

# Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



## Session 1: Recapping the story

### INTRODUCTION

This session makes use of Bibliodrama. You can find out more about this in the introduction to this series which is on the Vision4Life website. You will need to read this before going ahead with this session.

### SESSION 1: RECAPPING THE STORY

When we tell a story we search for the place it began. The Vision4Life story had several beginnings:

A group of people from different perspectives in the United Reformed church came together to discern a way forward for the whole denomination. One participant recalls:

'The experience was inspired, and visionary; a real response to a move of God. The fact that it was God's idea was fundamental to the success of Vision4Life. God called a group of diverse individuals together from different theological backgrounds and perspectives to wait on him. As we listened to one another and to God, we began to recognise a mutual love for him and for his church. Fellowship deepened, community developed and Vision4Life was born. We recognised the potential of this as a wonderful model for Church.'

A steering group was formed and a basic structure agreed for three years. A member of the group recalls:

"When we began meeting together none of us imagined that this would be the start of such a journey. It has been a privilege to work with such a diverse group to facilitate something that the whole church could be part of. We were always clear that this was not to be a programme to be followed but a process where we could all grow in confidence in talking about our faith and then sharing our story and God's story with others."

A series of pre-Vision4Life booklets were produced to get people started and discern where they were with regard to the themes of Bible, prayer and evangelism. This included an invitation to 'sign-up' for Vision4Life.

By the launch at Advent 2008, 466 churches had signed up. The final number of churches involved in Vision4Life was over 690 churches.

It seemed as if something fresh had been stirred up that excited many people across the United Reformed Church. As we reflect on the birth of Vision4Life, let's now look back at what many refer to as the birthday of the church, when the Holy Spirit equipped and empowered the first believers to step out in mission.

### Read

This 1<sup>st</sup> session is based on Acts chapter 2 so read this individually or as a group. Alternatively you may wish to use the remembered bible technique described towards the end of this session.

### Notes on Acts 2

Pentecost was a landmark. Later on (Acts 11.15), the church looked back to this as the beginning of its life. But like every chapter in a continuing story, Pentecost gains much of its meaning from what has gone before. Scriptures from the Old Testament, and events in the life of Jesus, help to make sense of what happened at Pentecost.

For Pentecost was the completion of Jesus' ministry on earth (2.22–24, 32–33). He had left his friends (1.1–6) and now he sent the Spirit (2.33) to guide and strengthen them as they

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carried on his work. In a way the Spirit was both a sign of Jesus' absence and also a taste of his presence. Here was echo and evidence of the ascension: now that Jesus had entered heaven, heaven had breathed into the life of earth. Work that he had begun would continue, among the people who knew him as Lord.

Storm and fire (2.2–3) recall Sinai (Exodus 19), when Israel of old received God's covenant and law. Pentecost was a new Sinai, a fresh covenant-forming moment, a time for a people to discover the depth and demand of their life with God. This covenant needed energy to push outward the boundaries of the holy nation.

The diversity of languages (2.4–13) tell of communication that will cross the earth and create new possibilities for human community. People from many nations hear clearly and compellingly of 'the mighty works of God' (2.11). Here is an undoing of the confusion and estrangement of Babel (Genesis 11), and a hint of the wide and sure reach of the gospel among the nations. Human barriers will become smaller, when heaven sets the perspective.

Peter stands to tell the story (2.14). Joel's prophecy had spoken of such a wide outpouring of the Spirit. Old and young, women and men, slave and free – all will receive the Spirit, and declare the goodness of God (2.16–21). The church will be a people enabled and empowered. Their hearts and hands and lips will be opened – in new depths of faith, of love and of speech.

Peter's speech turns also to other scriptures, from the Psalms. When David spoke of life that did not end in death and decay, he must have been looking forward (2.25–31): now Jesus has fulfilled those words by rising from the grave (2.24, 32). And the Psalm that tells of a Lord enthroned at God's side has also found its way to realisation, in Jesus' ascension into heaven (2.33–36).

So the church is born, in belief, baptism and the breaking of bread (2.37–42). Their fellowship is generous and glad (2.44–46), but this is not a narrow or in-grown togetherness. These Christians have a good name among neighbours, and growth is a natural outflow of their sharing and their service. As they live by the Spirit of Jesus and tell his story, their words resonate with the witness of their lives.

### Acting out Acts 2:

Take a scene from Acts; for example, the day of Pentecost. In this case you will need to cast someone as Peter who will give the speech, maybe from memory. Others might be cast as supporting disciples and members of the crowd. If this is done in the context of a Sunday service, the congregation might be invited to be the crowd of believers gathered in Jerusalem.

Try to set the scene. Play at being the market for a few minutes with people trying to imagine what the scene in Jerusalem might have been like. In advance, the leader could provide some background information about the Diaspora of Jews at that time or about what it meant to become a Jew from a non-Jewish background.

Let the scene develop naturally as a market place and then allow Peter to make his speech and for the crowd to make its response. One or two of the crowd would need to be given that task.

After the scene has been played, de-role the characters, especially Peter. Discuss how you feel it has helped you to understand the story. Are there things you saw in the way it was played that cast fresh light on the text for you?

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### ACTS THROUGH BIBLIODRAMA

A Bibliodramatic extension introduces a random element into the play. For it you will need one person who is able to act with some spontaneity. In this example of the day of Pentecost introduce someone playing the role of a reporter from the Jerusalem Post who interrupts the scene and begins to interview the characters. They might, for example, draw the other disciples in and ask questions of them about their experience. They might ask members of the crowd how they think their community 'back home' is going to respond to the claims of Peter. Do they think there could be political fallout? They might invite members of the crowd to ask questions about the validity of the experience, being deliberately provocative. It would be important to think in advance about the kind of area of experience the whole session is intended to focus on e.g. social issues, personal spirituality, or evangelism. The intention is to draw everyone away from following a script to playing with the story in an improvised way.

After letting the improvisation run for a while, bring the group together and ask them to reflect on how they experienced improvising in this way. Then ask them if improvising the story gave them any new perspective on the text itself. Lastly, discuss any contemporary reflection that the improvisation has produced. End the session by inviting members of the group to offer a word or a phrase that has come into their minds. If possible take some of those words and weave them into a prayer.

The session will need some planning, but it is important not to over-plan or script it. Spontaneity is central to the exercise.

### TELL YOUR STORY

Discuss the following questions in your group:

When did your church sign up for Vision4Life and why?

What were the highpoints and what were the low ones?

How has Vision4life affected your personal faith story?

Has anything new come out of the process?

If yes what, if not why not?

What is still needed?

### SOMETHING TO DO

Together, find a way of telling the story of your journey, both personal and as a group, through Vision4Life.

Find a way of displaying your Vision4Life story so other people can hear about it. Try to make it as personal as possible so others can relate to it. Use the 'vox pop' idea: a short statement about your own faith.

Depending on the time of year you are doing this, you could be 'thinking ahead about' the next season in the Christian Year, to plan an outreach activity of some sort. Speak to your Synod Training and Development Officer or Mission Enabler if you need help with this.

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### PRAYER

Where there are people present in your church or group from different cultures and languages, invite them to lead prayer in a way that reflects this diversity. If your church is more mono-cultural or mono-lingual, learn some prayers or chants from other cultures and see what they add to your life and worship.

Spend some time praying together about your faith journey.

Spirit of Pentecost,  
Your fiery involvement changed lives.  
May our ongoing involvement in your story  
change us,  
renew us  
and encourage us,  
so that we are not merely acting parts  
but wholly transformed  
as your disciples.  
Amen

### Alternative Bible input: Remembering the Bible

One strategy we encouraged churches to use during the Vision4life process was an oral strategy called 'Remembering the Bible' in which people collaborate in a group to reconstruct bible stories of importance to them and their community.

Are there parts of the bible that you remember as significant for understanding the whole of God's Story? What would you say these were? Give participants time to think of some and then write them up on a flip chart. Accept all suggestions for this activity. What one person thinks important to the whole story is as good as any other person's response.

Are there things people remember about the day of Pentecost? Record these on your flip chart.

### EVALUATION

Please try to answer these questions for yourselves:

1. What was the most helpful thing about this session and why?
2. What was the least helpful thing and why?
3. What would you like to try now?

### THE NEXT STEP

The Vision4life process is a three year process for local churches. You will find the resources available on our website where they can be downloaded freely.

### Acknowledgements

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