

Sharing the Faith at the Boundaries of Unity: Study Guide

Three study sessions for small groups of Anglicans and Baptists (and others as well) using the *Sharing the Faith at the Boundaries of Unity* report to:

- understand each other better and learn from each other
- understand our own tradition better and offer it as a gift
- Enable us to be better able to work and pray together.



Introduction

Christians today know how important it is that they share their faith. We need to share it with those in our society who don't know about the good news of God. We need to share it with our children and young people so that they can grow up trusting in the goodness of God. And we need to share it with one another within the fellowship of the church so that we are built up towards the full stature of Christ.

Over the last three years a small group from the Church of England and from the Baptist Union of Great Britain have met together on a regular basis to talk about these questions and in doing so to learn both about and from each other. There is nothing new in that – Baptists and Anglicans often meet to pray and work together and in the midst of this to talk about how we share our faith. These more formal conversations are also the second time a small group from the two denominations have met to talk and work at theology together, the first conversations lasting from 1992 to 2005.

The most recent conversations has been published as a report *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity* which is available on-line at:

[The Church of England website](#)

or

[The Baptist Union website](#)

They have also been published as a book of the same title, published by Regent's Park College, Oxford, in 2015 which contains all that is in the report plus two further reflections. The book, priced £10.00 is available from [Regent's Park College website](#) or from Church House Bookshop, 31 Great Smith St, London SW1P 3BN.

It is very clear that despite some obvious differences, both historically and today, we share a common faith rooted in God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in God's redemption of the world in Jesus Christ. The conversations explored some of the details of similarity and difference.

Building on some of the content of our shared faith, the conversations went on to explore three distinct areas:

- How we receive and grow in the faith
- How we celebrate that faith in worship
- How we share that faith with others.

The aim of this study is to provide some resources so that you can carry on the conversation. Our hope is that there will be a whole variety of small groups of

Anglicans and Baptists, and hopefully those from other traditions as well, talking together, and that in and through these conversations:

- We understand each other better and learn from each other
- We understand our own tradition better and offer it as a gift
- We are better able to work and pray together.

There are three sections to this study, which could be used by a small group which meets on three different evenings or perhaps for a Saturday morning or afternoon. There is no expectation that those participating have read the full report *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity* and it is not necessary to have it to hand to participate in these studies, although doing so might prompt reading of the report itself. Rather this study will try and ask questions, with the addition of some quotes from the report, in a way that helps open up the conversation further.

Preparations

Most of what you need for these studies is contained here. In addition it would be helpful if everyone had a Bible and there were some pens and paper.

A small amount of preparation is needed for each study, but this is quite simple and is mainly a matter of at least one person looking through the outline for the session in advance and ensuring that things that are needed are to hand, perhaps the person who will act as facilitator of the group.

At the end of each session there are suggestions for prayer, and this may be handled differently by different groups, according to what is comfortable for that group. Given the nature of the studies, one way we would encourage you to use these times is to ensure a variety of approaches. A different person might be invited to prepare to lead this part of the session, and different people might lead the prayers in different ways. One week, for example, there might be prayers which are prepared and led, reflecting a more formal liturgy. Another week there might be spontaneous prayers; another week there might be intentional silence at moments through the prayers. In this way the group will be able to experience some diversity as well as talk about it.

If at the end of your sessions, there are some comments or thoughts that you would like to feed back to the two churches at national level, please contact:

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1. How do we receive and grow in our faith?
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3. How do we share our faith with others?

1. How do we receive and grow in our faith?

Aim: to think about the way we have grown in our faith and the ways our own church community helps others to grow in faith too

Opening Activity

A good way to begin is for everyone to introduce themselves briefly.

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and then have a moment of quiet afterwards to let the words sink in. They remind us that behind all we do and choose is God's grace.

Think back as near to the beginning of your own journey in faith as a Christian as you can? Take some time for everyone to share:

- One experience from near the beginning that was important
- One person who was important to us at this point.

Beginning a journey

The Christian life has often been described as a journey in which we grow and develop all through life. This journey will have a beginning which might be one clear moment but for many people is a longer process. We have already begun to think about the beginnings of our own journeys.

This beginning of following Jesus may have a number of specific moments, which might include:

- Baptism, whether as a an infant or as a believer
- Sharing in Communion for the first time
- Experiencing God's love in a particular way and making a commitment to be a disciple
- Being confirmed
- Becoming a member of a church for the first time.

Which of these have been important to you, and why?

Write the following on separate pieces of paper:

- Baptism
- Communion
- Prayer of commitment
- Confirmation
- Church membership.

Shuffle the pieces of paper and put them in a line in a random order. Suppose this was the order of events that happens for someone in the beginnings of their journey – what difference might it make to how they receive and grow in their faith? Shuffle the cards and repeat this several times. Do you think there is an ideal order in which these moments should happen?

How does your own church make these to be important moment for people? Are there ways our churches could make more of these particular moments to help others receive and grow in their faith?

Learning a Story

We may have learnt something about being a Christian and the Bible as a child, and Sunday by Sunday we learn more of the story of the Bible and of our faith. But, again, there may have been particular moments that were set up to help us learn about faith. These might include

- Classes to prepare for confirmation
- Classes to prepare for baptism
- Classes before becoming a church member
- An Alpha course or something similar like Christianity Explored or Emmaus.

Which of these featured in your stories? Were there other particular moments that helped you learn the story?

How does your church community currently try to help others learn the story? Are there ways this could be developed?

Those who took part in the more formal conversations recognised that increasingly the particular aspects of the different denominations are played down. But they also felt that there are particular aspects of the different traditions that need to be celebrated so that this, in a very positive way, can shape and form those who are growing in their faith.

‘The [Alpha] course does not, however, in its strict form help people to understand why and how they are formed within a particular church tradition’ (The Report, p. 76)

What do you think is important about your tradition?

What is good about the way that your own church celebrates its own tradition and helps the church to grow in and be shaped by this tradition?

Developing Children

Children are a key part of our churches and they are an important group of those who are receiving and growing in faith.

‘Obvious indications of this change [in the Church of England] are the number of Youth Councils at Diocesan level, the representation of the Church of England Youth Council at General Synod and the more recent national events like the Regeneration Summit which set out to engage the Church of England with the vision and energy of the young people who are part of it.’ (Report p. 65)

What part do children play in your church? How are they enabled to receive and grow in faith?

It is increasingly recognised that we learn by being involved and doing, as well as hearing what others say to us. Many churches are trying to find creative ways of children and young

people being more fully involved in church life. How have you tried to do this and how might this be developed in your own context?

Many Anglican and Baptist churches have been thinking and wrestling recently with the way children are included and participate in worship including sharing in Communion. Has your church thought about this and if so what conclusions have you currently come to?

Prayer and Worship

Read Ephesians 1:3-14 again. Have a short while of silence to let some of the words and images fill your minds.

Thanksgiving: Take the opportunity to thank God first for God's love and grace and then for your own journey of faith, for the others in the group and their own journeys, for the churches you represent.

Intercession: Can you think of others who are still at the beginning of their journey? In a time of quiet mention them by name, asking that God will continue to lead them and work in them through the Holy Spirit.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer together (decide what version you will use).

Going Deeper:

Here are some suggestions of resources which will help you think about these issues further:

The Report, *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity*, ch 3 'How do we receive and grow in the faith?'

The Report, *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity*, ch 7 'Listening to the voices'

Baptist Union of Great Britain *Gathering Round the Table: Children and Communion* at: http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/370681/Gathering_around_the.aspx

'Faith Stories' from the Church of England at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-stories-christianity-in-everyday-lives.aspx>

The Church of England, *Going for Growth: Transformation for Children, Young People and the Church*, at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/education/children-young-people/going-for-growth.aspx>

2. How do we Confess our Faith in Worship?

Aim: to think about the way our worship week by week expresses our faith and helps our faith to develop.

Opening Activity

Individually, make a list of what you think the differences in worship are between the Anglican and Baptist traditions. Then share your list with someone from the other tradition and see where you agree or disagree.

Read: Ephesians 4:1-6. Paul wants to stress unity among Christians. How does what Paul says here relate to the various lists you have compiled?

Proclaiming our Faith

Both traditions expect that in midst of offering our praise to God and receiving God's love and forgiveness, worship will also 'proclaim our faith', that is it will say something about what we believe about God.

Have prepared some small pieces of paper (perhaps a sheet of A4 into 8 pieces). Ask members of the group to suggest / write one thing that you think might happen in a Sunday service on each piece of paper, e.g. sermon / final blessing etc. As a group try and put some / all of them in an order that might reflect the shape of a Sunday service.

- What individual elements of a service might not always be included?
- Think back to the opening exercise – would the different churches represented tend to suggest a different shape?
- What is the significance of the overall shape for the meaning of worship?

'It is clear that *which* elements of worship (such as praise, confession and intercession) are used and *how* they are presented (for example in what pattern or sequence) also convey something of the faith we are confessing.' (Report, p. 106)

We are thinking about confessing or proclaim the faith in worship. How might the following elements of worship 'proclaim our faith'?

- Sermon
- Communion
- Prayers of confession and assurance of God's forgiveness
- Prayers of intercession
- An offering

'Further, the *where*, or the architecture of fixtures and fittings, is also an expression of what is important in our faith (Report, p. 106)

How might the 'space' where worship happens and the way it is designed and arranged also contribute to the way we proclaim our faith?

What might someone who visits your church, or where you worship on Sunday, think is important about what you believe?

Authorised or Free?

One of the differences between the two traditions (which might be on your lists) is that Anglican worship tends to be more concerned to follow authorised guidance – that is patterns and words for worship which have been agreed centrally and which are shared by all parishes in the Church of England – and Baptist worship tends to be more free – each congregation making its own decisions about patterns and words for worship.

What might be the benefits of each of these traditions?

The boxes below give two quotes from the report, one coming from an Anglican contributor and the other from a Baptist. Why might both of them be important?

'The authorized eucharistic prayers convey a great deal of fundamental Christian teaching' (Report, p. 86)

'So it is not the case that "anything goes", and we live with a tension between the call to be open to the promoting of the Spirit who calls us to proclaim the faith in spontaneous movements of worship, and the call to be faithful to the story of God's saving love as told in the Word, proclaiming it through the prayers as we journey through the service.' (Report, p. 91)

Universal or Local?

So far in this study we have used the language of 'our faith', in that we are thinking about what we believe and how that faith has been shaped. But there is a very sense that it is not simply 'our' faith, as if we could choose what we believe, but it is the faith of the church which has been passed on to us and which we pass on to others. This leads us to another area where in the formal conversations we recognised some differences.

Anglican churches tend to have more elements in their worship which connect them to the wider, universal church. For example:

- Saying ancient creeds together in worship
- Following the pattern of the Christian year (beginning with Advent)
- Using the lectionary (this offers a set pattern of readings from the Bible for each Sunday and also every day, with the Sunday the lectionary including four readings for the main service, one each from the Psalms, the rest of the Old Testament, the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament)
- Using the Lord's Prayer.

'The Christian year and the accompanying lectionary and collects convey a great deal of Christian teaching and shape the Church's worship through each annual cycle.' (Report, p. 84)

Ask those from Anglican churches in the group to talk about the way their church or churches uses these elements and what significance they have. Those from other traditions might have questions they would like to ask.

Baptist churches tend to have more elements which emphasise the place of the local church. For example:

- Freedom of local church to choose Scripture readings
- Freedom of local church to decide who may preach and preside at communion.

Ask those from Baptist churches in the group to talk about the way their church or churches arrange these things. Those from other traditions in the group might have questions they would like to ask.

Ask those from any other denominations to talk about the way their church or churches arrange these things and have time for questions.

Prayer and Worship

Thanksgiving: Take the opportunity to thank God for all those who have come before us in the faith and who have passed their faith onto us.

Intercession: Remember those in God's Church in other parts of the world, who may need to worship in secret, who may have few of the resources we do.

Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Using words and phrases from that passage pray for each other and for God's worldwide church.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer together (decide what version you will use).

Going Deeper:

Here are some suggestions of resources which will help you think about these issues further:

The Report, *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity*, ch 4 'How do we celebrate the faith in worship?'

The Report, *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity*, ch 7 'Listening to the voices'

Resources for prayer and worship from the Church of England at:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship.aspx>

Transforming worship in the Church of England at:

<http://www.transformingworship.org.uk/>

Some brief explanations and resources for worship from a Baptist perspective at:

http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220862/Worship_and_Prayer.aspx

A helpful introduction to worship within a Baptist tradition is Christopher Ellis, *Approaching God: A Guide for Worship Leaders and Worshippers* (Canterbury Press, 2009)

3. How do we share the faith with others?

Aim: to think about the way our churches are engaged in sharing the Christian faith with others

Opening Activity

Have some copies of Ephesians 3:7-13 printed on sheets of paper, enough for one each. Read it through individually in quiet two or three times and then highlight or circle four or five words / phrases that strike you as really important. Share these with each other saying why they seemed important.

The Nature of Mission

The world-wide Anglican Communion worked in the 1980s to produce a statement that expressed its understanding of mission. The 1988 Lambeth Conference adopted what have been described as 'The Five Marks of Mission'. Since then many others, including many Baptists, have adopted the same ideas. The 'Five Marks of Mission' are:

- To proclaim the good news of the kingdom
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures in society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the earth.

Make a list of the different activities of local churches represented in the group. Link any of them, as appropriate to these five marks of mission.

Which of the five marks seem more important judging by the activities of the church and which seem less important? Do you think that is the right balance? If not what could be done to change things?

Are there things which individual members of the congregations do which would fit within one of these marks of mission?

The German Baptist of the nineteenth century, Johannes Oncken, was known for his motto, 'Every Baptist a missionary'. (Report, p. 115)

The Anglican-Methodist covenant of 2001 declares 'mission is the vocation and responsibility of every baptized believer'. (Report, p. 122)

Baptists and Anglicans in the formal conversation agreed on this! How do you respond to this challenge?

Believing and Belonging

Baptists historically tended to stress that individuals needed to believe and confess faith before they could belong. Anglicans on the other hand have tended to stress that everyone already has a connection with the local parish church, in some sense belongs, out of which believing may come.

But these tendencies have been changing as churches and society has changed.

There are, of course, those who believe and belong!
Can you think of those connected in some way with your church who:

- belong without yet believing
- believe but no longer belong

The interplay between believing and belonging, alongside the continuing emphasis on the importance of mission, has increasingly shaped the way Baptists understand the church. (Report, p. 117)

The Public Square

Anglicans and Baptists have tended to think of the relationship between the church and the state in quite different ways. Both have wanted to think about the relationship but Anglicans have generally supported the place of the Church of England at the 'centre' of the state, while Baptists have wanted the church to speak to wider society from the 'margins'.

Do you think the following are appropriate or inappropriate in our contemporary society? Discuss together what reasons might be given on both sides.

- There are 24 Anglican Bishops and 2 Archbishops in the House of Lords.
- There should be acts of predominantly Christian worship in all schools.
- Ministers of various denominations are invited into schools to take assemblies.
- There are prayers before local council meetings.

Prayer and Worship

Thanksgiving: Take the opportunity to thank God for all that is good in our society and all that churches are able to contribute.

Intercession: Pray for the activities of the different churches represented and broaden out the prayers to include the wider world, perhaps praying for missionary organisations supported by the churches and particularly missionaries known to members of the group.

Read Ephesians 3:7-13 again and look back at the words you have underlined or highlighted. Use these words to develop into a prayer.

Finish with the Lord's Prayer together (decide what version you will use).

Going Deeper:

Here are some suggestions of resources which will help you think about these issues further:

The Report, *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity*, ch 5 'How do we share the faith beyond the walls of the church?'

The Report, *Sharing our Faith at the Boundaries of Unity*, ch 7 'Listening to the voices'

More information on the five marks of mission at:

<http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/marks-of-mission.aspx>

Some ideas and resources for sharing the faith that have come from the Baptist tradition at: http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220861/Sharing_and_Living.aspx

Some ideas and resources for sharing the faith that have come from the Anglican tradition at: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/mission.aspx>

More information on fresh expressions of church at:

<http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/>

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