

## Ideas for Pentecost

### Introduction

As we Walk the Way of Jesus, God's Spirit can turn obstacles into opportunities. This booklet offers some ideas for leading your local church in worship and fellowship through Pentecost. This unique festival takes place 50 days after Easter Sunday, celebrating the great gift of the Holy Spirit in enabling us to be everyday disciples of Jesus.

One of the main responses to this time of celebrating God's presence in the everyday is to enter into personal and collective conversation with God in prayer, asking for god's guidance and listening for God's response. [Thy Kingdom Come](#) - a global, ecumenical prayer movement - offers an excellent way into exploring what Pentecost means, and comes highly recommended by the Walking the Way steering group.

Some additional ideas and suggestions for your local church are included in the final section of this booklet.

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after Easter Sunday. It marks a major shift in the life and witness of the body of Christ. During his early ministry, Jesus' presence on earth enabled his followers to accomplish much in his name. After the resurrection, he appeared to his disciples and breathed on them, saying:

*'receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.'* (John 20:22 Good News Bible).

With this great power, came a great responsibility to be faithful to God and to one another within the community of believers: this is the Holy Habit of Fellowship. He also told them to expect much more:



Image: 'Leap' © Elizabeth Gray-King

*'Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptised with water, but in a few days, you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'* (Acts 1:4-5 Good News Bible).

The disciples' time to move forward in their service to God would come, but first, they needed to wait for something very special. The Amplified Bible gives more details about the power and depth of the blessings that awaited them: *'You will be baptised and empowered and united with the Holy Spirit...'* This interpretive translation is quite rich: the person of the Holy Spirit baptises and empowers and unites us with God. Firstly, we are spiritually sealed as God's children. Secondly, we are empowered with gifts and graces to be faithful and fruitful Walkers of the Way. Thirdly, we receive the gift of fellowship, enabling us to partner with the Spirit, who is on a mission to make disciples of all the earth. At Pentecost, early believers received the Spirit and subsequently responded to the Spirit in growing the Church, both in terms of values and numbers. We too, are called to be part of this, through the reception of spiritual gifts which enable us to successfully Walk the Way. Pentecost is the ideal time to be reminded of this.

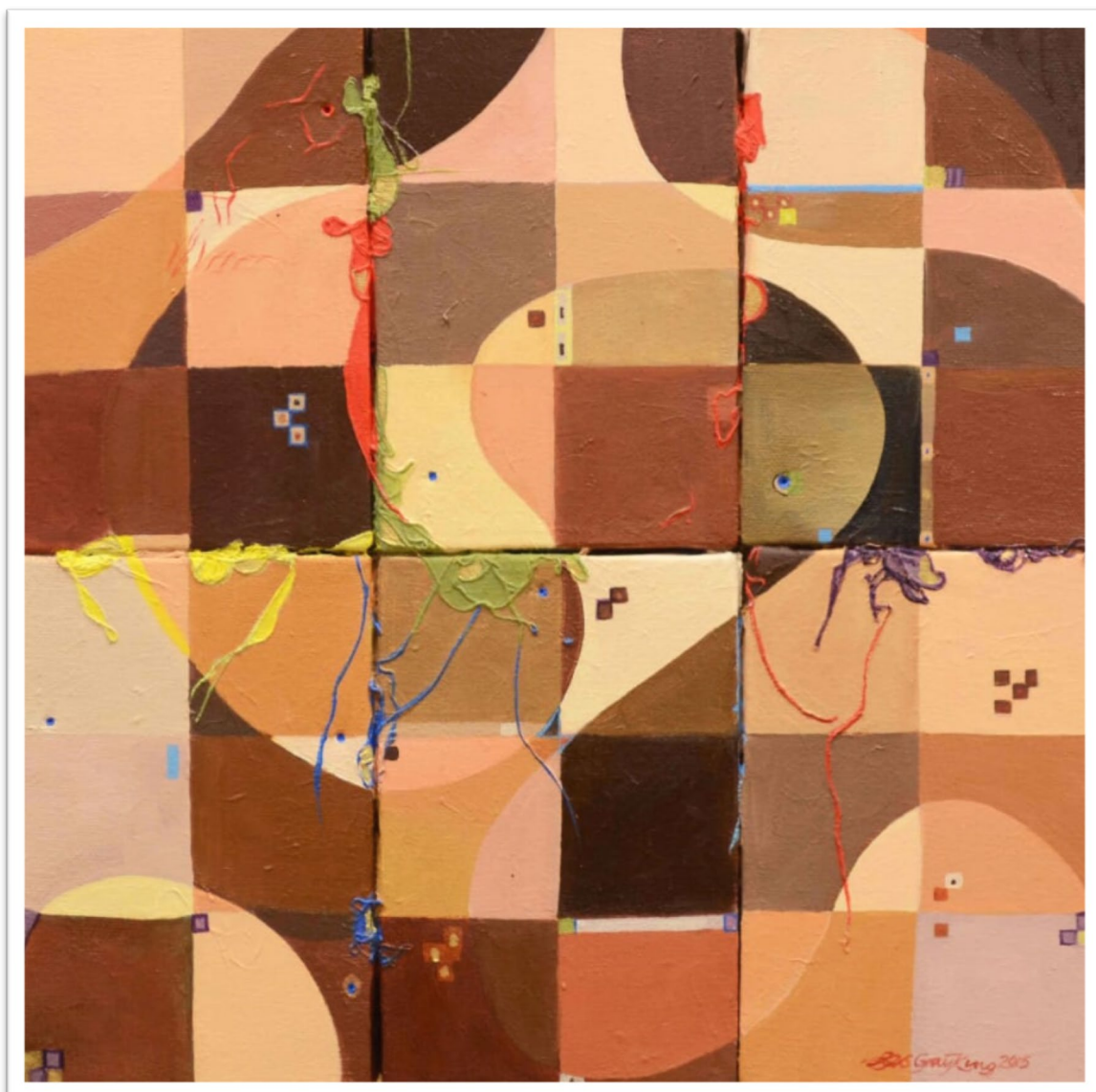


Image: 'Be' © Elizabeth Gray-King



## Gifts and fruits

Pentecost is the initiative of God the Father, achieved through the Holy Spirit. It is a pivotal part of God's purpose. Looking at the work of God in the Bible to bring humanity into full fruition, we see that God began by sending holy prophets to warn of what would happen if people failed to live in the ways God called them to. This message came with rulers who were charged with upholding the ways of God throughout their kingdoms. God also set out the law which would enable people to live in the ways of righteousness. After all these attempts to redeem us, we received the greatest gift of all, in the person of Jesus Christ. Through his sacrifice, we now have the presence of the Holy Spirit with us, in every single moment of our lives.

Pentecost is not an impersonal download of power from heaven. It is rather the gift of entering into a relationship with a triune God, attuning us with all that God desires of and for us, uniting us with other believers. This Spirit-enabled relationship yields spiritual fruits, gifts and graces within us.

Put simply, rather than receiving instructions and tools from a distant God, we are able to walk with Jesus along our journey of life, being guided and supported every step of the way, becoming the best people we can be.



The ministries to which God calls us includes that of being apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11-13). There are also countless other ways in which God works through each and every person whom God has created.

The gifts which God gives us as we seek to walk his way include words of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecies, discernment, tongues (spiritual language), interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-11), faith-filled prophecy, serving or ministering, teaching, exhortation, generosity, diligent leadership and cheerful compassion (Romans 12:6-8). There are also a multitude of other gifts and talents we see in everyone around us.

The fruits of the Spirit, the graces which God bestows upon us, are love, joy, peace, perseverance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and selfcontrol (Galatians 5:22), values which demonstrate the love and commitment of God. It is in seeing these within ourselves and those around us that we know the kingdom of God is growing.

Image: 'Call' © Elizabeth Gray-King

Paul insists that these gifts are activated by the Spirit, who freely allocates them at God's own discretion. Such gifts are down to nothing other than the grace of the Lord. For this reason, as we marvel at these gifts, abilities and graces, wondering how we can receive them, we are reminded that the disciples of Jesus were able to receive these, not as a result of anything they had done or any status they had obtained, but by their faith alone.

Pentecost has, at its core, the gifts of grace and faith, which are freely given to all those who, enabled by the Spirit to accept God's invitation, humbly seek God's face throughout their life journey.

**Consider:** How might your local church further recognise and celebrate the gifts of congregation members in the context of their everyday realities? How might elders and other leaders be supported in living lives that respond to God's presence in every aspect of their lives, enabling them to inspire others? The point is not to leave people feeling left out or inadequate, but rather to highlight God's strong, existing presence, in every life.



Image: 'Hear' © Elizabeth Gray-King



## Growing the flock

The gifts explored in the previous section are clearly aimed at building up the body of Christ in humility, helping it to become more Christ-like and to bear witness to the Gospel in ways that go beyond the life of local congregations. Pentecost is anchored on Jesus' purpose and passion to enable the whole world to know God's love and grace. In other words, it's not just about those who have already accepted the gift of the Spirit. It's about encouraging others to do the same.

In terms of encouraging people to Walk the Way, God is well aware that head knowledge is not sufficient for turning the world upside down in the way the Spirit aims to. God knows that relational and intimate knowledge of God, supported through the fellowship of believers, is the only sustainable and effective means of growing the flock. Just as God responded to this need by sending God's son, Jesus, to 'pitch his tent' and dwell among us in a manger in Bethlehem, so God also responds by sending the Spirit to 'set up camp' in our hearts, and in the world around us. The incarnation of God, starting with Jesus in Jerusalem, grows on and on, through the Holy Spirit, across the whole world.

The disciples would, very likely, have been happy to witness exclusively within the Jewish community in Jerusalem, on home turf, among their own people. However, Jesus had a much bigger plan for them, a plan that would see them move way beyond their comfort zone. We read Jesus' instructions to them as he ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God: they should go forth and '*make disciples of all nations*' (Matthew 28:19). Through the book of Acts, we receive some insight into the tasks that were expected of them and the Holy Habits which held them together (Acts 2:42-47).

The followers of Jesus were not chosen for this work because they were perfect. In fact, we see countless examples in Scripture of their frailty. We read of how they failed to put their trust in God in the midst of a storm (Mark 4:35-41). They worried about the resources they would need to carry out the work that had been asked of them (Matthew 6:26-34). They even tried to prevent Jesus from making the sacrifice which he had told them he needed to make (Luke 22:47-53). All this, while Jesus was still physically with them, able to show them the way directly!



Image: 'Fly' © Elizabeth Gray-King

Yet, despite all of this, it was this small band of seemingly insignificant people that formed the foundation of what we know now to be the Church, not because they were perfect, but because they were willing to go on a journey with Jesus, ultimately allowing God to shape their lives over a long period of time.

In the same way, God calls us to leave our comfort zones behind, not because we are perfect, but because we have been created to glorify God simply by being the people we are called to be, Walking the Way in which Jesus leads us throughout our lives, growing and changing according to the will of God.

Pentecost is a celebration of God's great and big plans for humanity, for the Church, for congregations and for individual believers.

**Consider:** Pentecost is both a reminder and an invitation to be ambitious in looking outward beyond our own lives and that of the Church, in joyful expectation of God's plan to grow the body of Christ. Pentecost is a season to keep dreaming God's dreams and seeing God's visions. How might these be further explored and fostered during elders' meetings and church meetings? Could spiritual retreats or fresh forms of worship help to examine these? We need to see Pentecost as an opportunity to consider whether our personal lives, as well as those of our local churches, are growing in the ways God intends.



Image: 'Watch' © Elizabeth Gray-King



## Holy Habits, worshipful lifestyles

Pentecost took place during the Festival of Weeks - one of the three major annual festivals, including Passover, marking the escape of God's people from slavery in Egypt - and the Feast of Tabernacles, which marked the years spent by God's people in the desert en route to the promised land. The Festival of Weeks is a harvest festival, a festival of thanksgiving. It also commemorates the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai, seven weeks after the exodus from Egypt. According to first-century literature, the Festival of Weeks was seen as a season for a yearly renewal of the covenant between God and God's people through the law. It was an outstanding celebration, bringing together, in Jerusalem, Jews from all nations.

Andrew Roberts and the Bible Reading Fellowship (BRF) have produced a number of resources around the Holy Habits which held the early Church together and kept them focussed on God's purposes, summarising them as: biblical teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, sharing resources, serving, eating together, gladness and generosity, worship, and making more disciples.

With this in mind, as we examine the Holy Habits, three things are worthy of special note in terms of Pentecost:

Firstly, the early followers of the way were faithful to Jesus' directive to remain in Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49, Acts 2:5). As if it weren't enough to be living in a context where it was unpopular to keep believing in the Son of God, they also needed to deal with pain and grief at the loss of their teacher, Jesus. In the midst of all this, they were asked to wait patiently and hold on to a sense of hope. This must have been excruciating, yet it was vital to the plans of God that they waited for Christ's Spirit before embarking on the work they had been set. Today, we too are also challenged to be faithful, obedient and patient, both individually and collectively, in a variety of ways, despite the major challenges which this can bring.



Image: 'Word Becomes Flesh' © Elizabeth Gray-King

Secondly, they were faithful to one another. When we read of the Pentecost account in Acts 2, we find them gathered together in one place (Acts 2:1). As 'God-fearing' people (Acts 2:5), gathered amid the festival of Weeks, it is likely that they were gathered to worship God when it all happened. The hymn 'As we are gathered, Jesus is here', about the presence of the Spirit of Christ among those gathered in God's name, comes to mind. In such a time of anxiety and waiting, praising God must have taken some commitment. They couldn't have done this without offering steadfast support to one another.

With the festival going on, being gathered in one place could still have meant being in households within the same place, or out celebrating in the same streets, spending time, of course, with relatives from many parts of the Roman Empire (Acts 2:5). The gathered body of believers was like another family to them. Worshipful gathering was absolutely essential to their life together.

Thirdly, at Pentecost, the Spirit came suddenly. The Spirit does not always come in dramatic ways, but it certainly did here. Whether we believe that the Pentecostal outpouring is a single, unique occurrence from which we continue to benefit, or believe that it can be repeated through history, it is clear that the people gathered were not expecting it, either at that time or in that form (Acts 2:7-13). This brings the challenge of being ready to respond to God at any time. This requires, not only obedience and commitment, but preparedness to be a fundamental part of our lifestyle, indeed our very DNA, as followers of Jesus, individually and collectively. This is particularly relevant in challenging times. We may 'not know the day or the hour' (Matthew 25:13) when God will act, but we can trust that God is always with us and will always lead us to fulness of life if we are willing to follow, trust and obey.



Pentecost is a reminder and an encouragement that God is ever waiting to bless us suddenly, and beyond our wildest expectations and predictions, if we can only wait faithfully.

**Consider:** How might the Holy Habits of the early Church help us to build up the patience, faithfulness, commitment and obedience we need to respond to God's sudden and unexpected moves in our lives? How might the resources of Andrew Roberts and the BRF help your local church to further examine and understand these habits? What changes are needed in your life to help you live out these habits more closely and enjoy the fruits that they develop?

Image: 'Chill' © Elizabeth Gray-King



## Cut to the heart

The purpose of Pentecost was to empower God's people to proclaim the Gospel in word and action, even, and especially, when they did not feel equipped to do so. Peter, the 'rock' upon which God would build the Church (Matthew 16:18), had already failed on a few occasions, perhaps most famously when he denied even knowing Jesus following his crucifixion (Luke 22:54-62). Peter was clearly an unstable follower, not a strong leader, and probably wasn't educated to a great degree. Yet it was he who was anointed to share the Good News persuasively. And that he did. The impact of his anointed preaching had a tantalising impact on the diverse, indeed global crowd, gathered in Acts 2:

*'Now when they heard this, **they were cut to the heart** and said to Peter and to the other apostles: "Brothers, what should we do?"' (Acts 2:37)*

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit opened the hearts of the listening crowds, made scales fall from their eyes, and assured them that the disciples were, indeed speaking through the Spirit, in the name of the risen Christ. Through this Spirit-led, Spirit-charged sharing of the Gospel, the crowd was left with a longing to have their lives changed through repentance, baptism and the acceptance of God's gift of the Holy Spirit.



Through the Holy Spirit, we too have the chance to elicit such a response. Whether a congregation chooses to proclaim God's love through charitable works, working with families, engaging in community work or in evangelical, public proclamation of the Gospel, the Spirit of Pentecost can enable us to share a message that will 'cut to the heart' of whoever our audience might be. Through our faithful living and sharing, people should wonder whether there is more to us, and who is behind our unusual, countercultural witness.

Like Peter, our own track record of living out the Holy Habits or cultivating the fruits of the Spirit into our own lives, either individually or collectively, may not be the greatest. However, it is not our own merit or achievement that enables our preaching, proclamation or sharing to have impact. It is the Holy Spirit alone, to which we must remain committed and faithful on our journey of life, whatever may befall us and whatever mistakes we may make.

Image: 'We Know Only in Part' © Elizabeth Gray-King

Scripture tells us that the very event of Pentecost itself led to at least 3,000 new believers (Acts 2:41). It seems unlikely that our own congregations will experience such a harvest, especially at such a high pace, but it is certain that, if we can be a community of believers which is united, obedient, faithful and hopeful in God, then we will be able to offer non-believers a taste of God's love for them and a glimpse of what the kingdom of God looks like.

It is also worth noting that the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost brought linguistic barriers crashing down. We may not find international congregations being able to suddenly understand each other's languages today. Yet, as people from different places and interests come together in the name of God, God honours such a gathering by transcending the things that keeps them apart. Their divisions give way to the unity of their various gifts and talents being used in harmony for the benefit of the whole community. As this happens, we notice that people's hearts become more fertile to the Good News. As people get to know each other more closely, they grow in their awareness of the love and presence of God in and through the lives of others.

Pentecost enables believers to display the Good News in unusual and convincing ways, including in our own lives, and through the witness of our local churches.

**Consider:** Who are the people your local church tries to reach? What do you do with them? What do you hope will happen as a result of this relationship? What messages might 'cut to the heart' of your local community? How might your church pray for God's guidance as you seek to unpack some of these challenging questions, seeking the power of the Holy Spirit? Could this be done publicly, so that people can witness the ministry you're offering directly?

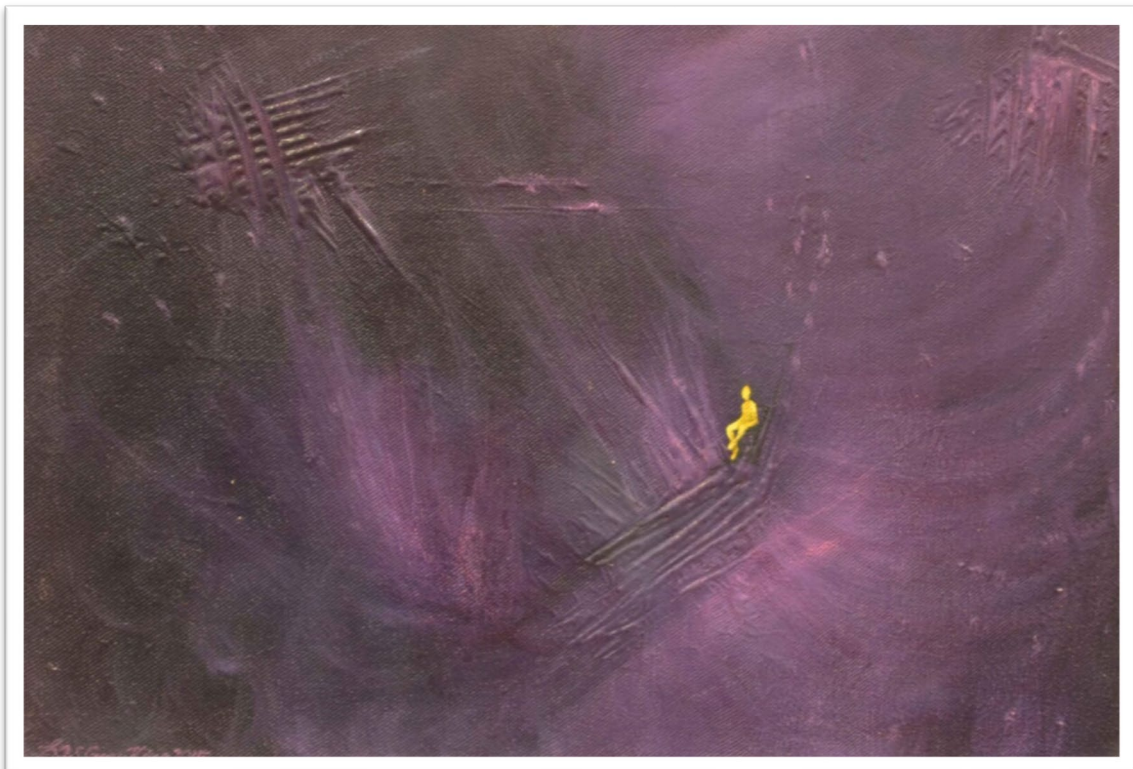


Image: 'Wait' © Elizabeth Gray-King



## Taking action, joy and celebration, bringing down barriers, using opportunities

Having taken time to explore various approaches to and elements of Pentecost, it is now time to consider how we ought to respond.

A good place to begin is focussing on what you and your church has to be thankful for. It can be all too easy to focus on negatives and difficulties in our churches, but use [Appreciating Church principles](#) to ask what's going well in your church. How is the Gospel already touching people through the ministry you're engaged in? What role does the Holy Spirit play in this work?

The next stage is to identify something specific that you or your community can celebrate. This should be something that will draw people from both within and outside your church community, something that is meaningful locally and defining of the neighbourhood's identity. Congregation members are very important to this process as they, together, hold knowledge and experience of living in their local area, knowing what matters and knowing where God is at work. They will also have gifts, talents and networks they can use to find out more information about what people need or would respond well to, and to plan how Pentecost might be seen as an opportunity to explore this in more depth.

In a day and age when Church can seem alienated from its community, especially when the Church has failed people or left them feeling judged or rejected, Pentecost offers a chance to break down barriers, to reduce suspicion and defensiveness and to heal past failures and misunderstandings. This can lead to positive visions, aims and objectives for the future. This can enable confidence, enthusiasm and even energise our communities. If the Church plays a pivotal role in this, people's hearts will be more receptive to the Good News.

Some suggestions include:

- Signing up for [Thy Kingdom Come](#), a global, ecumenical prayer movement, around Pentecost.
- Organising a 'slap-up' meal, inviting representatives from across the community (local business owners, homeless people, social workers, refugees etc) and providing opportunities to hear their thoughts on life, community and the local church, in order to shape the work and ministry of the church moving forward.



Image: 'That you may have life' © Elizabeth Gray-King

- A shared pastorate or area festival with input and/or displays from each congregation of how the Spirit is at work within their life and witness.
- A local ecumenical and/or interfaith festival, highlighting the gifts which each denomination and approach to faith brings to the local community.
- An interfaith festival or intercultural festival, highlighting the Pentecost theme of getting people together.
- Host a virtual/online festival exploring some of the themes and questions in this booklet around Pentecost, to welcome fresh, external perspectives into local discussions.
- Contact [Andrew and Sally Willett](#), Evangelism and Renewal Advocates with the [Group for Evangelism and Renewal \(GEAR\)](#) in the URC, to organise workshop sessions on the Holy Habits of Prayer and Making More Disciples. Both sessions can be run in a single day, and people can attend either or both as they wish. The sessions focus on demonstrating that God is already very much at work in our lives, cultivating habits of prayer and evangelism, whether we realise it or not.
- Organise a local community festival around the Queen's birthday, or another big celebration that fosters the identity of the community and would naturally bring people together, using this as an opportunity to consider the significance of Pentecost. Check out [www.royal.uk/queens-birthday](http://www.royal.uk/queens-birthday) for more ideas.
- All of these suggestions could involve a time of shared worship, or a time of sharing stories of faith testimony. If you decide to do so, be open about what you're inviting people to come along to.
- Have a look at [spiritofinvitation.com](http://spiritofinvitation.com) for more inspiration about how you might respond to the call to share the Good News with people in your community.

To organise such opportunities, you may wish to:

- Identify a small group in your church to explore themes and suggestions for community Pentecost celebrations.
- Consult relevant members of the community, and also other churches, involving them in a steering group, if possible, to make decisions on how things will proceed.
- Think about how different groups who use the church building might be enabled to engage in Pentecost celebrations, something that would enable each group to share their own identity and story.



- Design events and responses with awareness of wider community gifts and cultural values.
- Consider practical implications such as cost, venue, format, volunteers, food, refreshments, advertising, key guests, etc. The URC's [Vision 2020 small grants scheme](#) could help with this.
- Set up a prayer team so that everyone feels cared for, has a place to make prayer requests, or the opportunity to enter into prayer while events, gatherings or other responses are taking place.
- Visit the [Walking the Way webpages](#) for more resources and inspiration on developing an ethos of whole-of-life discipleship in your own life and that of your local church.

*Produced by Bachelard Kaze Yemtsa, April 2020*



Image: 'And it was Good' © Elizabeth Gray-King

To find out more about the artwork featured in this resource, from Elizabeth Gray-King's Pentecost Trinity exhibition, click [here](#).