as slaves by the Persians far away from their homeland, where the capital city and their temple fell in to ruin over the years. Nehemiah, who was originally from Jerusalem, had become an important servant of the king of Persia called Artaxerxes, and he plucked up the courage to ask the king for help.



Nehemiah 2:1-5, 17,18
(or the whole chapter).

Dragons Den role play

On *Dragon's Den*, people often talk about a problem and a solution (you could bring in a clip from the show, or there's lots on YouTube).

The problem we are exploring in this **re:focus** project is that our church is inward focussed, and is not salt and light to our friends and local community. What is your solution?

Ask the young people in pairs or small groups, to come up with a solution and present it to the Dragons – the rest of the group, or youth leaders ... or even deacons or the minister if it goes well.

Re-imagining the Church

Imagine your church had fallen to pieces and, like Nehemiah, you had to come and rebuild it.

On a big piece of paper, design your ideal church, significantly in a way that becomes salt and light, or a blessing to the local community.

What would it look like, what activities would happen there, what features would it have, etc.

Discussion

Nehemiah heard God telling him to go back and rebuild the city. What do you think God might be telling this church to do differently?

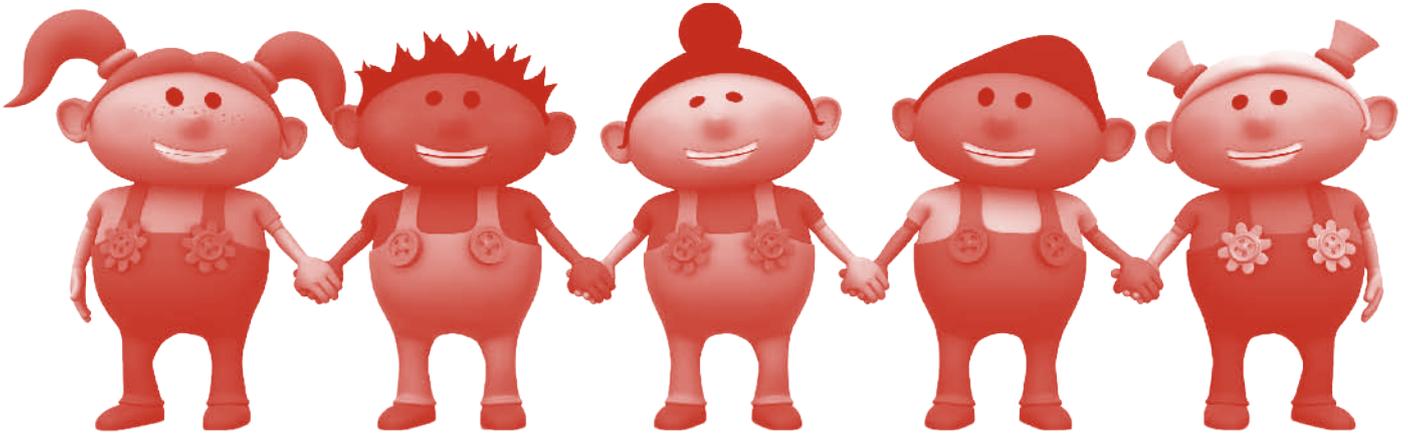
When he started rebuilding, everyone got involved in building a little bit of the wall, each bringing their own skills (you can see this in Chapter 3). What do you think God might ask you to do differently? Both in the church, but more significantly when you are back at school or college etc.

What things can we do as a youth group that will reach out to our friends more?





Children's Leaders' Notes



There are five sessions designed to be used with the children before the main **re:focus** meetings. They don't follow the adult curriculum as they're intended for use with those between the ages of 7 and 11 years whose focus is on 'present life situation' (rather than the 'changing culture' of the adult congregation) and who cannot be assumed to have faith just because of their presence in church.

Instead, the sessions encourage the children to think through their place within the church, their relationships with their friends and how they can share the good things of church life (and hopefully faith in Christ) with them. In particular, the craft activities in sessions 1, 2 and 5 are designed to help the children express how they see themselves, their friends and the church. By creating a wall display the children will hopefully be happy to leave their creations with you rather than taking them home, thereby enabling you to share the outcomes with the rest of the congregation and the **re:focus** facilitators. If you need to cut down the number of sessions it is therefore recommended that you omit sessions 3 and 4 which look at discipleship.

Each session comprises of various games, activities, bible readings, crafts and prayers. There is no standard format. This is because the nature of the material being taught leads itself more naturally to different formats. However, if you would prefer to work to your normal structure then it should be possible to rearrange the material.

Some of the suggested activities require a particular size of group or some basic equipment so, wherever possible, alternatives have been provided to enable you to choose what will work best in your setting. You may also need to adapt or cut out activities to fit into your allotted time. Do not be afraid of doing this, as you know your group and what will and won't work. However, as you prepare, please be aware of the learning outcomes for each session so that you can ensure that you are still going to achieve them.

There is a strong emphasis on building from week to week so any groups that normally rotate leadership may wish to consider sticking to the same leaders for the whole series or at least ensuring adequate briefing between weeks.

1 This is me!

This session helps the children to look at their own individual identity; who they are, what they like to do and why they go to church.

Learning Outcomes: at the end of the session you should have got to know the children a bit better and you will have a wall display showing the members of the group. You should also have started to create a sense of belonging to the church which will be built upon in future weeks.

2 These are my friends!

This session helps the children to look at the people that they spend time with; who they are and what they like to do together, including whether or not they go to church.

Learning outcomes: at the end of the session you should have got to know more about the children's friendship groups and you will have a wall display showing who their friends are and what they like to do together. You may also have had the opportunity to introduce the best friend of all...Jesus.

3 In the team (Part 1)

This session helps the children to understand their place in God's plans for the world. Using the football analogy from the adult sermon 3 they will find out how to play their part on God's team; tackling sin and scoring goals (developing the character of Jesus).

Learning Outcomes: at the end of the session you will have talked about discipleship in relation to sin and forgiveness and developing the character of Jesus with particular reference to the fruit of the Spirit. There will also have been opportunities to discuss the things that hinder discipleship such as the devil as well as the help that is available from the Holy Spirit and to present the gospel clearly, although considerable sensitivity is required with these issues.

4 In the team (Part 2)

This session picks up on the football theme from the previous week to help the children to understand their place in God's plans for the world. This time the focus is on the need to listen to the coach (God) and work together as a team (the church).

Learning Outcomes: at the end of the session you will have talked about the bible, prayer and other Christians as ways in which God can speak to them and teach them. They will have also seen the value in working together in the church.

5 Join the party

This session encourages the children to think about the sort of things that they enjoy about going to church and the things that they would like to share with their friends.

Learning Outcomes: at the end of the session you will have had some fun together and have a list on the wall display of things that they could invite their friends to in order to learn more about God together.



Appreciation is expressed to Fiona Burt who developed these Children's Leaders' Notes.



Children's Groups

1 This is me!

Aim

To help the children to look at their own individual identity; who they are, what they like to do and why they go to church.

At the end of the session you should have got to know the children a bit better and you will have a wall display showing the members of the group. You should also have started to create a sense of belonging to the church which will be built upon in future weeks.

Introductory Games

- For groups that take a while to gather, print off copies of the quiz 'What kind of animal are you?' (page 27) for the children to answer while everyone gathers. If you have plenty of time you could then give them a colouring page with a picture of an animal to colour in.
- For small groups with access to a computer, use an internet-based personality test. Check out www.thesuperheroquiz.com or www.theanimalinyou.com
- For larger groups, play a live game of 'Guess Who?' using the whole group. Select one child to come to the front and look at the other children. Get them to write down the name of one child (or point to them while you have your eyes closed to create added excitement in the group). You then have to ask simple questions which they can answer with a straight 'yes' or 'no' in a process of elimination until you can guess who was chosen. If you like, you can add an incentive such as a small sweet for each question that you need to ask, or say that you will guess after three questions and then give them a sweet if they have been able to beat you.

Explain that we all look different physically (give examples from within the group of different hair, eye colour etc), like to wear different clothes (give examples from within the group) and enjoy doing different things (give examples from within the group if you can or from your own family and friends). Explain that today you want to find out what they are really like (if appropriate, pray for the group as you seek to learn more about each other and about God).



Luke 12: 6-7

Aren't five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one sparrow is forgotten by God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!



This is me! Activity

Sit down in a circle. Tell the children that when a question is asked, if it applies to them, they need to get up, run clockwise around the outside of the circle and then sit back down again as quickly as they can. For variety you could ask them to hop around or to slow the game down you could get them to crawl around. If you are short of space you could just get them to stand up and sit down again. If you have a play parachute then you can make use of it and the children needing to move can swap places underneath the chute.

Ask questions to get them thinking about themselves, their families and pets, their homes, their school, what they like to eat, what they like to do and where they like to go, in preparation for writing their biography later. Start with easy questions to answer and then progress on to more thought-provoking ones, and don't be afraid to question them further about the answers, eg if you say "everyone who watched TV yesterday needs to move" you could follow up with a discussion on the sort of programmes and films that they watch.

Crafty bit

Most children will be familiar with the Nintendo Wii games where their character on the screen is called a mii (an avatar which they customise to look like themselves). They generally have very large heads and small bodies. Print off some examples from the website www.miicharacters.com if you need to. Explain that today they are going to make a 'mii' which they can use to represent themselves on the display wall.

- For younger children - create paper plate faces by drawing or sticking on features and using appropriately coloured knitting wool for hair.
- For older children – ask them to draw and cut out a mii from A4 paper and dress it with scraps of cloth.

Talk with them as they do it about themselves, their families and pets, their homes, their school, what they like to eat, what they like to do and where they like to go. Learn what makes them so special and then help them to write a short biography on the back of their mii eg 'my name is Carla, I live with my mummy and my sister Louise. I have a dog. I like to eat pizza and play computer games'. For those who are less good at writing you can print out a proforma for them to fill in the spaces (see page 28 for template).

Those who finish first can help you to put together the wall display. You will need a roof shape and the words 'our church' to show that they are all part of the church. Let them colour in the letters and then help you to stick the miis under the church roof.

Once everyone has finished and the display is complete, discuss with them why they come to church and what they do and don't like about church. Write their answers on small pieces of paper and stick them on the wall next to their mii. Say that there are lots of different reasons why people come to church but that the best reason is because they want to be a friend of Jesus and get to know more about God.

Prayer

Father God, we thank you that we have been able to come to church today to meet together and learn more about you. We thank you that you created each one of us to be different and special and that you love every single person here. Help us to love you too. Amen



What kind of animal are you?













This is me!

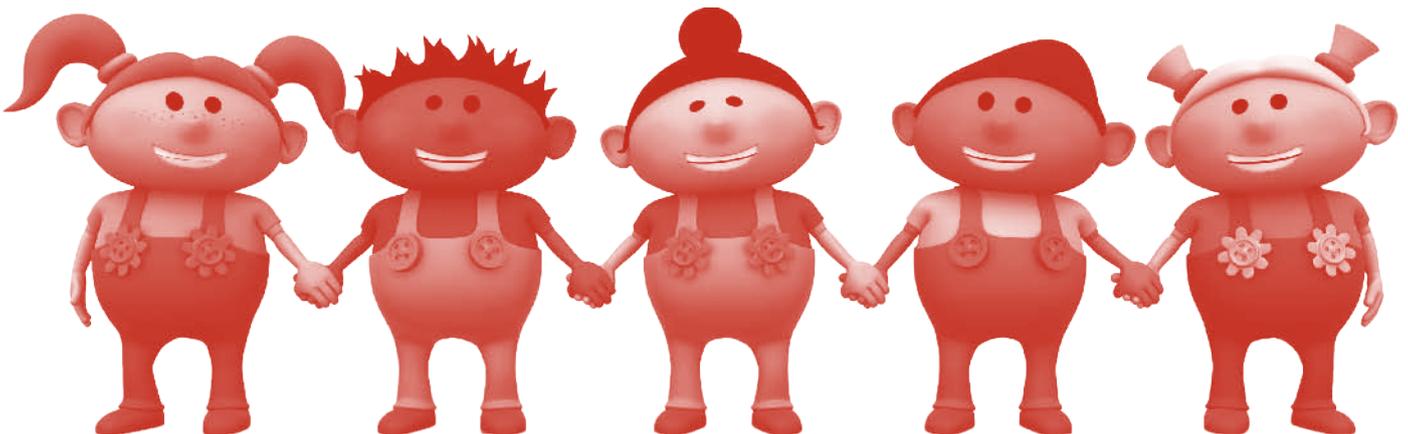
My name is

I live with

Our pet is

I like to eat

I like to play





Children's Groups

2 These are my friends!

Aim

To help the children to look at the people that they spend time with; who they are and what they like to do together, including whether or not they go to church.

At the end of the session you should have got to know more about the children's friendship groups and you will have a wall display showing who their friends are and what they like to do together. You may also have had the opportunity to introduce the best friend of all ... Jesus.

Introductory Games

- For large groups, play a game of 'Clusters'. Get the children to spread out around the room. When you call out a number they need to get into a group with that number of people in it. Any remaining children not in a group are out of the game but can be consoled with a small sweet if you like. Remember that lower numbers are easier and eliminate fewer people. The game ends when you have just two people remaining who can also be given a small sweet as a prize.
- For groups with plenty of space, play a game of 'Chain Tag'. Choose one child to be 'it'. When they tag someone they have to hold hands so that they form a chain until only one child remains 'in'. If you have time for a second round, then that child becomes the new 'it' for the next game.
- For smaller, quieter groups or those that take a while to gather, provide a piece of paper either with a grid on it like a blank crossword (page 31) or three interlocking circles (a Venn diagram) (page 32).
 - For the grid get each child to write their name across the centre and then link on as many of their friends' names as they can before they run out of space.
 - For the circles get the children to write their friends' names in the correct circle, remembering that some friends may fit into two or three circles so need to be put in the overlapping sections.

Explain that during each week there are lots of different people that we spend time with. Sometimes we will be at home with our families, sometimes we will be in school with our class, sometimes we will be at a club or activity like scouts or swimming with our friends. This week we want them to think about the people that they like to spend time with and what they like to do together. If appropriate, you could then pray for the group as you seek to learn more about the people that they like to spend time with and about God.



These are my friends! Activity

Play a game of charades. Start the game off by miming one of the things that you like to do with your friends. The first person to guess correctly then comes to the front to mime what they like to do with their friends. Once they have done a mime they must sit out and not do any more guessing – this will ensure that everyone has a turn. If your group is small enough, you could play more than one round until you have exhausted all the ideas of the group. Finish by asking whether there are things that they like to do that their friends don't or conversely whether there are things that their friends like to do that they are not so keen on. Give examples from your own friends, eg my friend likes to go fishing but I prefer to stay at home and watch TV. Ask whether their friends like to come to church or youth club with them.

Crafty bit

Provide strips of paper and scissors and show them how to concertina the paper and then cut out some paper chain people (see page 33). Write the name of one of their friends on the front of each one eg Joe's friend Matthew, and write the things that they like to do together on the back. Encourage the children to include whether they go to the same church as them, whether they go to a different church, or whether they don't go to church at all. More artistic children may like to draw their friends' faces and colour them in.

Those who finish first can help you to put together the wall display. You will need the words 'our friends'. Let them colour in the letters and then help you to stick their paper chain people underneath. You can get an interesting 3D effect by leaving the paper chains slightly concertinaed.

Once everyone has finished and the display is complete, remind them how nice it is that they have so many good friends (give examples of names from the display). Draw their attention to the many different fun things that they can do with their friends (give examples from the display) but remind them that the best thing that they can do with their friends is come to church and get to know the best friend of all...Jesus.



*"Friends come and friends go,
but a true friend sticks by you like
family."*

Proverbs 18:24 (*The Message*)

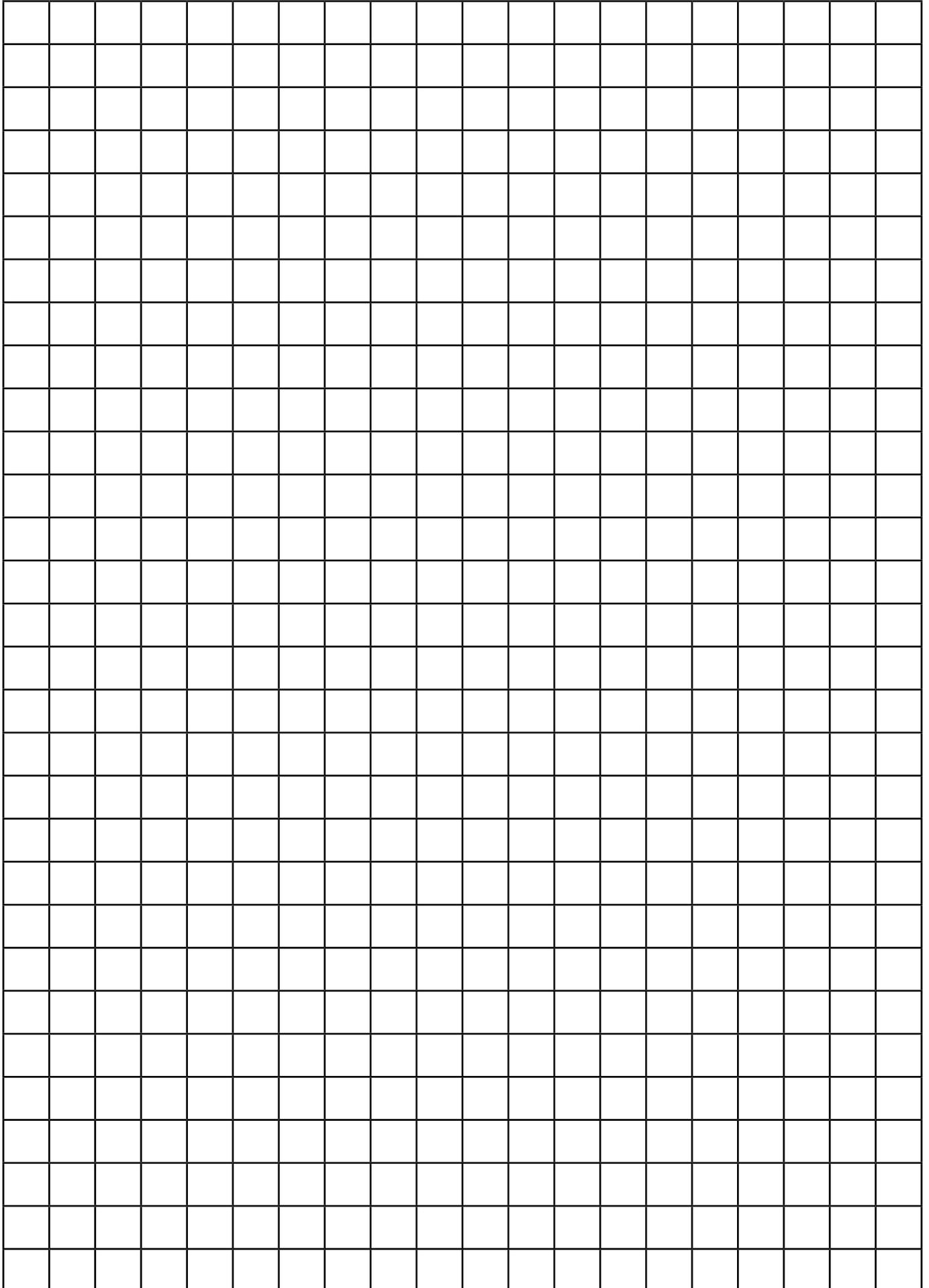
Before the session write the words of the memory verse (Proverbs 18:24) on a line of paper chain people. Get the group to read the verse through a couple of times, then each time that they repeat the verse tear off one of the people from the chain until they are saying the verse entirely from memory. Remind them that their other friends may not stay friends with them but that Jesus wants to be their friend forever.

Prayer

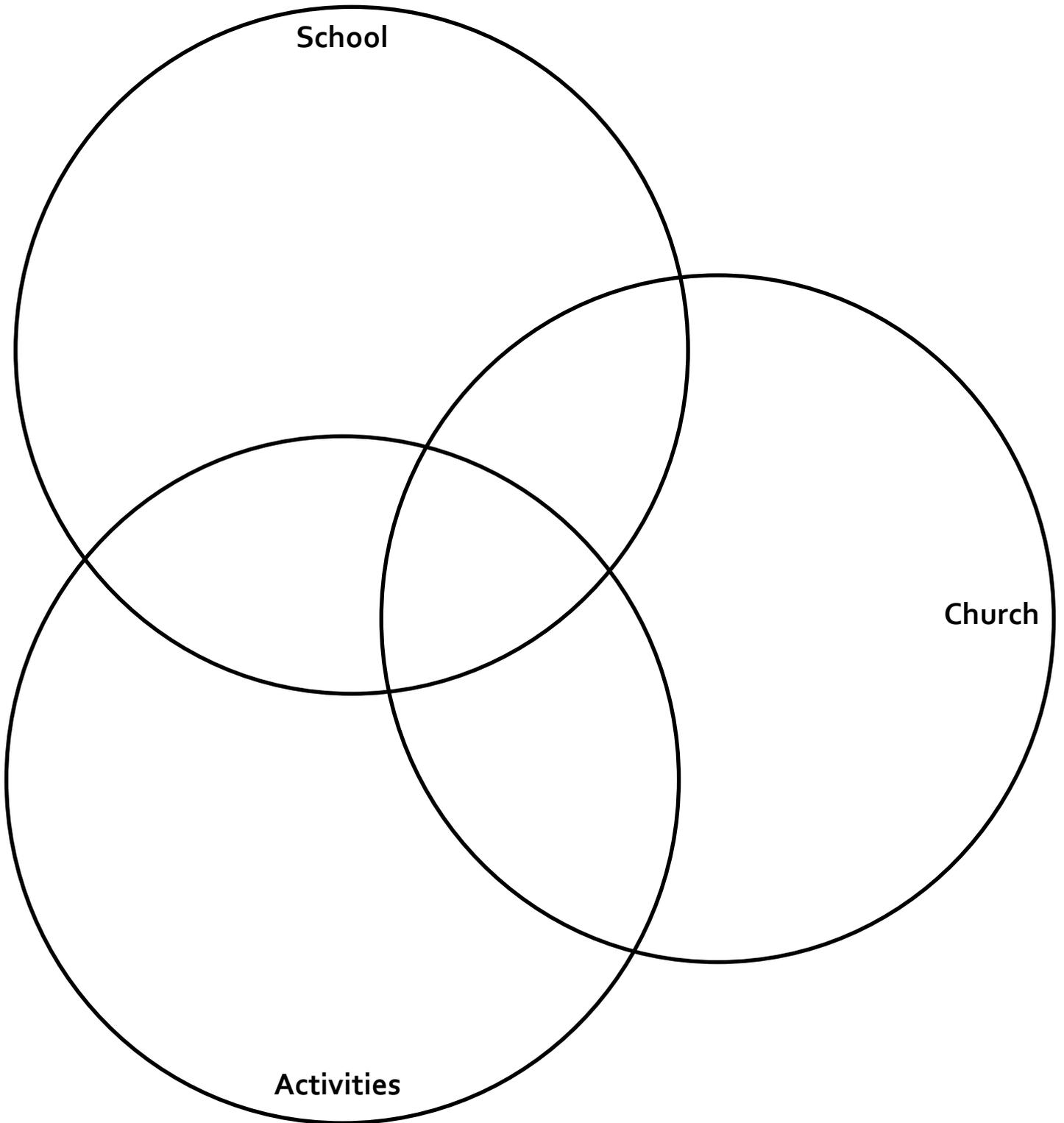
Father God, we thank you for all of the people that we spend time with each week. We thank you particularly for the friends that we have fun with. Help us to introduce them to the best friend of all...Jesus. Amen

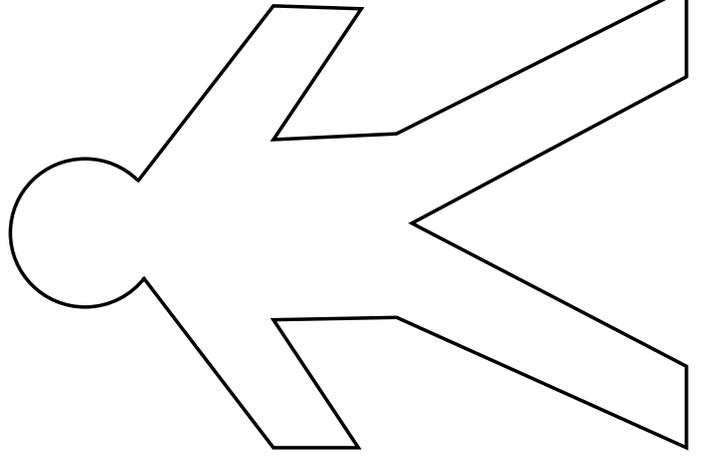
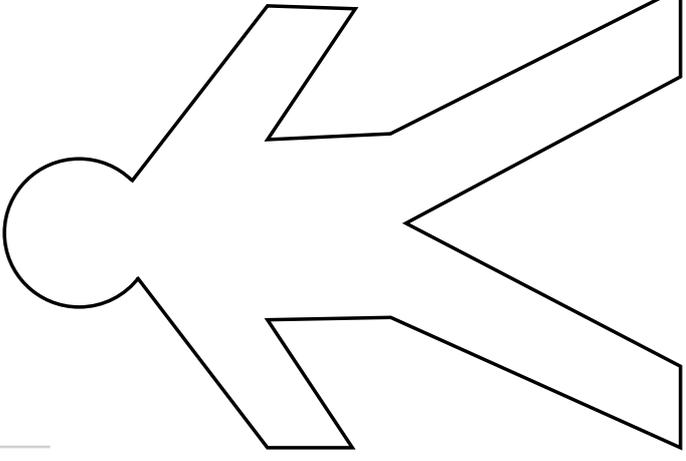


These are my Friends



These are my Friends







Children's Groups

3 In the team (part 1)

Aim

To help the children to understand their place in God's plans for the world. Using the football analogy from the adult sermon 3 they will find out how to play their part on God's team; tackling sin and scoring goals (developing the character of Jesus).

At the end of the session you will have talked about discipleship in relation to sin and forgiveness and developing the character of Jesus with particular reference to the Fruit of the Spirit. There will also have been opportunities to discuss the things that hinder discipleship such as the devil as well as the help that is available from the Holy Spirit and to present the gospel clearly, although considerable sensitivity is required with these issues.

Introductory Games

- For groups with plenty of space, play a game of football or rag hockey or any team game where you have to tackle and score to win.
- For small groups, play a game of table football or blow football. If there is not enough time for everyone to have a go, you can let them know that there will be more matches next week. Encourage any spectators to participate by cheering on their 'team'.
- For small groups with access to a computer, use an internet-based football game. Check out www.twoplayergames.org/option.oyunlar/id.373/Table_Football_2 for a 3 minute, easy-to-play, two-player table football game. Alternatively, you might be able to set up a games console eg Playstation or Wii with a football or hockey game. If there is not enough time for everyone to have a go you can let them know that there will be more matches next week.

Talk about the games that they play where someone has to choose the team. These might include rugby, netball, baseball and cricket. Ask them how they think that it feels to be chosen (they may be able to tell you from experience) and then ask them how they think that it feels not to be selected for the team.

Explain that the good news is that God has selected every single one of them to be part of his team. Unlike football, we do not need any particular talent or skills to be in God's team as he will provide everything that we need as we go along. All we have to do is tell God that we want to join his team. Let them know that if they have never said 'yes' to being on God's team that you would love to help them do this at the end of the session but first of all you are going to spend some time, both this week and next week, talking about what the players on God's team do.

Explain to them that the goal for all the players on God's team is to become more like Jesus Christ. Tell them that a follower of Jesus is called a disciple, which is from the Latin word for a 'learner', and that two of the things that you will learn to do as a good disciple are to tackle sin and to cultivate the fruit of the spirit or good character. If appropriate, read the bible passage with them at this point (or just verses 16 and 22-23).





Galatians 5: 16-22
(New Living Translation)

Read

So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarrelling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

To win in a football match you need to get the ball from the other team (tackling) and then do something positive with it yourself (score a goal). It is the same in the Christian life. We need to stop doing some things and start doing other things. The two activities in this session demonstrate this.

Tackling Sin Activity

Talk to the children about what sin is. Let them know that it is not just breaking rules. Sin is anything that upsets God. Sin is not just the wrong things that we do. It is the wrong things that we say and even the wrong things that we think. Give some recent examples from your own life. Then ask them to think of examples of times when they have sinned or other people have sinned (most children find it easier to think of things that their brothers and sisters have done wrong than things that they have done wrong). Get them to write these down on separate sheets of scrap paper. Add as many other sins that you can think of, eg murder, stealing, selfishness, pride, greed. Explain that because Jesus Christ died, we can be forgiven for all the wrong things that we have done. Pray a simple prayer for forgiveness and then get them to crumple all the sheets of paper up into balls ready for the game. You may need to have some additional balls prepared too.

- For quieter groups, set up a game of skill where they have to throw the paper balls into a dustbin, labelled 'forgiveness', placed a suitable distance away. This can be played for individual scores or as a team game but make sure that everyone has the same number of balls. If you like, you can award the winners a small sweet or a medal made of a chocolate coin and a ribbon.
- For groups with plenty of energy, divide the room in half with a line of masking tape on the floor. Divide the children into two teams and stand them at opposite ends of the room. Divide the paper balls into two and put one pile in each half. When the game starts they have to throw the balls into the other half of the room. After a few minutes of frantic paper hurling you stop the game and count up how many paper balls are in each half. The team with the fewest paper balls is the winner.

Remind them that to be a disciple of Christ we need to tackle the sin in our lives. This means that we try not to do the things that upset God. However, remind them that if they do do something wrong then they can always pray for forgiveness, because Jesus died and paid the price for all our sins.



Half-time refreshments

As in a football match, you could slice unpeeled oranges into eight segments and hand them out for the children to suck the juice out. Or you could just offer half-time squash and biscuits.

Scoring goals Activity

- For groups with plenty of energy, set up a treasure hunt prior to the children's arrival. Take nine footballs (or other balls) and label them with the fruit of the spirit (Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control). Hide them around the room (or rooms) and send the children off to find them.

Once they have gathered up all the balls, set up an indoor goal and play a game of 'Beat the Goalie'. As each child chooses a ball to score with, talk to them about that fruit of the Spirit and situations when they may need to become more Christ-like and develop that quality. Ask them for examples from their lives and be willing to share examples from your own too. Explain that it is not always easy to become like Jesus Christ because lots of things will stop us, including other people and, of course, the devil, but that we need to keep trying and that if we are on God's team that we can always ask the Holy Spirit to help us. If appropriate, read (or re-read) verses 16 and 22-23 of the bible passage with them at this point.

- For quieter groups, play a game of 'Spiritual Bingo'. Ask each child to choose five of the fruits of the spirit and write them down on a piece of paper. Place nine small pieces of paper with the nine spiritual fruit written on them into a bag. Draw out a piece of paper and call out the name of the spiritual fruit. Spend a few moments talking to them about that fruit of the spirit and situations when they may need to become more Christ-like and develop that quality. Ask them for examples from their lives

and be willing to share examples from your own too. The first child or children to cross off all five fruits is the winner or winners. If you like, you can award the winners a small sweet or a medal made of a chocolate coin and a ribbon.

Team talk

Gather the kids together into a huddle for a team talk. Summarise what they have learnt about the need to tackle sin in their lives and develop good character (become more like Jesus Christ). Tell them that, if they have joined God's team, the Holy Spirit will help them to do these things. Let them know that God has selected every single one of them to join his team and that if they want to say 'yes' that they can pray with you now. Point out that they may have already done this before if they have 'asked Jesus to be their friend', 'invited Jesus into their heart' or 'become a Christian' as these are all different ways of describing the time when you join God's team, but it is a good thing to tell God again if we want to so they can all pray with you if they desire.

Prayer

Father God, thank you that you have chosen each one of us to play on your team. I want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. I am sorry for all the wrong things that I have done, please forgive me and help me to tackle sin this week. I also want to become more like Jesus. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit to help me be more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled this week. Amen

Follow up

Let the children know that if they have just joined God's team for the first time and become a Christian that you would like to give them a gift to help them. Have some appropriately-aged tracts to hand out, along with a certificate to remind them of their decision (see page 37-38 for a sample).



Welcome to God's Team!

Name _____

**has decided to follow Jesus,
prayed the prayer on the back of this card
and has become a Christian.**

Date _____

Welcome to God's Team!

Name _____

**has decided to follow Jesus,
prayed the prayer on the back of this card
and has become a Christian.**

Date _____

Prayer

Father God, thank you that you have chosen
each one of us to play on your team.

I want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I am sorry for all the wrong things that I have done,
please forgive me and help me to tackle sin this week.

I also want to become more like Jesus.

Please fill me with your Holy Spirit to help me be more
loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful,
gentle and self-controlled this week.

Amen

Prayer

Father God, thank you that you have chosen
each one of us to play on your team.

I want to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I am sorry for all the wrong things that I have done,
please forgive me and help me to tackle sin this week.

I also want to become more like Jesus.

Please fill me with your Holy Spirit to help me be more
loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful,
gentle and self-controlled this week.

Amen



Children's Groups

4 In the team (part 2)

Aim

Picking up on the football theme from the previous week, to help the children to understand their place in God's plans for the world. This time the focus is on the need to listen to the coach (God) and work together as a team (the church).

At the end of the session you will have talked about the bible, prayer and other Christians as ways in which God can speak to them and teach them. They will have also seen the value in working together in the church.

Introductory Games

- For groups with plenty of space, play a game of football or rag hockey or any team game where you have to tackle and score to win.
- For small groups, play a game of table football or blow football. Remember to let anyone who did not get a chance to play last week to have a turn first. Encourage any spectators to cheer on their 'team'.
- For groups with access to a computer, use an internet-based football game. Check out www.twoplayergames.org/option.oyunlar/id.373/Table_Football_2 for a 3 minute, easy-to-play, two player table football game. Alternatively, you might be able to set up a games console, eg Playstation or Wii with a football or hockey game. Remember to let anyone who did not get a chance to play last week to have a turn first.

Ask them whether they can remember what you did last week. Remind them of the good news that God has selected every single one of them to be part of his team. Ask them whether they have any example of times during the past week

when they have either tackled sin, had to ask for forgiveness or behaved in the same way that Jesus would have. Be ready to share an example or two from your own life to encourage them.

Explain to them that just like every football team has a coach / manager who tells them how to play better, so God wants to teach us how to become more like Jesus Christ. If they want to become a better player on God's team, the first thing that they need to do is learn how to listen to him.

Listening to the Coach Activity

Play 'Simon says' (you could change this to 'God says', if that is not too irreverent). The children have to do what you ask them to, but only when you say 'Simon says' first eg 'Simon says, touch your nose'. Children who get it wrong are out of the game but could be consoled with a small sweet if you like. The game ends when you have just one person remaining who can also be given a small sweet or a medal made of a chocolate coin and a ribbon as a prize.

Ask the children if they know how God tells us what to do. Talk to them about the importance of reading the bible because it is God's word, of listening as well as talking when they pray and of taking instruction from other Christians. If appropriate, read the bible passage with them, pointing out how fortunate they are to have known the holy scriptures since childhood.





2 Timothy 3:15,16
(Contemporary English Version)

Since childhood, you have known the holy scriptures that are able to make you wise enough to have faith in Christ Jesus and be saved. Everything in the scriptures is God's word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.

Half-time refreshments

As in a football match, you could slice unpeeled oranges into eight segments and hand them out for the children to suck the juice out. Or you could just offer half-time squash and biscuits.

Playing as a team Activity

Play a game called 'River Crossing' where they have to work together as a team in order to cross from one side of the room to the other without touching the floor. Mark out the river using masking tape and tell them that it is infested with crocodiles so they must not put any part of their body in the water. Depending on the size of the room and the number of children, provide a certain number islands for them to step on safely. These could be carpet samples, carpet tiles, tea-towels or sheets of newspaper depending on what you have to hand. Remember that a large group can always 'shuttle' people across the river, although they may need help to figure this out.

At the end, ask them what would have happened if one person had taken the islands and gone across to the other side alone. Draw out from them that it would have left the others stranded and unable to get across. In the same way God intends us to work together as a team in the church so that we help each other throughout our lives to grow closer to him. If appropriate, read the bible passage with them, explaining that it would make you happy to see them helping each other in the same way that it made Paul happy to see the church in Philippi working together.



Philippians 2:2
(New Living Translation)

The apostle Paul asked the church in Philippi to '...make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose'.

Team talk

Gather the kids together into a huddle for a team talk. Summarise what they have learnt about listening to the coach and playing together as a team. Tell them that next week's session will involve preparing for and having a party. In the bible the kingdom of heaven is often described as a party and God makes it clear that every single person is invited. Suggest that because of this, if they would like to invite their friends to come to church with them next week then you would love to have them at the party.

Prayer

Father God, thank you that you have chosen each one of us to play on your team. Help us to listen to your instructions through prayer and by reading our bibles. Help us to work together as a team, encouraging and supporting each other both when we are in church, in school and at home. Amen





Children's Groups

5 Join the Party

Aim

To encourage the children to think about the sort of things that they enjoy about going to church and the things that they would like to share with their friends.

At the end of the session you will have had some fun together and have a list on the wall display of things that they could invite their friends to in order to learn more about God together.

Welcome

Have some party music playing as the kids come in. You could have a few decorations and balloons up too as well as letting off some party poppers to add to the excitement. Remember to welcome any new friends that the group has brought along.

Preparation for the Party Activity

This session is designed to reflect modern pedagogy (teaching theory). The early years curriculum enables children to take the lead in their own learning using the activities that they enjoy most. If you have the resources, therefore, you should provide a wide range of party preparation activities and allow the children to choose what they would like to do, eg some may be decorating biscuits and cakes for the party tea, others might be making party hats or masks, some might be blowing up balloons or making bunting to decorate the room (take care as some children are scared of balloons) whilst others are wrapping a pass-the-parcel or designing their own party game.

After a suitable time has elapsed (be careful not to spend too long on the preparations or you will not have time for the invitations which will provide the outcomes for the **re: focus** meeting), gather everyone together.

Explain that the bible tells us that the kingdom of heaven is like a party. The good news is that everyone is invited to this party. And the even better news is that it will be the best party that there has ever been, much better than any party they have ever been to.

Crafty bit

Explain that you would like everyone to know that they are invited to God's party. The best way for them to find out is if we tell them.

Ask them to look at the display wall that you made in session 2 where they have their paper chain people.

Ask them to choose one of their friends who does not go to church anywhere (if they haven't got one then chose a friend that does go to church) and think about the sort of things that they like doing together.

Get them to imagine something that they could do together that would enable them to learn more about God.



Ask the children for their suggestions first so that you do not direct their thoughts, but if they are struggling you could offer some of your own ideas eg

- Come round to my house to read the bible and pray together
- Come round to my house to watch 'Friends and Heroes' together
- Come to Sunday School with me
- Come to Youth club with me
- Come to the school Christian Union with me
- Come to a special service with me, eg a baptism or a nativity
- Come to a Family Fun day at the church
- Come to meet my church friends

The ideas don't necessarily have to be things that are already happening in the church as you really want to find out what they would like to be able to invite their friends to ready for the **re:focus** meeting.

Buy or print off some blank invitation cards (you may have some left over from a party - or see page 43) and hand one to each child. Get them to write out an invitation saying what they are invited to and why; eg Dear Rebecca, You are invited to come to Sunday School with me so that you can learn more about God. It is at my church at 10:30 every Sunday and it is a lot of fun. Love from Laura

Attach the cards to the display next to their paper chain people. Once the display is complete, remind them how nice it is that they have so many good friends (give examples of names from the display). Draw their attention to the many different fun things that they can do with their friends (give examples from the display) but remind them that the best thing that they can do with their friends is learn about God together. Encourage them to look for opportunities to invite their friends to this week.

Prayer

Father God, thank you that you have invited everyone to come to your party. Help us to remember that this week and to look for ways in which we can invite our friends so that they can get to know you better too. Amen

Join the Party Activity

Finish the session by having some party food and drinks and playing some party games. You could use some of the games that they have really enjoyed from the previous sessions mixed with simple, traditional party games so that you do not have to spend so much time explaining the rules. Why not try musical islands, musical statues, musical chairs or musical bumps? Put a string across the room at chest height and hang strawberry laces from it. The children have to race to eat their way up the laces without using their hands. Play some relay races or organise a balloon stomp. Don't forget to play pass the parcel if they have made one too.

At the end you could even hand out party bags containing a few sweets, a small gift from the bible bookshop and a tract.

If possible keep the display from the five sessions for the congregation to see at their main **re:focus** meeting (Module 6). Please prepare a verbal summary of key points the children have made to share at the meeting. If children are going to be present at the meeting, or weekend, then there are further exercises to use in Module 8 pages 15-16.



Invitation

Invitation



celebrating who you are and
developing your **crossing**places

Module 3: Leaders' Questionnaire

re:focus is a journey to help your church:

- focus on its life as a Christian community
- develop new and existing *crossingplaces*
- share the Christian message in actions and words.

Using a selection of the **re:focus** modules, the church will:

- listen to each other and to God
- be guided by experienced external facilitators



Leaders' Questionnaire

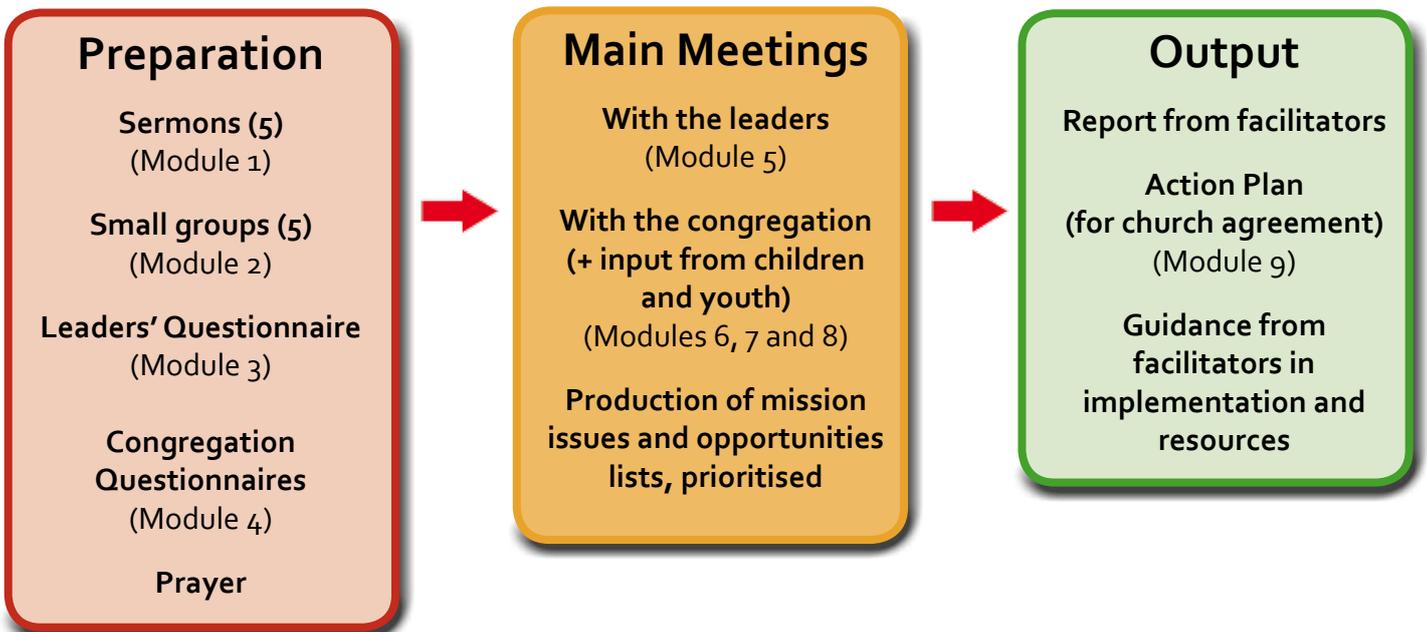
To enable the church leaders to provide useful information to the facilitators ahead of the main meeting together.

Introduction

One questionnaire should be completed representing the joint views of the leadership. Please note that the word 'leadership' is used through **re:focus** to describe the minister(s) plus deacons and/or elders – whichever group the church regards as its leadership team, whatever it is called!

This questionnaire is to be completed and returned to the facilitators within a month or at least two weeks before your main meeting with them.

This is part of the **re:focus** preparation phase which should all be completed before the main meetings.



Notes on completing the questionnaire

1 Hopes for the re:focus process

In the box, please write why you have decided to set out on the **re:focus** journey and how you hope it will help the church.

2 The church's *crossingplaces* diary

Any activity of the church which provides a regular contact with people who are not yet Christians may be described as a *crossingplace* in the **re:focus** journey. It is a *crossingplace* if there is an intentional desire to help the people encountered on their spiritual journey towards Jesus Christ.

If the concept of *crossingplaces* is new to you, then please look at the introduction to Module 7 or at the *crossingplaces* links mentioned at the end of this module.

***crossingplaces* are those occasions when individual Christians and/or the church together intersect with the community and make a difference. In *crossingplaces* we create opportunities to show and share the Gospel.**

You are asked to fill in the chart headed 'The church's *crossingplaces* diary'. You may be writing in an activity like:

- the minister writing a regular Christian column in the local paper,
- a group of church people going twice a term into the local school to give Christian input,
- a weekly toddler club run by the church,
- an annual Christmas event you run in the community.

Think through the year to put in as much as possible in the appropriate columns.

You will be sharing this completed form for discussion at the main congregational meeting (Module 6), when the congregation will also be completing their individual *crossingplaces* diaries.

3 Factual information about your church

Please count the number of people in your church on a typical Sunday (or whatever is your main meeting day) and fill in the tables, indicating gender, age, ethnicity and disability.

Complete the charts giving the following **annual** information over the last five years:

- The number of members
- The number attending a service on a 'typical' Sunday
- The number of baptisms

If this information is not on record within the church, then for BUGB churches contact the Faith and Society Team at faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk or 01235 517716 who will give you the statistics from your annual returns.

In the box, describe any specific reasons for new people coming to the church or leaving the church within the last five years (eg people coming due to the closure of another church, or people leaving because a major industry left the area).

4 Church groups meeting regularly

Please indicate housegroups and other groups that are meeting regularly as part of the life of the church or its outreach into the community.

5 Growth and Decline Assessment

The statistics on membership and baptisms give bare facts regarding the growth or decline of the church, but will not be the whole story. Explanations will be offered verbally to the facilitators but this exercise allows for 'perceptions' to be expressed and understood. The chart is completed by the leadership group together. The congregation will also be completing this particular exercise individually and anonymously in their questionnaire, and the facilitators will be collating those results to gain an overall picture of perceptions and attitudes of the congregation as well.

Each of the possible signs of growth and causes of decline are typified by a common phrase that reflects the short description given below it. On the chart, you are to indicate a number on a scale of 0 to 10 how well you think this represents the thinking of the church.



Signs of Growth

1 “This church helps me grow as a Christian”

The relationship between God and the congregation is growing, individually and corporately. Christ is being experienced through the bible and by prayer. This vertical dimension of faith is being lived out in the world.

2 “The leadership team is serving the church well”

The leaders demonstrate vision and faith in God. They communicate and consult well with the congregation, whilst showing appropriate leadership skills. They move matters forward as requested.

3 “Everyone’s gifts are encouraged and used”

Every member of the church is recognised as having a particular contribution to make to its life. Members are encouraged and empowered in their discipleship, to help them live in a Christ-like way in all their life situations.

4 “We have a clear shared vision for this church”

The church is conscious of its general role as a community of faith open to all who want to explore and be all it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. The majority of the church knows and owns its specific direction and purpose.

5 “I meet God in the worship so I can serve him 24/7”

When we worship together, we are aware of the presence of God. The world, community life and the whole person are also brought into the services. The worship is inspiring and relevant to my faith in everyday life.

6 “This is a welcoming and loving community”

Agapé was the special word used in the New Testament to denote the love God gave to us in Christ. We are to share this love with others through being mutually supportive, encouraging and caring for one another. This includes a good welcome to visitors.

7 “This church takes its *crossingplaces* with non-Christians seriously”

The church has an outward focus. The congregation desires to present the gospel in words and actions to those who are not-yet Christians. People pray for these evangelistic opportunities.

8 “We make a difference to our local community”

The congregation intentionally builds bridges into the community. We want to serve various sectors of the community, challenge injustice, and spread Kingdom values, guided by the Holy Spirit.

9 “We’re not afraid to do things differently”

The church recognises cultural differences. Although the heart of the gospel remains the same, the way that the church expresses the gospel has developed throughout Christian history. This church has managed change well and remains open to being culturally relevant.



Causes of Decline

Again look at the common phrase that might express an attitude that is a cause of decline in your church. On the chart, indicate a number on a scale of 0 to 10 how well you think this represents the thinking of the church.

1 "Keeping the show on the road takes most of our energy"

The time and energy of the leaders and members is taken up with the internal running of the church. People and financial resources are exhausted by the maintenance of existing church programmes and buildings.

2 "We've tried it before and it doesn't work"

The usual response to a new idea is negative because of previous bad experiences. The church has experienced general decline over a number of years and this has shaped our outlook. Morale is low.

3 "Do as I say, not as I do"

The public formalities of church are carried out, maintaining the elements of church worship and promoting them. The building is being kept in good order. However, there is little active discipleship and little evidence of lives being changed.

4 "We're a good group as we are"

Fellowship within the congregation is good, but there is resistance to the inclusion of 'outsiders'. People are preoccupied with each other to the exclusion of engagement with the community. The church desires renewal but resists evangelism.

5 "What was good enough for our grandparents is good enough for us"

The church is struggling to accept that each generation or cultural group has the right to discover Christ in its own cultural way. The congregation is not identifying with or adjusting to people different from themselves.

6 "The building's not supposed to be comfy and welcoming like home"

The buildings where the church meets have not been updated for a long time. The premises are uncomfortable or not easy for a visitor to enter. They are unsuitable for the life and mission of the church.

7 "The leadership structure isn't serving us well"

The size or structure of the leadership team is not suitable for the size of the church. People think the minister should be personally pastoring everyone. The leadership team is lacking some necessary skills for what the church is doing now.

This exercise is adapted from one created by the Bible Society and is used with their kind permission (www.biblesociety.org.uk).



6 The History of the church

In the box, please summarise a brief history of the church with approximate dates. In particular include the 'high' and the 'low' moments in the life of the church and any external factors that made a significant difference.

7 The 'Parish'

In the box, say what area you regard as the 'parish' for the church and/or to which particular group of people you relate.

Please answer the questions in the table using your local knowledge. The facilitators will gather information from the internet, but giving your local information is important.

Suggested book:

Resourcing Mission by Helen Cameron
Published by scm press ISBN 978 0 334 04146 7

Suggested videos:

Be the Centre - the story of Finchampstead Baptist Church - DVD produced by the Baptist Union in 2011

www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/367470/Home_Mission_DVD.aspx

Other resources:

Contact the Baptist Union of Great Britain Faith and Society Team on faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk



Leaders' Questionnaire

Notes to help

- 1 Please complete the questionnaire as legibly as you can and return to:
- 2 Consult with other members of your leadership team in completing the questionnaire.
- 3 If a question does not apply to your church (for example it is about premises, and you have none of your own) write NOT APPLICABLE.
- 4 If there is insufficient room for what you want to say at any point, please continue on a separate sheet.

Name of Church:

Please supply the name and contact details of the person responsible for completing this questionnaire (in case the facilitators need to clarify any answer).

Name:

Address:

Email Address:

Telephone:



Hopes for the re:focus process

Please write why you have decided to set out on the **re:focus** journey and how you hope it will help the church





Church *crossingplaces* diary

(Remember that in a *crossingplace* you must be in touch with people who are not yet Christians)

Any 'stepping stones' for follow on in developing faith				
Focused on ...				
<i>crossingplaces</i> event or activity				
	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Occasional





Factual Information about your Church

3

Questions 3.1 - 3.5 refer to the people present in church for a 'typical' Sunday (or other day of the week - whenever your church has its main service of worship).

3.1 Please count the number of men and women (18+) at your main service of worship on a 'typical' Sunday (leaving out special Sundays, like Christmas or baptismal services).

Men	Women	Total

3.2 Please estimate how many of the typical attendance would fall into the following age ranges:

	0 - 4	5 - 15	16 - 19	20 - 44	45 - 64	65+
Male						
Female						

3.3 Thinking about your average/typical Sunday attendance (as in 3.1 above), please give an indication of the numbers in the following ethnic groups:

Black or Black British (African)		Chinese	
Black or Black British (Caribbean)		White (British)	
Black or Black British (other)		White (Irish)	
Asian or British Asian (Indian sub-continent)		White (Other)	
Asian or British Asian (Other)		Other	

3.4 Do you offer any services in other languages? If so, which languages?



3.5 Thinking about your average/typical Sunday attendance (as in 3.1 above), please give an indication of the numbers of people who have some kind of disability:

People with limited mobility		People with speech difficulties	
People who are blind or partially sighted		People with learning disabilities	
People with hearing loss		Other	

3.6 Approximately how many regular adult members of the congregation also attend small groups? (such as housegroups or cells, but excluding ALPHA or a similar course). Give the total number that attend at all, not the attendance in any specific week.

3.7 Complete the charts giving the following annual information over the last five years of members, attenders at the main service of worship, baptisms.

Year					
Membership					
Those attending church service					
Baptisms					

3.8 Describe any specific reasons for new people coming to the church or leaving the church within the last five years (eg people coming due to the closure of another church, or people leaving because a major employer left the area)





Growth and Decline Assessment

5

For each of the possible signs of growth and causes of decline, please indicate a number on a scale of 0 to 10 how well you think this represents the thinking of your church.
0 = completely disagree, 10 = fully agree

Signs of Growth

1 "This church helps me grow as a Christian"

The relationship between God and the congregation is growing, individually and corporately. Christ is being experienced through the bible and by prayer. This vertical dimension of faith is being lived out in the world.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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Agapé was the special word used in the New Testament to denote the love God gave to us in Christ. We are to share this love with others through being mutually supportive, encouraging and caring for one another. This includes a good welcome to visitors.

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7 "This church takes its *crossingplaces* with non-Christians seriously"

The church has an outward focus. The congregation desires to present the gospel in words and actions to those who are not-yet Christians. People pray for these evangelistic opportunities.

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The congregation intentionally builds bridges into the community. We want to serve various sectors of the community, challenge injustice, and spread Kingdom values, guided by the Holy Spirit.

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The church recognises cultural differences. Although the heart of the gospel remains the same, the way that the church expresses the gospel has developed throughout Christian history. This church has managed change well and remains open to being culturally relevant.

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Causes of Deline

1 "Keeping the show on the road takes most of our energy"

The time and energy of the leaders and members is taken up with the internal running of the church. People and financial resources are exhausted by the maintenance of existing church programmes and buildings.

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2 "We've tried it before and it doesn't work"

The usual response to a new idea is negative because of previous bad experiences. The church has experienced general decline over a number of years and this has shaped our outlook. Morale is low.

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3 "Do as I say, not as I do"

The public formalities of church are carried out, maintaining the elements of church worship and promoting them. The building is being kept in good order. However, there is little active discipleship and little evidence of lives being changed.

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4 "We're a good group as we are"

Fellowship within the congregation is good, but there is resistance to the inclusion of 'outsiders'. People are preoccupied with each other to the exclusion of engagement with the community. The church desires renewal but resists evangelism.

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5 "What was good enough for our grandparents is good enough for us"

The church is struggling to accept that each generation or cultural group has the right to discover Christ in its own cultural way. The congregation is not identifying with or adjusting to people different from themselves.

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6 "The building's not supposed to be comfy and welcoming like home"

The buildings where the church meets have not been updated for a long time. The premises are uncomfortable or not easy for a visitor to enter. They are unsuitable for the life and mission of the church.

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7 "The leadership structure isn't serving us well"

The size or structure of the leadership team is not suitable for the size of the church. People think the minister should be personally pastoring everyone. The leadership team is lacking some necessary skills for what the church is doing now.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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History of the Church

6

In the box please summarise a brief history of the church with approximate dates. In particular include the 'high' and the 'low' moments in the life of the church and any external factors that made a significant difference.



The 'Parish'

7

In the box below, please describe the area you regard as the catchment for your church and/or the particular group of people with whom you are trying to connect.



For your 'parish', please describe:

Any characteristics of the age profile	
Any social characteristics (eg unemployed, ethnic groups)	
Any community issues (eg crime)	
Any housing characteristics (eg sheltered housing)	
Any major community buildings (see also Module 11, pages 4-5)	
Any major employers	
Churches of any denomination or other faith buildings	
Anything else of note	





celebrating who you are and
developing your **crossing**places

Module 4: Congregation Questionnaire

re:focus is a journey to help your church:

- focus on its life as a Christian community
- develop new and existing *crossingplaces*
- share the Christian message in actions and words.

Using a selection of the **re:focus** modules, the church will:

- listen to each other and to God
- be guided by experienced external facilitators



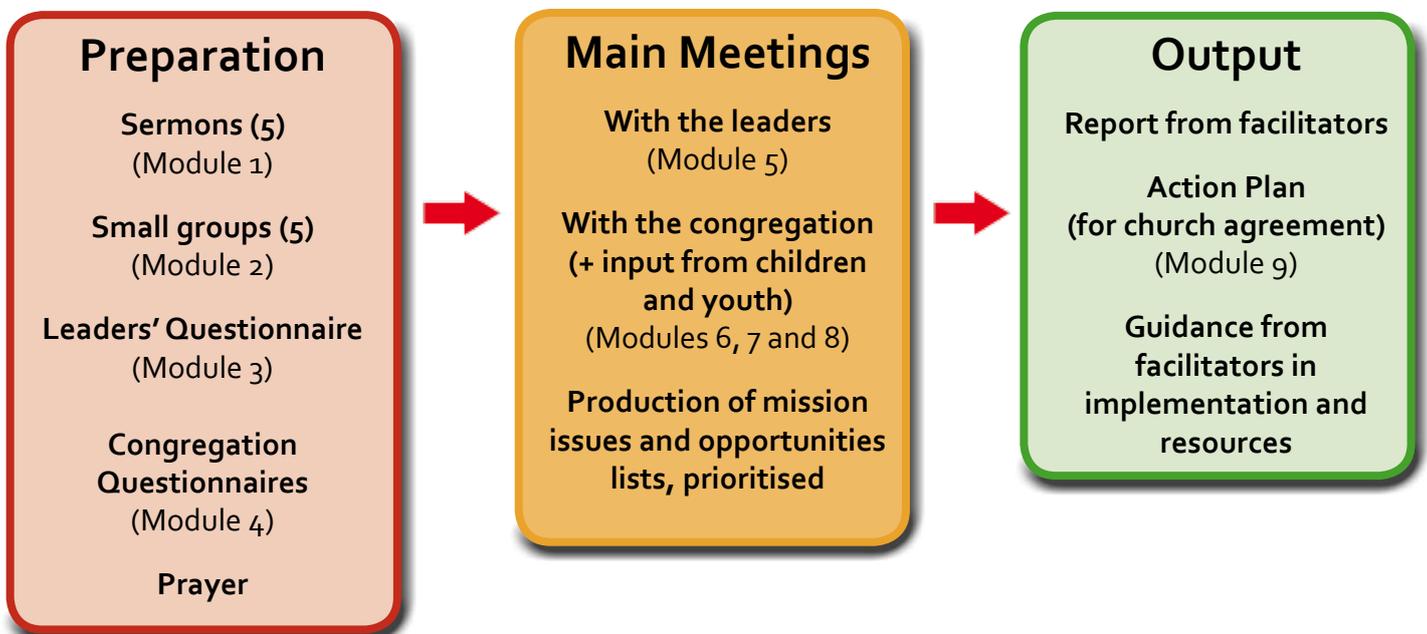
Congregation Questionnaire

To enable the church congregation to provide useful information to the facilitators ahead of the main meeting together.

Introduction

The preparation phase of the **re:focus** journey has several elements. Please try to be present in church for the five **re:focus** sermons, and attend

your small group to discuss some related material. Another important part of the preparation is the completion of this questionnaire, along with plenty of prayer for the whole process.



Returning the questionnaires

One **re:focus** questionnaire should be completed per person in the congregation without consultation with others. The more people that fill them in, the more useful the information becomes. The questionnaires are submitted anonymously and go directly to the facilitators. You will be given a date, ahead of the main **re:focus** meetings with the leaders and with the congregation, by which you hand them in.

The facilitators will collate all the questionnaires to get a first overall impression of the life of your church. There will be plenty of further exercises and discussion at the main congregation meeting to paint a fuller picture.

From all of your input, the facilitators will be producing lists of mission issues and mission opportunities that will be prioritised towards the end of the main meeting.

You may be invited to complete this questionnaire online.

My *crossingplaces* are those regular occasions when, as an individual Christian, or with others from the churches in this area, I am with non-Christians and making a difference to their lives. In *crossingplaces* we create opportunities to show and share the Gospel.

Notes on completing the questionnaire

1 Personal information

Although you are not giving your name, please complete this section to indicate some of the ways you are involved with the church.

2 Your personal *crossingplaces* diary

You will have started to hear what *crossingplaces* are in the **re:focus** sermons and in the small group studies. Any activity of the church which provides a regular contact with people who are not yet Christians may be described as a *crossingplace*. It is a *crossingplace* if there is an intentional desire to help the people encountered on their spiritual journey towards Jesus Christ.

As well as being involved in the church's *crossingplaces*, we may also have our individual *crossingplaces*. There may be people we meet regularly in an informal setting, friends, family, neighbours or colleagues, with whom we share our faith as opportunities arise.

In this questionnaire, just jot down a word on the right day for your own *crossingplaces*. At the main congregational meeting, the facilitators will explain this further.

3 Growth and Decline Assessment

The leaders of the church have supplied factual information to the facilitators. You are asked to give views on how you see the church, marking the chart called the Growth and Decline Assessment. This exercise allows for 'perceptions' to be expressed and understood from across the whole church.

Each of the possible signs of growth and causes of decline are typified by a common phrase that reflects the short description given below it. On the chart, you are to indicate a number on a scale of 0 to 10 how well you think this represents your thinking about the church.



Signs of Growth

1 “This church helps me grow as a Christian”

The relationship between God and the congregation is growing, individually and corporately. Christ is being experienced through the bible and by prayer. This vertical dimension of faith is being lived out in the world.

2 “The leadership team is serving the church well”

The leaders demonstrate vision and faith in God. They communicate and consult well with the congregation, whilst showing appropriate leadership skills. They move matters forward as requested.

3 “Everyone’s gifts are encouraged and used”

Every member of the church is recognised as having a particular contribution to make to its life. Members are encouraged and empowered in their discipleship, to help them live in a Christ-like way in all their life situations.

4 “We have a clear shared vision for this church”

The church is conscious of its general role as a community of faith open to all who want to explore and be all it means to be followers of Jesus Christ. The majority of the church knows and owns its specific direction and purpose.

5 “I meet God in the worship so I can serve him 24/7”

When we worship together, we are aware of the presence of God. The world, community life and the whole person are also brought into the services. The worship is inspiring and relevant to my faith in everyday life.

6 “This is a welcoming and loving community”

Agapé was the special word used in the New Testament to denote the love God gave to us in Christ. We are to share this love with others through being mutually supportive, encouraging and caring for one another. This includes a good welcome to visitors.

7 “This church takes its *crossingplaces* with non-Christians seriously”

The church has an outward focus. The congregation desires to present the gospel in words and actions to those who are not-yet Christians. People pray for these evangelistic opportunities.

8 “We make a difference to our local community”

The congregation intentionally builds bridges into the community. We want to serve various sectors of the community, challenge injustice, and spread Kingdom values, guided by the Holy Spirit.

9 “We’re not afraid to do things differently”

The church recognises cultural differences. Although the heart of the gospel remains the same, the way that the church expresses the gospel has developed throughout Christian history. This church has managed change well and remains open to being culturally relevant.



Causes of Decline

Again look at the common phrase that might express an attitude that is a cause of decline in your church. On the chart, indicate a number on a scale of 0 to 10 how well you think this represents the thinking of the church.

1 "Keeping the show on the road takes most of our energy"

The time and energy of the leaders and members is taken up with the internal running of the church. People and financial resources are exhausted by the maintenance of existing church programmes and buildings.

2 "We've tried it before and it doesn't work"

The usual response to a new idea is negative because of previous bad experiences. The church has experienced general decline over a number of years and this has shaped our outlook. Morale is low.

3 "Do as I say, not as I do"

The public formalities of church are carried out, maintaining the elements of church worship and promoting them. The building is being kept in good order. However, there is little active discipleship and little evidence of lives being changed.

4 "We're a good group as we are"

Fellowship within the congregation is good, but there is resistance to the inclusion of 'outsiders'. People are preoccupied with each other to the exclusion of engagement with the community. The church desires renewal but resists evangelism.

5 "What was good enough for our grandparents is good enough for us"

The church is struggling to accept that each generation or cultural group has the right to discover Christ in its own cultural way. The congregation is not identifying with or adjusting to people different from themselves.

6 "The building's not supposed to be comfy and welcoming like home"

The buildings where the church meets have not been updated for a long time. The premises are uncomfortable or not easy for a visitor to enter. They are unsuitable for the life and mission of the church.

7 "The leadership structure isn't serving us well"

The size or structure of the leadership team is not suitable for the size of the church. People think the minister should be personally pastoring everyone. The leadership team is lacking some necessary skills for what the church is doing now.

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4 Your ideas

Think about your community and about your concerns for it. Perhaps you are aware of a number of lonely people in a particular area, or of a local school with little Christian input. You may know a number of friends who used to go to a church who don't anymore. In the mission issues box, write down any such matters which concern you.

If you have ideas about how these issues could be addressed by people in your church write these in the mission opportunities box. Think how God's love could be shown and what might work for low-key evangelism. If you have ideas about building on the contacts the church has already, include these too.

These ideas can be raised again through the exercises done at the congregation meeting.



Congregation Questionnaire



1 Personal information

For this church: (please tick all which apply)

I attend a church activity	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am in a small group	<input type="checkbox"/>
I worship regularly (at least once a month)	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was baptised as a believer	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a member	<input type="checkbox"/>

My age is (please tick)

0 - 4	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 - 15	<input type="checkbox"/>
16 - 19	<input type="checkbox"/>
20 - 44	<input type="checkbox"/>
45 - 64	<input type="checkbox"/>
65+	<input type="checkbox"/>

List the church groups or activities in which you are involved:

List the activities in which you are involved in the locality of the church's main meeting place, near your home or workplace, or elsewhere:

Do you feel that you have a part to play in the church?

Yes	No
-----	----

If 'yes', what?

If 'no', why?

If you could do anything for God, and time, money and circumstances were not obstacles, what would it be?





Your Personal *crossingplaces* Diary

Keep a diary of your regular *crossingplaces* during a week. Put an asterisk next to those you regard as your personal *crossingplaces*.

My *crossingplaces* are those regular occasions when, as an individual Christian, or with others from the churches in this area, I am with non-Christians and making a difference to their lives.

In *crossingplaces* we create opportunities to show and share the Gospel.

My regular *crossingplaces* are:

At the main congregational meeting, the facilitators will explain this further.





Growth and Decline Assessment

For each of the possible signs of growth and causes of decline, please indicate a number on a scale of 0 to 10 how well you think this represents the thinking of your church.
0 = completely disagree, 10 = fully agree

Signs of Growth

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Your Ideas

Please list any ideas you have:

Mission issues in the community	
Mission opportunities	

Suggested book:

Resourcing Mission by Helen Cameron
Published by scm press ISBN 978 0 334 04146 7

Suggested videos:

Be the Centre - the story of Finchampstead Baptist Church - DVD produced by the Baptist Union in 2011

www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/367470/Home_Mission_DVD.aspx

Other resources:

Contact the Baptist Union of Great Britain Faith and Society Team on faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk



BUGB Faith and Society Team, Baptist House PO Box 44 129 Broadway Didcot Oxon OX11 8RT
telephone 01235 517700 email faithandsociety@baptist.org.uk Website: www.baptist.org.uk

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