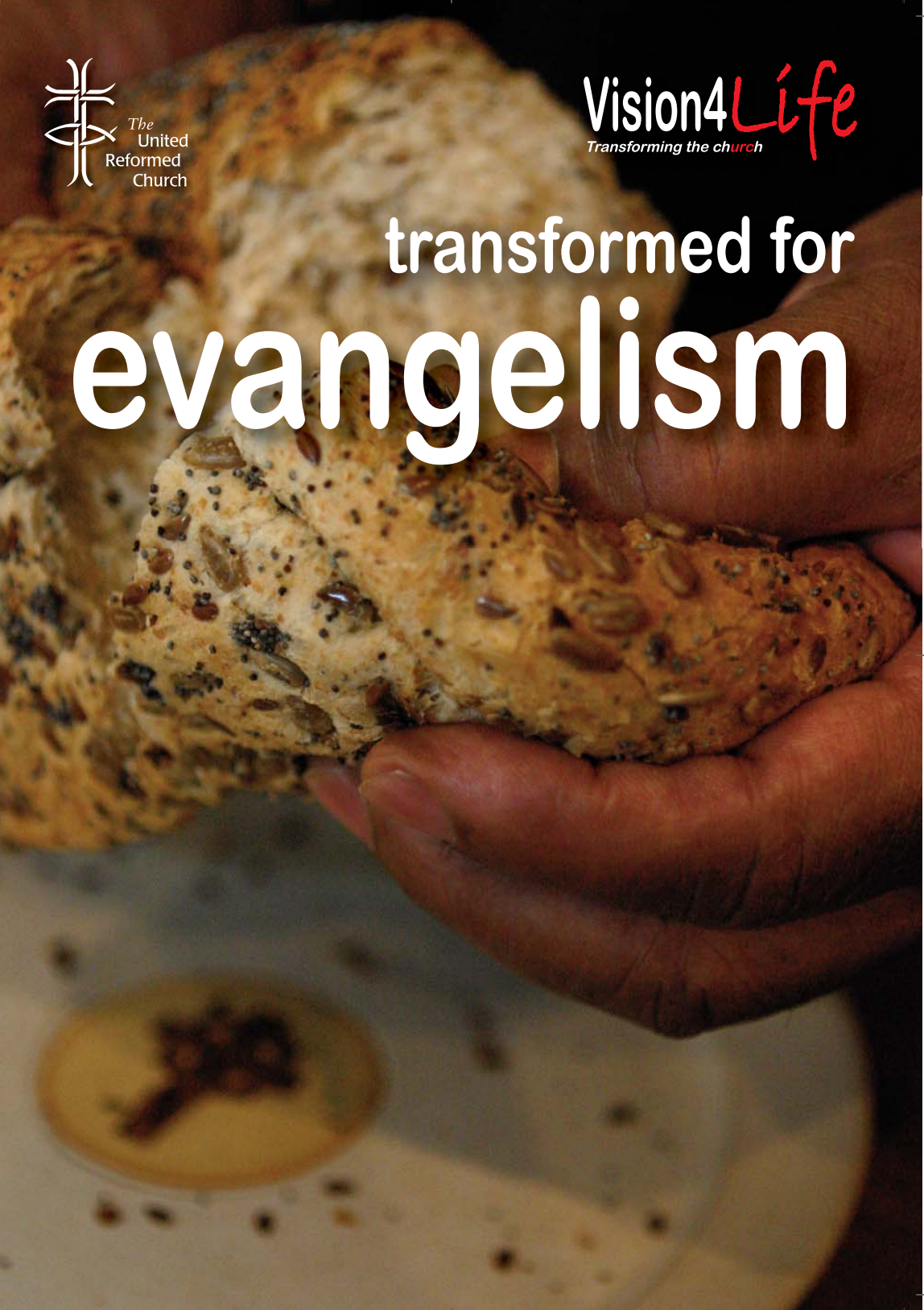




Vision4Life
Transforming the church

transformed for evangelism





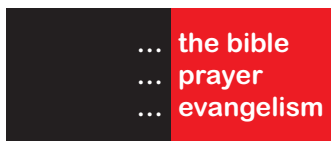
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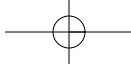
conversations about



Produced by Communications and Editorial on behalf of the Vision4Life steering group.

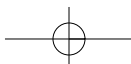
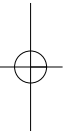
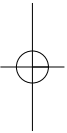
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transformed for evangelism introduction



Introduction

The vision

This is the third of four conversations which congregations across the United Reformed Church are having during 2008. *Vision4Life* follows on from *Catch the Vision* and was introduced in 2007 at General Assembly. It grew from conversations between people from across the denomination, who got inspired by exploring the Bible and prayer, and sharing their faith stories.

Churches planning local initiatives such as Hope '08 are encouraged to try including elements of *Vision4Life* within these events, and not to see it as being in competition with them.

What follows is not a session about evangelism but an invitation to talk about how we share our faith stories in church and in our daily lives. How comfortable or uncomfortable are we with talking about our faith to each other and how well does that equip us to share our faith with others? The four sections – Remember, Reflect, Respond and Refresh – are followed by stories under the heading of 'Life'.

This material is for use by whoever leads the session – probably ministers or Elders. If leadership can be shared by several people then so much the better. Group members will each need a photocopy of the worksheets at the back of the booklet.

Please visit the website – www.vision4life.org.uk – for other *Vision4Life* materials including worship.

How to use the material

The most important role for leaders is to give everyone the best chance to talk openly and honestly about their story and experience. Set ground rules at the start – about listening to each other, respecting each other's views, encouraging everyone to speak and not letting anyone dominate.

For the opening 'Remember' section of this material there is a worksheet (pp 22-23) to photocopy and give out to everyone taking part. There are suggested timings for each section, eg: 5, 10 if you are using the material in one 90 minute session, which may begin and end with worship.

Here are some suggestions for using the material. Please choose any which suit your setting and feel free to adapt or add to them:

- Conversations woven into Sunday services
- Specially-arranged discussion groups at church or in people's homes (or a mixture)
- Pairs of Elders organising home discussion groups for those on their lists
- A church day conference for all four conversations, or two half day sessions
- People offering to host one or more discussions with a meal in their home
- Weaving these conversations into existing groups and events
- Conversational events with shared food at your church
- Parallel events for different parts of the church family such as young people
- Find ways to include the housebound and those with mobility difficulties



Notes to assist you
are in the margins



section one:
remember

**'I will sing to the LORD, because he
has dealt bountifully with me.'**

Psalm 13 verse 6

transformed for evangelism section one: remember

Telling our stories 10

Give out the worksheets and then ask people to start thinking about their personal faith story. Everyone has a story to tell and there are no 'right' or 'wrong' stories – just stories. How did they come to be part of the Church? How did they come to be part of this particular congregation?

Get people to form twos or threes with others they do not know very well. Using the questions on the worksheets as a prompt, ask all of them to tell their faith story simply, making sure each person has a chance to speak.

Then ask the small groups to pair up and invite people to retell the story of someone in their original two or three to those in the bigger group.

Sharing our journeys 5

Now gather the whole group together again and ask people to share a flavour of the things they said in their twos and threes. Try to build up a shared picture of the faith journeys people have taken through life. You may find it valuable to keep a note of what people have shared, using whatever method you wish, whether a flipchart or electronic means.

This section has several purposes. It aims to get people remembering their own experiences and talking about these in the group. It also wants people to listen to someone else's story so they can pass it on. Encouraging people to talk openly, honestly and freely about their faith is at the heart of the whole process.



This exercise needs two facilitators – one to write up and the other to interact with those giving feedback and with the whole group. The aim is to share and record what people have said, not to correct or judge their comments. It's about giving them an affirming welcome, and checking you understand what they mean, as you list their contributions.



section two: reflect

'They found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions'.

Luke Chapter 2 verse 46

transformed for evangelism section two: reflect

Questions we always wanted to ask 10

Hand out pieces of blank paper – no larger than A5 – and ask everyone to write a question they've always wanted to ask about the Christian faith. They don't need to put their name on the sheet but their writing should be readable.

Collect the papers in and put them into categories according to the subject matter. Then start a discussion with the group to reflect on possible answers to the questions, choosing one from each subject area if there are a lot of questions to cover. This could be started in pairs or small groups.

Finally, invite people to reflect on any lessons for talking about faith to be learned from this exercise, and note them down for all to see.

What keeps us in? 5

Ask people to return to their twos and threes to answer the next question on their worksheet:

Reflect on when your faith has been most stretched. What kept you in the church then?

How was it for you? 10

Ask people to find others they haven't shared with yet and talk in twos and threes about what they've done so far, using the next questions on the worksheets.

- What was it like listening to other people's faith stories and questions?
- Was it easy or hard to share their own story?
- How did they feel when they'd told their story?
- Did they worry that their story was not dramatic enough or too dramatic?
- Did these conversations raise questions for them?

Now bring the whole group back together and invite people to reflect together on the process so far.

In any discussion of Christian faith, and how we share it, there can be unasked questions that concern people but don't get voiced. This is an opportunity for those in the group to raise those questions, and experience how it feels to do so, which may help them when relating to others who are taking steps of faith and asking questions.



As before, the answers you get are important, but so is the process. How well are people responding and sharing? Does the process feel relaxed and encouraging?

transformed for evangelism section two: reflect

How helpful is our congregation? 10

Invite the whole group to return to their original twos and threes. Ask them to consider how people in the congregation might respond to serious issues of personal faith without creating awkwardness.

Church is about faith in God, but how easy is it for people to talk about their relationship with God in church? Surely church, above all, should be the place where we are able to do this.

Ask each small group to consider various situations and settings in the life of the church. Get people thinking about how comfortable and appropriate it would feel to bring up a deep personal issue about faith there.

Try to list about a dozen settings and situations which reflect what happens in their church – there's a suggested list on the next page – and ask the groups to score them from 1 to 5.

5 points = very comfortable and appropriate

3 points = could be all right sometimes

1 point = embarrassing and inappropriate

When the small groups have scored all these settings bring the whole group back together, and add up the points for each situation in turn.



Remember, the process is important as well as the answers you get. How well are people responding and sharing? Is the atmosphere relaxed and encouraging?

Suggested situations

- Sunday morning worship
- With the preacher at the church door
- Church Meeting
- Junior Church group – if you're young
- Coffee after worship
- When the minister, an Elder or pastoral visitor calls
- Bible Study
- A stall at the Church Fete
- A church social evening
- Visiting a friend from church
- A church outing
- Choir practice
- Sharing the church cleaning
- In the car park

Discuss the scores for the various settings. Then ask every small group to give an overall score for their church when asked 'How comfortable and helpful a setting is our church for talking about personal faith concerns or issues?' Are they content with their church's scores?



section three:
respond

'I am longing to see you
so that I may share with you'.

Romans Chapter 1 verse 11

transformed for evangelism section three: respond

Making our faith sharing work for us 5

Here is a chance to respond to what has been said so far, in the light of what the group has shared.

- Does the way they understand evangelism and the sharing of faith stories relate to their daily lives and experience?
- Does their church need to refresh and change the way it enables people to talk about their faith within the fellowship?
- Does the sharing of faith stories reach people on the margins or beyond the fellowship?

How typical of our congregation are we? 5

Ask the group to consider what they have shared about telling their faith stories, and how it works for them now, in the light of those members of the congregation who are not present.

Would those others have agreed with the views expressed in the group or not?

This section is to get the group reflecting on how people talk about faith in their congregation, week by week.



This is going to be the crunch question to allow the whole process to proceed in any church.



This is actually quite an important question. The process needs to encourage as many people as possible in each fellowship to engage more deeply with sharing their faith story – not just the 'faithful few'.



section four: refresh

'As you go, proclaim the
good news'.

Matthew Chapter 10 verse 7

transformed for evangelism section three: respond

Any ideas as to how we do this? 5

Ask if the group want their church to sign up for Vision4Life which includes the Evangelism Year starting in Advent 2010. The website – www.vision4life.org.uk – will have a menu of practical suggestions and materials from mid 2010 onwards. This will not be all that's needed for every church but it should allow local groups to come up with their own programme, suited to the needs around them.

Meanwhile, if people wonder how they might start refreshing their engagement with evangelism now, here are some suggestions. Maybe they do some of these already:

- Could you encourage people to bring a non-church friend with them to worship?
- Might you ask people to write about their faith story for the church magazine? This would be a good way for Elders and others to introduce themselves to the congregation.
- Do you have a church welcome pack, with information for visitors to take away about what you do and who you are? If not, find a church that does and borrow or adapt some of their ideas.
- Could you ask some old and new members of the congregation to say what drew them to faith and use their quotes – not necessarily by name – in a special Sunday service?

This is a chance for the group to stop, draw breath, and consider how their conversation so far could relate to what their church does now and might do in the future.



life

'We struggle to put our faith into words when asked, so we need to practice with each other.'

**Dr John Campbell,
Vision4Life steering group**

Faith sharing for everyone 5

Talking about our personal faith is not something many Christians do naturally, without some preparation and encouragement. Often people don't talk to one another in depth about their close human relationships unless there is a problem, and in the same way many church people hesitate to talk of their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The most effective way to renew the Church is for Christians to tell people about the difference God has made in their lives. If we're going to put our faith story into words, so as to help someone who is looking for God, we need to do a bit of work on ourselves first. This means we have to practice talking about what drew us into knowing God. We also need to try putting into words how we feel about loving Jesus and being loved by him.

When we discover we love another person we're often full of excitement and delight at the difference they make in our lives. At such times we may have no problem showing others how we feel or expressing the difference this love makes to us. God has done more for us than any human being ever will. Let's try sharing with others the words, music, images and movement that express the gratitude, release and joy brought into our lives by God's love.

Four stories of people sharing their faith 10

At this point you might offer one or more of these four stories of people telling others about their faith. You can decide which to share with your group or you may think of others to encourage and inspire people.

This section can be shared as a trigger for further thought. It gives a brief overview of the importance of people learning to share their faith stories if churches are to refresh and renew their understanding of evangelism. It may help encourage people to try this out with others and put their personal faith into words. Remember we all use language differently and face different challenges in speaking out loud.

transformed for evangelism life

*'deciding to make a
commitment'*

Finding God away from home

Two young women who shared a flat had both moved to London to work. They decided to look together for something a bit different in life that had nothing to do with work. While looking through lists of evening classes they came across an advert for a course exploring Christianity and decided to sign up. The atmosphere was welcoming and the course appeared well organised. They were delighted to find other professional, single, 20 somethings like themselves. The 'weekend away' came as a bit of a culture shock. Accommodation was pretty basic. Everybody let their hair down enjoying party games. Both women found themselves arriving at a point where they wanted to make a personal commitment to Christian faith. The fact that the church which had put on the course took this work seriously, did it well and recognised the need to encourage, challenge and nurture people as they grew in faith, made a real difference.

*'of course the church
didn't rush her'*

Taking the next step of faith

Deborah did an introductory course about Christian faith with a church in her town, but could not bring herself to take the next step and invite Jesus Christ into her life. Of course, the church concerned didn't try to rush her. A few months later though, when her primary school- aged son asked to become a Christian, the minister thought it was important that she should be present too. As he explained to the son what they would pray together, tears started to trickle down Deborah's cheeks. Recognising that the Holy Spirit was at work in her life too, at that very moment, the minister said simply: 'It's time for you as well, isn't it?' She nodded and he led them both in prayer, phrase by phrase, as they made a break with the past and invited Jesus to come into their lives as friend and saviour.

Good news on the high street

Who knows how many people come to faith because somebody else talks about the church they go to and invites others along? Often the best evangelists are people who are prepared to talk to anyone, who notice new faces and are not afraid to strike up a conversation where God gets mentioned. A village church kept getting new worshippers on a regular basis because one faithful member, a woman in her 60s, so often invited people to church. She enjoyed being out and about, and liked nothing better than meeting people on the High Street. When she was shopping she would often strike up conversations with people she knew, as well as those she didn't. Because church was such an important part of her life it was natural for her to talk about her friends in the congregation, and any things that were due to happen there in the coming week. Other worshippers got so used to her friendship evangelism that whenever they saw a new person in church they tended to assume she must have asked the person along – often she had done.

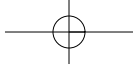
'Come along to our church!'

transformed for evangelism life

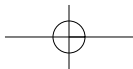
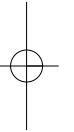
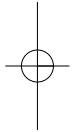
*'Becoming spiritual
midwives'!*

Laughter and learning

Everyone seemed to be having a lot of fun during the final evening of a training retreat in evangelism. More than 60 people were learning through role-play how to lead someone into committing themselves to God. People worked in groups of three, with one observing while another accompanied the third person in the process of making the decision to put Christ first in their lives. The room was filled with laughter and afterwards the three-somes talked through what had been helpful and what could have been done better. Everyone seemed to have been encouraged in finding that they were capable of acting as a spiritual midwife. Having rehearsed it in a 'practice' situation, people felt confident that when it came to the real thing they would be equipped to help someone who was really wanting to make a step of faith in Jesus.



transformed for evangelism life





worksheet

transformed for evangelism

TELLING OUR STORIES

In your twos or threes take turns to talk of three things:

- how did you become a member of the Church?
- what brought you to join this congregation?
- Now join with another group and retell your original partner's story to those in the bigger group.

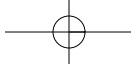
WHAT KEEPS US IN?

In your twos and threes, reflect on when your faith has been most stretched. What kept you in the church then?

HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

In a new group of two or three, talk in turn about what you have done so far in this conversation:

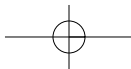
- what was it like listening to other people's faith stories and questions?
- was it easy or hard to share your own story?
- how did you feel when you'd told your story?
- did you worry that your story was not dramatic enough or too dramatic?
- did these conversations raise questions for you?



transformed for evangelism worksheet

HOW HELPFUL IS OUR CONGREGATION?

In your original twos and threes, discuss how easy it is for people in your congregation to talk, without creating awkwardness, about issues of personal faith. You will be given a list of possible situations and settings in church life to score from 1 to 5 in terms of how comfortable and appropriate it would be to bring up a deep personal issue about faith there.





Hearing back from you...

We hope that our ideas have helped you to have a useful discussion and that your church is considering engaging with the next three years of *Vision4Life*.

A lot of *Vision4Life* materials, including downloadable versions of the words and images in this booklet, will be on the website www.vision4life.org.uk, as well as worship ideas. Please use the website if you can and let us know if having printed materials as well is really important to you.

Comments, stories and suggestions on our website:

www.vision4life.org.uk

or send an email to:

admin@vision4life.org.uk

or write to us at:

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Many thanks from the *Vision4Life* steering group

