



The
United
Reformed
Church

Vision4Life
Transformed for evangelism

exploring evangelism

– welcome to the Evangelism Year

© The United Reformed Church 2010

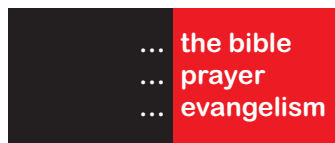
The material may be used freely in the worship of the churches.

If it is used in printed form, acknowledgement of the source should be given.

The reproduction of the material for circulation or sale beyond a local church is prohibited without permission. Application for permission of use should be addressed to Communications and Editorial, The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT.

Poem p36 © Lucy Berry

conversations about



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

Design and Photography:
Twenty-Five Educational 0151 632 1657

Printed by APG on HELLO silk FSC. APG hold ISO 14001 Accreditation for International Environmental Standards

*Biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible
©1989 The Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches in the USA.*



exploring evangelism

– welcome to the Evangelism Year



Contents

Introduction	6
1 Getting started	9
2 Making relationships	17
3 Following Jesus	25
4 Making a commitment.....	31
5 Getting on with it	41



What do you think evangelism is?

Welcome to the Vision4Life Evangelism Year



You can still access material for the Bible and Prayer Years on the website www.vision4life.org.uk

This is the final year in the *Vision4Life* process. This year we are challenged to be 'transformed for evangelism'. That's a word that has many people puzzled or worried. In this booklet we will explore what it might mean in your church in a number of different ways. One way this booklet could be used is in five group sessions.

If you are going to work as a group it is worth spending some time setting up some simple rules. This will help everyone feel safe and able to contribute. These might include:

- the group will value all contributions, both verbal and nonverbal;
- the group is here to build confidence through affirming each other;
- the group will keep confidential anything that is shared within the group;
- the group will provide a safe environment in which to try sharing our faith on a small scale first.

If you are setting up a group it is important to consider the leadership of the group from the very beginning. It is not always those who have traditionally been the leaders of the local situation who make the best leaders for a non-judgemental, affirming and safe group of this kind. Neither is it necessarily the resident evangelism expert. Consider what kind of skills and abilities your leadership team will need and who has these skills. A team or small group often works better than one person.

In this booklet we shall introduce a number of characters. Each will represent an opportunity for evangelism and they are there for you to consider,



Throughout the booklet, notes to assist you will be found in page margins.

relate to your own experience and turn into action. There are associated Bible studies and exercises designed to help in your discussions and in your ability to respond to such opportunities. There are more characters and additional material on the website. Our hope is that you will enjoy this process and find that evangelism is a normal and practical activity for all Christians and that you, too, can be an effective agent of the Holy Spirit in making the kingdom of God a growing reality in people's lives – including your own...

A photograph of two men in conversation at what appears to be a conference or meeting. The man in the foreground is older, with grey hair and glasses, wearing a plaid shirt and a blue lanyard. He is looking towards the other man. The man in the background is younger, with dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and a grey jacket. He is looking back at the older man. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and lights.

session one:

getting started

Introduction

In this booklet you will hear from different people about their experience of sharing Christian faith. We hope that this approach will help you to feel more confident when it comes to sharing your own faith. We offer two different perspectives on the story of faith:

- Our story: about how individuals and groups have come to faith
- God's story: about how God deals with us, calls us, forms us and empowers our faith sharing.

First responses to evangelism

Turn back to page 6. There you will find some responses from ordinary people to the word evangelism. Do you connect with any of these responses? If so, which ones?

Here are some stories about evangelism. Which ones connect with your experience?



As you listen to these stories remember that the approach to evangelism used in this booklet relies on everyone feeling free to share relevant incidents and stories from their own personal life story. It's important that this is done in an atmosphere of trust, respect and mutual confidence.

Let me tell you...

Marion, now in her 70s, says, 'In my younger days I did my share of trying to convince people about the Gospel, even standing outside Holborn tube station and giving out tracts in all weathers. But now I am more convinced that it is as a team that we are more effective. Each one needs to play their particular part in the whole enterprise, passing on the message according to their skills and abilities.'

Sally says, 'I'm a GP and I have thousands of encounters a year. This is where I need help to make these encounters meaningful. And yet this is still where I find the church lacking. It's good at giving me more things to do in and for the church.'

But as for whole life ministry, I still struggle to find help with that.'

Linda says, 'I'm not really sure what evangelism is. Is it persuading people to come to Jesus? I know a good church which has open doors to anyone – but it isn't a church which shouts about itself much. So is that a bit of a waste? Asylum seekers and other people who've been through terrible things need somewhere to recuperate, don't they? They may just need this love and acceptance to help them get back on their feet, so to speak. But if a church doesn't make some pretty clear statements about Jesus and his love, it's copping out, isn't it? Is welcoming people enough?'

David says, 'We live in a world where facebook friends are replacing face-to-face friends and a conversation has 140 characters (if you tweet). What we need is someone or something who can help us to make real relationships again. I don't think just preaching at people will make any difference. We need people – Christians – who will go out of their way to befriend others. But that's not evangelism. Is it?'



There will be 'Our story' questions all through this booklet. You can look at them together in a group or on your own. If you are doing this on your own, you may want to make some notes in a journal so you can think about them later or share them with someone else. If you are doing this as a group, remember the ground rules mentioned earlier.

Our story

How do you relate to what Marion, Sally, Linda and David say?

Think about your own journey in the faith:

- How did it begin?
- What have been the most memorable moments?
- What would you say it is like now?
- What effect would you like the evangelism year to have on your life and faith?

Something to think about

How has God related to you in the past?

Consider a time when God was very real to you.

Can you remember the ways in which God has been at work in your church?

Spend some time with others mapping out a realistic story of your journey as a fellowship over recent years. You will need to agree a starting point.

- What have been the highs and the lows?
- As you remember your community, who has come and gone?
- What other changes have you seen?
- Where was God in all this?

You may find it helpful to make your remembered story into a poster or powerpoint for others to see.



In Bible Year one of the activities was to remember the life of Jesus. You may want to go back and use the 'Jesus Life Line' activity from the Bible Year part of the website. Or you may just want to talk about what you remember from Jesus' life or make some notes about it in your journal.

God's story

In Year One of *Vision4Life* we explored how we are transformed by the Bible. As we remember God's story again it might be helpful to reflect on the effect of the Bible Year on your church, what you did and what happened.

Let me tell you...

A group of six young people aged 14-16 were remembering Jesus' life. 'We don't remember owt,' they said as we got started.

Then they gradually remembered a number of different events from Jesus' life: he was born, he got lost when he was a teenager, he went into the desert

for 40 days and nights, he met some fishermen and went fishing with them, he did 'a load of other things' and then he went to Jerusalem on a donkey. Now things were really hotting up. This was what they recalled from the last week of Jesus' life: he ate a last supper with his friends, he got arrested and then crucified, then he came back to life again on Easter Day. But last of all someone said: 'I remember he had another supper with his friends, and I'm going to call that "The not last supper".'

Something to think about

Do you remember that 'not last supper'? Some people refer to it as the Supper at Emmaus. Think about that story now. According to your local practice you may want to spend some time remembering it alone or together, to listen to someone retelling it, or read it from a Bible, in which case you will find it at Luke 24:13-35.

One of the things the two disciples say to each other is, 'It was like a fire burning in us when he talked to us.' They are referring to their encounter with Jesus. Can you think of a time when you met with someone and it seemed to be like that?

When we think we are expected to talk about God we might have a range of responses. Here are some frequently heard comments:

- 'I'm worried I'll not know the answer.'
- 'I'm worried that it'll be about rote learning of answers and not about listening.'
- 'I'm worried that people will think of answers more than they'll think of authentic, truthful relationships.'
- 'I'm worried people won't feel able to say, 'I don't know'.'



You can offer participants the opportunity to tell each other about any such encounters they have had, or if doing this on your own, make some notes in your journal. Where folks say 'No, that has not happened to me,' invite them to listen to what others have to say. This may spark off some memory of a significant encounter they had overlooked, and it can also help those who are telling their story to have an audience to tell it to.



This question doesn't have a right answer!

Answers are to be collected and discussed but not to be put in any particular order.

- 'I'm worried what people will think of me if I talk about God.'

How do you respond to these concerns?

What would you say are the two most important things to you about God?

It is important to recognise that Matthew's Gospel does not start with the Great Commission to make disciples (followers) of all the nations (28:18-20). That is right at the end. Rather, it starts with a history (1:1-17) – a story – a plan: God's plan being worked out in human life. As a whole, it is the story of God's plan for and activity in God's world. It is the story of Immanuel, God with us (1:23). Eventually, when we do arrive at the Great Commission, we find that it is not only a call to convert but a call to make disciples for the one who is the ultimate representative of God's kingdom on earth. And even then, God's promise is, 'I will be with you always.'

Another text that encapsulates so much of what Matthew wants his readers to understand and which sums up Jesus' ministry is 4:23: 'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.' The good news in Matthew is that the kingdom of heaven has come to earth and it demands people's response and allegiance.

How do you respond to these two different parts of Matthew's Gospel: 'Go and make all people my disciples' (Matthew 28:18) and 'Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people' (Matthew 5:23)?

- How do the two fit together?
- Which do you find easier to connect with and why?
- Is there anything you find difficult to connect with?

Next steps

If possible, talk with some other people about what evangelism means to them. You could start by talking with two people under 20 and ask them what the word evangelism means to them. Note their responses. Then find two people between 20 and 40 and do the same. Then two people between 40 and 60 and finally two people over 60. If there are any minority groups in your church be sure to include them. Don't just ask the obvious people! Discuss your findings with others.

Prayer

Lord, help us see more clearly
the connection between your story and ours,
and how our different experiences have a place
within your message of good news for the world.
When you use us to reach out to others,
may we offer what we can,
trusting the outcome to your wisdom and love.
Amen

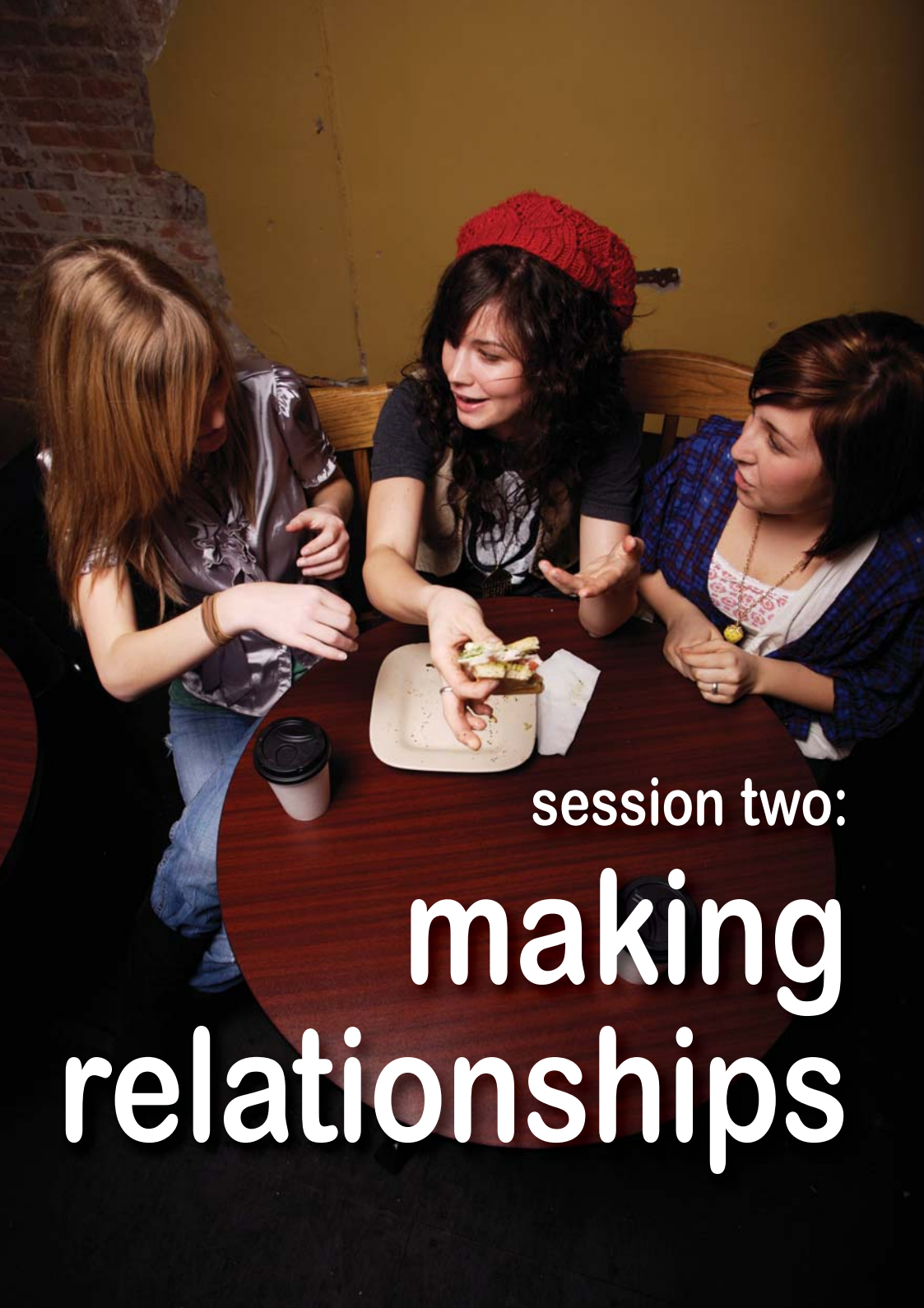


Throughout the booklet there is Bible study material from Matthew's Gospel in particular, as this dovetails with the Sunday Bible readings in this year's lectionary.

Evaluation

At the end of each session for the Evangelism Year it is important to evaluate the session and use the feedback to plan what to do next. There are three simple questions suggested for the evaluation of each session:

- What did you enjoy or like most about it?
- What did you find most difficult or challenging?
- What would you like to do next?



session two:

making relationships



Here are three stories to help you think about evangelism

In our ordinary lives Christians are in touch with more people who don't go to church than we might at first think. Do any of these stories connect with your experience?

Let me tell you...

Jonathan is in his thirties. He's an architect with a city firm. He lives near to Matthew's church in a flat which he has been doing up for the last year with a friend. Matthew has often chatted to him when their paths cross early some mornings when out jogging and when walking his dog. Jonathan always asks how Matthew is and he has a gentle, vulnerable manner which Matthew finds disarming. Jonathan's parents, who are both alive, are only the other side of town – but he says the family rarely gets together. Matthew once mentioned that he was looking forward to his Christmas carol service and Jonathan sighed and said that he used to love church too – that he was in the choir as a little boy, but that he 'fell out with God'.

Matthew got the impression that Jonathan missed church – but he didn't want to seem nose-y by asking more. He felt that Jonathan would enjoy coming to church, but didn't know what he might be asking Jonathan to put behind him.

Jonathan is an easy talker who obviously likes and gets on with people and the congregation is a nice bunch of people who are usually very welcoming. It could work really well. Especially as he sounds wistful about church and maybe needs a bit of a family atmosphere too. But Matthew feels odd asking someone to church whom he doesn't really know – and should he extend the invite to his flatmate too?

Let me tell you...

Robert is in his early 60s and has worked most of his life as a fitter. He was brought up as a Roman Catholic but left his churchgoing behind in his teens. He has been married to Betty for nearly forty years. She is a nurse and attends the local URC. Robert and Betty rarely talk about church – early on in their marriage Robert said, ‘The church is full of hypocrites and I can’t be doing with it.’ And that was that.

Recently Robert became very ill and ended up in intensive care where he was visited by one of the chaplains who took a risk on the second visit and offered to pray with Robert. He agreed, and on subsequent visits the chaplain always prayed with him. Robert slowly recovered and went to the hospital service twice before he was discharged. When he got home, Betty suggested he might like to go to church with her, but Robert was not keen.

He has lots of questions but he knows God has looked after him. His current question is: why should he bother with church when he has experienced God’s presence in hospital in such a real way?

Betty desperately wants her husband to come to church with her – to know something about the love of God and Jesus for himself. In the early days she invited him to things but more recently it has become a ‘no-go’ area and Betty has been left to live with her frustration and guilt.

And then the heart attack, intensive care, the chaplain’s visits, the prayers, the chapel services. It all seemed like an answer to prayer that she’d not

prayed for at least 20 years. And he is still scared of going to church.

Should she ask the chaplain to visit Robert at home? Should she get her own minister to call round for a chat? Should she persist in inviting him or should she say nothing? What should she do?

Let me tell you...

Mark is a 27-year-old computer engineer. He and Fiona have been living together for six years now and over a year ago they started talking about starting a family. Katy, their beautiful baby daughter, was born three months ago. They were very happy before Katy was born. They are even happier now. Mark's a good dad although he himself was abused as a child. His own father was a very religious, domineering man, who forced his religion on his son and reinforced his wishes with a heavy hand and a strap. Mark got out of his parents' house at the earliest possible opportunity and he and his father have not spoken since. He has occasional secret contact with his mother but wants nothing to do with his father or his religion.

The problem is that Fiona has started talking about getting Katy christened and the idea is hanging like a great black cloud over Mark's head. He hasn't even dared tell Fiona how he is feeling, but he knows he has got to face up to it now.

Yesterday, Fiona came home from playgroup saying that she'd spoken to the vicar. He had happened to visit the playgroup and the opportunity presented itself. The outcome was that the vicar is visiting them next Friday evening after Katy is in bed.

Mark's mind is very clear. He hates his father and religion, although he's not so sure he hates God – if there is one.

For Fiona it's a different story. She has been brought up in church from childhood. Though she lost the habit in her teens, she wants her child to have the same experience as she had, growing up in a safe environment where she will learn how God loves her. Why would Mark have a problem with that?

Something to think about

In small groups or on your own please discuss or reflect on these stories in the light of the following questions:

- How do you connect with these people?
- What do you find difficult to connect with?
- What friendships are important to you and why?
- If you were going to befriend any one of the people described, where would you start?
- What about you and your friends outside church?

Our story

How did you come to faith in God? Why do you come to church? In a group, compare your reasons with those of the other members of the group.

- What do these responses tell you about why people search for God?
- What do they tell you about what to expect when approaching people who are not yet part of the life of a church?

Consider: how do we start conversations? How do we build up relationships? Are these specialist jobs for certain people or something ordinary people can do?



We suggest you begin with Matthew 9:18-26 and continue with other characters as time permits. If you want more, a list of people who came to Jesus can be found on the Vision4Life website.

How can we become more confident in these skills?

God's story

Read, recall or listen to some stories about people who came to Jesus.

The aim is to see what made people come to Jesus, how they approached him and how he responded to them. Then consider the question, 'What can these incidents teach us about how people today relate to Jesus and to us?'

Matthew 2:1-12	The magi
Matthew 8:1-13	A man with leprosy and a Roman centurion
Matthew 9:18-26	A distraught father and a sick woman
Matthew 15:21-28	A Canaanite woman
Matthew 19:16-22	A rich young man
Matthew 26:6-13	A loving woman

Think about these questions by yourself or in a small group:

- What actually happened? (You could close your Bibles and piece the story together by letting the group say what they remember.)
- Why did this person come to see Jesus?
- What did it cost them to do so?
- How did they approach Jesus and how did Jesus respond to them?
- What was the outcome?
- Does the story teach us anything about why we come to Jesus?
- Does the story teach us anything about why those outside church might come to Jesus?

Ask each member of your group to choose a character from one of the stories you have chosen (it doesn't matter if more than one person chooses the same character). Ask people to close their Bibles and shut their eyes. Then read the passage through slowly and ask the group members to visualise their role in the story and to try to 'feel' the feeling of the character they have chosen. Then let each member of the group share their experience, draw out significant points and relate them to the questions already asked.

Something to do

Participants may be uncertain about how to talk about their faith with other people and this may make them reluctant to do it. It can be a good idea to practice this kind of conversation in a small safe group with people they know. So try this activity in small groups of three people. One person will represent someone from your church, the second needs to represent a friend, neighbour or family member who doesn't belong to any church. The third role is the would-be faith sharer. The faith sharer begins by telling the other two people their reasons for having faith in Jesus and why they go to church. After sharing their story the two other participants are asked to give feedback as to how they relate to this: is their experience at all similar? Does it make sense to them? Discuss whether they have any of the same needs and how/where those needs are met. Discuss what they think God and the Church should be there for. Take turns in taking the role of the faith sharer and the other two roles.



The heading 'Something to do' signals an activity to try out during your group session.



The heading 'Next steps' signals something you might want to do after your group session as a follow up activity.

Next steps

If your church has a church magazine or notice sheet take a spare copy and think of someone to pass this to during the week. Spend some time thinking this through carefully before you do it. Maybe choose someone who you know has been to your church before but has not been recently, or someone you know who lives alone and who might appreciate the contact. If necessary discuss this with a friend before you do it. It is not necessary at this stage to plan a long speech. You are just going to offer the magazine or notice sheet and say, 'I thought you might like to see this' or 'We'd be very pleased to see you at our church on ...' or something of that sort.

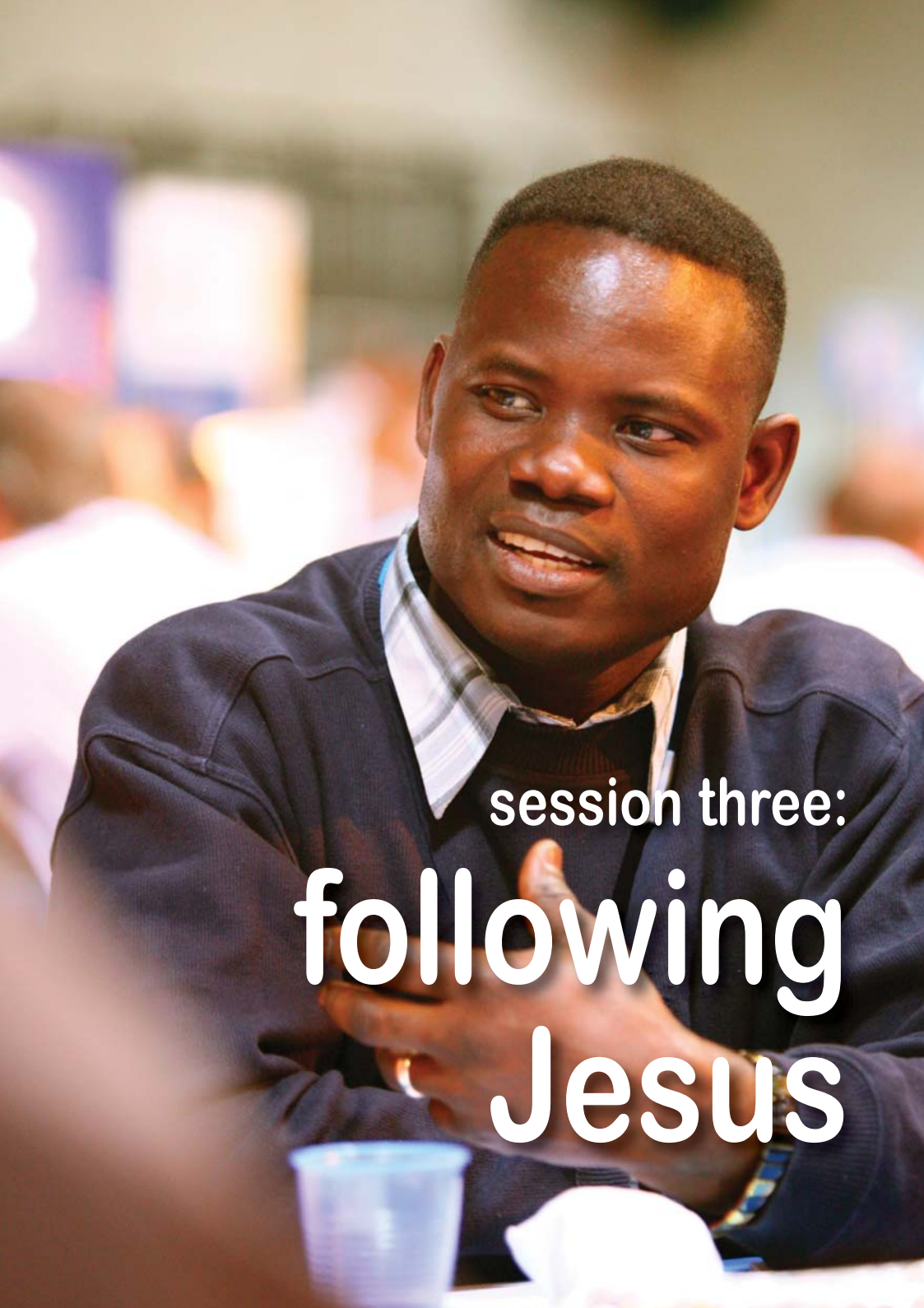
Prayer

Lord Jesus, you listened to those who came to you, and looked on them with compassion.
May we not presume to know what others need, but discern where our words and actions may help, as you lead us all, by faith,
to the fullness of life you promise
to those who trust you. Amen

Evaluation

At the end of each session for the Evangelism Year it is important to evaluate the session and use the feedback to plan what to do next. There are three simple questions suggested for the evaluation of each session:

- What did you enjoy or like most about it?
- What did you find most difficult or challenging?
- What would you like to do next?



session three:

following Jesus

If we trust and respect someone, we are much more likely to take their beliefs seriously. Does your experience connect with any of the following stories?

Let me tell you...

Derek says, 'As a teenager I actually became a Christian as the result of the witness of the Christian family who lived next door. My family were not Christians and never went to church. I was friendly with the eldest son of the family; we went to the same school. At the weekends I would escape from my chaotic family to find a haven with the folks next door. I soon started attending their church's youth meetings and activities and later was baptised. Today, I am a teacher in a Christian school and I think there's nothing more important than those first few steps of discipleship we can support young people to take.'

Christine says, 'As a teenager I thought, 'This lot are really boring!' I left my mum and dad at their church and went off to one I liked better on the other side of town, that did things I could relate to. Now I see our church dwindling and I wonder if we'll ever get the chance again to find a way of reaching young people.'

Dave says, 'At the beginning of a communion service, the minister said, 'Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey you are welcome here. I was sitting in the front row and suddenly I felt the need to burst into tears. All I could say was, 'Thank you'. Afterwards I explained, 'You obviously meant that. It has changed my life.'

Our story

How do you connect with these stories?

- Can you think of a time when you had to choose a church to attend?
- What did you look for?
- Can you think of a time when your church was faced with welcoming someone?
- What did you do?

God's story

Who is your favourite disciple?

As a warm-up activity, ask people to think who their favourite follower of Jesus might be.

Peter says, 'Mine is Peter, because we share the same name.' Jo says, 'Mine is Mary of Magdala because the Church has cast her in a bad light, even though the Bible does not. When people have thought badly of me for no reason, I have related to her.'

- What would your response be?
- Why did you choose that person?

If you don't have a favourite disciple in the New Testament, what person do you admire and why?

Read, remember, retell or listen to Matthew 4:18-22; 10:1-8; 14:22-32; 16:13-23; 18:21-22; 26:31-38, 69-75; John 21:15-19.

Then ask yourself these questions or discuss them in a small group:

- How would you describe the process of change that is happening in Peter's life?
- How does Jesus deal with Peter? (If you don't know the story well you may need to read John 1:35-42 as background to Peter's story in Matthew.)



If you are doing this on your own, you might like to write your responses in a notebook.

- What is Jesus' intention?
- How does Peter respond?
- How does this story relate to people inside church? What about people outside church?
- How does this connect with your own story?
- Are there ways in which it does not connect?

Both as individuals and as Church, what should we do differently in the light of this story?

What should we do differently this week? What should we plan to do differently during the next year?

Something to do

Write out or draw the most important steps of your faith journey. In a group, compare your faith journey with that of the other members of the group.

What does this tell you about how people grow in their faith? What does it tell you about what to expect when sharing Jesus' story with people who are not part of the life of your church?

You might want to make a poster or display about these faith journeys. Invite participants to bring a photograph to go up alongside their story and find a time and place to put them on display where others can study them.

Next steps

As a group, create a short drama that portrays the growth in faith of one of the disciples. This could be Peter or Mary or another disciple, named or unnamed. If at all possible, present the drama in church, with an explanation of what it means in the context of sharing Jesus' story with people not yet part of the life of the church.

You might want to use this in a service of worship or at another event you plan for the evangelism year. Session five includes an opportunity to plan an invitation service as a 'next step'. Perhaps you could use this sketch in that service.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, those who first met you came with different needs and expectations. Even your closest followers did not find discipleship a straight or even path. Just as we have learned so much from others, may we befriend those finding faith for the first time, and offer our companionship on their journey. Amen

Evaluation

At the end of each session for the Evangelism Year it is important to evaluate the session and use the feedback to plan what to do next. There are three simple questions suggested for the evaluation of each session:

- What did you enjoy or like most about it?
- What did you find most difficult or challenging?
- What would you like to do next?



session four:

making a commitment



There is a lot of recent research about evangelism and about how and when people come to faith. Some of this is available via the Vision4Life website.

In this section, it is important to recognise the need for commitment in the context of a faith journey that takes people considerable periods of time to make. Our role in the process is to be agents of the Holy Spirit: to be available to help someone else on the journey to take a step closer to God.

Let me tell you...

Kathy is a 16-year-old who attends a Christian secondary school. Her parents are both church members. Although they are not pushy about their faith, they do pray for other people and read the Bible as well as attend church regularly and take part in activities there.

Kathy has grown up in this background. She was baptised as a baby and she went to Junior Church as a child. She was in the Girls' Brigade until the branch at their church closed down when she was 12. She had some good times: sleep-overs and parties and trips out.

About two years ago the family moved house and although mum and dad are happy at the new church Kathy doesn't really go much now. She goes at Christmas and sometimes she'll feel like going on other Sundays but mostly she has a lie-in. There are next to no other young people at the church and it doesn't feel like the place where she grew up. Although she feels that she is still connected to the church it is more loosely. There's a chaplain at her school and she has a good relationship with her. Recently she asked Kathy if she'd like to prepare for confirmation but Kathy is not sure. None of her friends go to church and certainly no one talks about God or Jesus.

Kathy's parents say it's up to her to decide. They remember how they were made to go to church and Sunday school as children, and they don't want Kathy to feel pressurised into accepting their faith. But as well as that, they don't quite know how to raise the subject. It was much easier when the whole family went to church together.

Let me tell you...

Mollie is a 45-year-old housewife. Over the years she has done a few little jobs to supplement the household budget but she is a million miles from being a career woman. Her life has been her family – George, her husband, a car mechanic and Alan, her only son, who is now at University.

Mollie went to a local Methodist church as a girl – she has a good voice and she sang in the choir.

Unfortunately, there was an issue with the choirmaster and the family fell out with the church. Then she met George who played cricket on Sundays, and a marriage and a young child and a busy life put church and faith on the back burner.

However, when he was 15 Alan became a Christian. He had been part of the Junior Church in the local URC and then in the youth group, and he had made a commitment to Christ and become a church member. He is now engaged to be married to one of the young women in the same church.

Even when Alan was still at home, Mollie had started going to the church occasionally, particularly when Alan was taking part. Then her friends at church invited both her and George to an Alpha course to discuss Christianity. George had declined



Recent research shows that the average time for those interviewed to discover God was about four years. 69% could not date a conversion. 60% had prayed 'regularly' before they became Christians. 76% had had links with church as children and 70% had dropped out between 10 and 14 years of age.



These stories show that people's decisions to follow Jesus Christ are usually complicated, and even when such decisions are made it is not the end of the story, because even after commitment, the conversion process continues as people's faith develops.

– too busy as usual – but Mollie had been quite keen to go along and she has enjoyed the discussions. But... the crunch has come. Should she commit her life to Jesus? She has never really stopped believing but she knows this is more serious. But what about George? The last thing she wants is for her rekindled faith to come between them. But she knows she must make the decision.

Alan knows his mum's thinking about recommitting herself to Jesus. He's very excited about it. He doesn't want to put her off by being too keen, especially as Dad has never been one for church. But he'd love it if both his parents shared his faith.

Let me tell you...

Damian is a musician – a very good musician. His parents were Catholics but he dropped out of church when he was about 10. Music became his life – music became his god.

Damian was a brass player with two music degrees. He played the usual classical stuff but then he became part of the backing group to a well-known pop group and a rich man.

Damian has had spiritual experiences all his life. More recently he has had a few drug-induced experiences that have left him more than a little scared. He knows there is a spiritual world out there and he is both attracted to it and scared of it at the same time.

Damian's friend Phil has become a Christian. It has made such a difference in Phil's life. He has found a stability – a peace – that Damian envies. He knows

Phil would listen, he wouldn't laugh at him like some of the band have done and he would understand.

Phil has told Damian that he needs to commit his life to Jesus and that he needs the Holy Spirit inside him. Damian has come to the point where he wants more, but can he really believe all that stuff about Jesus being God? And there is so much bullshit in the church – could he face being part of it? If he becomes a Christian, won't he just fail and become a hypocrite like the rest?

Phil's been praying for Damian ever since he himself became a Christian. It would make such a difference to Damian's life. But if he's honest, Phil's not sure if Damian would fit into his local church. The music there is way out of date! Should he invite Damian to services there or try the new alternative worship scene in a different church?

Our story

- How easy or hard was it for you to make an initial commitment to God and to the church?
- How did you mark that milestone in your journey?
- How has your own commitment changed through the years?
- How may we make it easier or harder for people to take one more step on their journey of faith?

God's story

All through the Bible we find transformation as people commit themselves in different ways to God.

Read, recall or listen to Acts 8:26-40



If you are doing this on your own you might like to write your responses in the notebook. If you are doing this in a group, take some time to reflect on the questions before sharing your responses with others.



A fuller text of this Bible study is available to download from the Vision4Life website.



This song by John L. Bell and Graham Maule can be found in *Common Ground*, a songbook for all the churches, Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, copyright © the WGRG, Iona Community.

This is the story of Philip the deacon turned evangelist. He was one of the seven deacons chosen to care for the poor widows of the Greek Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 6). He is a daring evangelist who, touched by the Holy Spirit, goes over to an Ethiopian and asks him a simple question. That opens the door to a most amazing conversation in which Philip proclaims to him the good news of Jesus Christ. Prepared to go beyond his comfort zone Philip becomes the first of Jesus' followers to open the gospel to non-Jews.

Something to think about

- Is faith sharing always easy?
- Can you think of times when you shared your faith with others?
- How did it make you feel?
- Were there particular boundaries you felt you had to cross?

At this point you may wish to pray or sing the chorus of the song: 'To the lost Christ shows his face.'

This is not just the story of Philip. It is also the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. It was quite common in the Ancient Near East for men who had been castrated to serve in positions of state. So it is with this man, he is the chief finance minister to the Candace, the queen of Ethiopia. He was rich and powerful. But money and status aren't everything, as this poem suggests. You might want to read this out loud or reflect on it quietly.

Treasurer to the Candace

Give me two pennies to rub together
and I will see they breed.
I have the talent to send money forth to multiply.

My Mistress,
(who is, naturally, not my mistress),
giggles she never saw any man more
well-equipped for the job.
She says no-one can touch me
for generating capital.

Indeed, no-one touches me;
That is the issue.

I go home to gold. And empty halls.
I sleep alone
generating dreams of dead ends,
cut off suddenly.

No-one stops with me here.
No-one touches me.

Only, my ancestors stop, with me, here;
where my descendants shall never begin.
For this branch bears no fruit.

No kissing, no caressing,
no cries of childbirth in my halls, no wedding feast,
no daughters whispering to their satin mother.
No plump-ankled sons, half-asleep, in my lap.
Nothing in my lap.

As I arrive at court in my silver sedan,
they titter. Intact, without tact.

What have I to love, but gold?

Or what to love with?
For that which is dead
cannot rise again.

© *Lucy Berry*

Something to think about

- What does this poem tell you about the life experience of the Ethiopian?
- What do you think spoke to the Ethiopian when he read the passage from the prophet Isaiah?
- What is it about Jesus' story that touches you?

At this point you may wish to pray or sing the chorus of the song: 'To the lost Christ shows his face'

When the Ethiopian hears the story of Jesus he strongly connects with it. He wants to share in that story; he wants to make Jesus' story his personal story. And so when he sees water he asks Philip: 'Is there anything to prevent my being baptised?' And Philip, who knows full well what Deuteronomy says about eunuchs (read for example Deut. 23:1) has no hesitation about baptising him into the community of Jesus. He puts nothing in his way. And so Jesus' story is also a story of belonging – in the new community of Jesus, the kingdom of God, all are welcome.

That message is radical and not easy to live by. Our natural tendencies are to limit the love of God to those we deem acceptable. The early church struggled with it, in a way that is all too familiar. An ancient addition in verse 37 puts an answer after the eunuch's question to be baptised: 'If you believe with all your heart, you may'. Our daring evangelist shows us that nothing should be put in the way of those that seek God and want to belong to God's community. That is the good news.

Something to think about

- The Ethiopian makes a commitment to follow Jesus through baptism. How do you connect with that?
- Can you tell a story of commitment from your own experience?
- What are the things that might prevent people from making a commitment to faith?

As you think about the way this story touches the Ethiopian and us, you may want to sing the chorus of the Iona song *The Touching Place*, or to use it as a prayer.

Something to do

When you think about your own commitment to God, is there a song or hymn, poem or picture that you particularly remember as relevant to your faith journey? Do you ever find a tune going round and round in your head which you can't dislodge? A phrase from the Bible or a hymn can have the same effect and can help to nourish us at different stages of faith, or through different life challenges. Repeating a verse or chorus can also help us devise our own memorised patterns of prayer. With your group or on your own make a list of hymns and songs that speak to you of personal commitment or affirmation. Try to encourage participants to tell why they have chosen their particular example.



You can find a fuller list of suggested songs of affirmation and personal commitment and their sources on the [Vision4life website](#).

Next steps

Find someone who has recently (in the last year) been baptised, confirmed or become a church member. Discuss with them the significance of what they were doing, what they felt about it at the time and what they feel about it now. Find out if it has made any significant difference to their lives. See if they would be willing to share this with a wider group in words, or with pictures, music or dance if that is more appropriate to them. Be ready to share what you have learnt too in a way suitable for you.

Prayer of personal commitment

O God, Father of Jesus,
I freely turn to you now
and away from everything in my past
that has diverted or distracted me from
following you.
I commit myself to you now and in the years
to come.
Please accept me as I am.
May I become the person you made me to be,
so that other people may benefit,
grow in your love,
and live together in peace. Amen.

Evaluation

At the end of each session for the Evangelism Year it is important to evaluate the session and use the feedback to plan what to do next. There are three simple questions suggested for the evaluation of each session:

- What did you enjoy or like most about it?
- What did you find most difficult or challenging?
- What would you like to do next?



session five

getting on with it

How can our churches encourage possibilities for sharing God's good news? Different congregations will have different ideas about how best to do it in their own situation. Do either of these stories from St Paul's Church connect with your experience?

Let me tell you...

Every year St. Paul's Church holds Easter workshops for primary school aged children on Good Friday and advertises these arts and craft activities through the local primary schools. There is a short family/all-age service at 10am followed by hot cross buns and tea/coffee. Then there is a short 'Action Songs' session with all the children together before the workshops begin.

Zoe took home her form and asked her mum if she could go. Mum decided that as she was partial to a hot cross bun, Zoe could go and she herself would go to the service and stay for the free hot cross bun afterwards before leaving Zoe to it until the end of the workshops.

The whole family have been regular church-goers ever since. Zoe is now studying to be a teacher and mum is one of the leaders of the older youth group, whilst dad is the church treasurer.

St. Paul's holds a holiday club at the end of the summer holidays each year. It finishes with an all-age service when parents are invited to see what has been going on all week. During the week all the children aged 8+ are invited to join the Pilots group that meets at the church on a Sunday evening. It begins in the autumn term on the evening of the

Holiday Club all-age service. Currently the Pilots group has 16 youngsters regularly attending, about 85% of whom do not go to church on a Sunday morning, but who have come through the holiday club and have found Pilots to be their church. A number of youngsters have just 'graduated' to the older youth group at the church. None of this group are regular Sunday morning church-goers, though they wrote and performed their own sketch about the meaning of Christmas at the carol service.



You could go back to your definitions of evangelism on p6 at the beginning of this booklet. Do they help you think of examples of evangelism in your church's life?

Our story

- How do you connect with these stories from St Paul's?
- What is difficult for you to connect with and why?
- Can you tell a story about something that happens at your church that you think of as evangelism?

In a way our efforts at evangelism are always unfinished. For lots of reasons we may have only short-term contact with some people. Here are some stories about evangelism in progress for you to consider and discuss.

Let me tell you...

We're a safe, small, unstructured church at the moment. You don't really need to be very organised when you all know each other. But we're really friendly too and want to try to evangelise, and so we've been thinking how to do it, to get to the stage where we all talk more about our faith to each other inside the church – and outside as well. And it feels perfectly OK to do. We're getting used to it!

But we know that if you invite people in, everything may change quite a bit. And so we're trying to get ready for that.

We've had a church meeting and lots of other talks about how to get ready for when people begin to come in. Three have come already, you see. So we are trying to look at everything with a bit of a fresh eye: putting a welcoming sort of message on the back of the Order of Service sheet each week, sharpening up on Child Protection, which we weren't really very careful about before, more helpful notices round the church. Because once people start coming, we want them to feel happy they've come – and that means us being a bit more on the ball really. It's surprising how much we see that needs doing, once we start to welcome newcomers. Our church secretary says it's like painting the Forth Road Bridge!

Something to think about

- How do you connect with this story?
- In what way is your church ready to welcome new people?
- In what way is your church not yet ready to welcome new people?
- What do you think you need to do next?

Let me tell you...

My son and I were driving home over Archway Bridge. My twelve year old son said suddenly, 'That man's crying, mum!' So I parked the car further on and we walked back and this guy is just sitting on a bench by the bridge. It's a horrible drop; people jump off there sometimes. And he had a teddy bear and some other toys in a plastic bag.

And so I say, 'You ok, mate?' And he just begins to cry harder than ever. And over the next two hours we hear about his failed business and his drink problem and his childhood. And as he begins to feel better, he asks what I do. And I say, 'I'm training to be a minister in the Church.' And he says, 'You believe in that stuff, do you?' And I say, 'Yes, utterly.'

And when he's ready to ring his wife and after she turns up, he says to me and my son, 'How did you notice me?' And I say, 'My son notices everything. He saw you crying, so we stopped.'

So then he shakes my son's hand and then mine and says, 'I'll never forget you as long as I live.' And that was all. We went home and have never seen the man again.

Something to think about

- Do you connect with this story?
- Can you think of any times when you have shared your faith in some way and then not seen the person again, and wondered what happened next?
- Does the story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in session four connect with your situation? If so, how?
- Do you have any other stories of unfinished evangelism to share?

God's story

Read, remember, retell or listen to Matthew 13:1-23. Then ask yourself the questions or discuss them in small groups:

- How would you describe the character of God as represented in the parable?
- What are God's intentions?

- How does God speak to people?
- How do people respond?
- How do you connect with this story?
- How does this story relate to ordinary people, both those in the church and those who are not?

What should our expectations be when we share God's good news with people?

Both as individuals and as church, what should we do differently in the light of this story?

What should we do differently this week – what should we plan to do differently during the next year?



Depending on your group, you might find role-play an interesting way to explore how you might in practice share the ideas you have thought about with others.

Something to do

Ask each member of the group to offer one (only one) part of Jesus' life or teaching that they think is essential in portraying the good news of the kingdom. Write them down in a way that everyone can understand or draw a picture to represent each episode.

Go round the group as many times as necessary and until all ideas are exhausted. Discuss them.

What is evangelism?

By now we hope you will feel both more able to discuss evangelism and more prepared to explore some ways of sharing your faith as a community of God's people.

What is evangelism? Here is a definition:

Evangelism is about people with a story to tell...

- people who have an experience of Jesus
- people confident enough to share that experience with others
- so that the Holy Spirit can move them nearer to God.

How does this compare with what you wrote in the box on page 6?

Next steps

With the agreement of church members, find two church friends who will be willing to plan an invitation Sunday. Together, work out who you will invite to that Sunday. For example, think about an invitation leaflet and get it designed (do it yourself if you are able). Plan well ahead for special festival Sundays, as they are good opportunities.

Then actually do it. Prepare your invitations, pray for each other and the people you are inviting. Then, following the service, discuss the results together. Finally tell your Elders and Church Meetings how the process went and what you and the church have learned from it.

Prayer

No farmer stops sowing seed in case some is wasted

Lord, give us your generosity.

One sows, another waters but God causes the growth

Lord, help us to work together and trust in you.

Proclaim the word in season and out of season

Lord, make us lifelong sowers of your good news.

Amen



Back to Church Sunday, an organisation which encourages people to invite others to worship, has its own website: www.backtochurch.co.uk



Overleaf is a Charter for Evangelism of eleven key points. You may want to display this charter at your church. Further ideas about ways of using the charter are available on the Vision4life website.

Charter for evangelism

- We share faith **through cooperating with the Holy Spirit**
 - We share faith **with prayer**
 - We share faith **in hope**
 - We share faith **with joy**
 - We share faith **through stories**
 - We share faith **as a whole church**
 - We share faith **without a guarantee of success**
 - We share faith **through being vulnerable**
 - We share faith **in a variety of ways**
 - We share faith **by affirming what we are doing already**
 - We share faith **with encouragement.**
-