

Acting out Acts: Post Vision4Life



Session 3: Bringing different perspectives together

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 3: BRINGING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES TOGETHER

Most of us feel much safer when we stay within our comfort zones. Yet we grow far more when we are stretched, as the muscles in our bodies do when we exercise. Vision4Life emerged out of a sharing of hearts and minds across the diversity of the URC. In taking the risk of spending time together, listening to one another, we discovered a common vision for the church to be transformed.

We have had many reports of people using Vision4Life material from all over the country and from different parts of the church. Website information shows that users are directed to the website from our own United Reformed Church website or from others. Vision4Life is part of a hub of learning and development material being used in churches across the UK.

It has been said that Vision4life has 'moved from the margins to the mainstream' of the denomination. Whilst others have said 'We will have to wait and see how Vision4life beds down in the churches'.

- What is your view now the process has come to this point and why?

A story about meeting other people

Toller United Reformed Church in Kettering is in the middle of the pedestrianised High Street. During Advent 2010 this church had been exploring the material from the Vision 4Life Evangelism booklet. It had helped them to discover how confident they were to share the God they loved with the community around them.

The manager from the mobile phone shop which was situated next to the church intercepted the minister one day. He commented that he had seen the folk from the church coming and going for many years, but realised that they did not know each other at all. He then invited all at Toller to join them for coffee and mince pies after one of the Sunday services in Advent. With great delight the congregation agreed that this was what evangelism was all about; not preaching to others, but building relationships with others so that they can experience the love of God through action.

On learning there might be fifty to sixty people for coffee, the manager said, 'Can we borrow your tea urn?' The meeting in the phone shop for coffee after worship was a great success: most of the congregation went along. The minister said, 'We'd looked at the Evangelism booklet and the coffee meeting seemed an ideal starting point to get to know some of our neighbours. Now we think Vision4Life has been the right foundation for us to prepare for the future.'

Read

This 3rd session is based on Acts chapter 10 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.

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Notes on Acts 10

Caesarea was a frontier town. Here the life of the Jewish people met the power and grandeur of the Roman world. Like many a colonial capital it had a strong military presence as well as commercial activity through the port. And there was a mixed population, with residents who had come from many lands. Not surprisingly, the mood and opportunities of this place started to reshape the work of the gospel and the fellowship of Christ's people.

Caesarea's atmosphere and design owed little to Jewish tradition or custom. It was a Roman city on Jewish soil. So the Christian message could not be told there, as it had been in Jerusalem, through close reliance on scripture. Israel's heritage could not be relied on in a town where this heritage had little meaning.

Yet it was in Caesarea that the church took a big step into the wider world, when the centurion Cornelius came to Christian faith. He was already a 'god-fearer', a Gentile attached to Israel's faith and worship. He would have been Roman by race; all centurions were. So when he came to believe in Jesus, it was a major test-case for the church. Acts takes almost two chapters to explain how this Gentile household was touched by the Holy Spirit (10.1 – 11.18).

Peter was the Christian preacher involved. Yet he too had new truths to face. Meeting Cornelius asked for four kinds of openness on Peter's part. He had to be open to Cornelius as a seeker, to realise that the quest for Christian faith had already begun in his heart and life (10.17–23). Then he had to see new things himself, aspects of God's work he had never understood before; the power of grace was breaking through the frontiers of race, and reaching Gentiles as well as Jews (10.9–16). Third, he needed to use speech that was not too tightly biblical, to set out the gospel in ways Cornelius could understand (10.34–43). And he had to accept the interruption of the Holy Spirit, who managed to locate Cornelius without waiting for Peter to finish preaching (10.44–48; 11.15–18). (In side column these ideas are from an essay by Graham Collingridge; used by permission.) (note)

The story Peter tells is different again to the speeches we read in chapters two and four. Here the main theme is the story of Jesus – his baptism, teaching, healings, death and resurrection (10.34–43). Cornelius knew about God (10.2–4); he needed to be told about God's presence and power in Jesus.

Cornelius was a changed man. So was Peter. We too might be changed, if we started to meet people and tell of our faith across some of our society's divides. We might need to be open in new ways to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We might find that we learn and grow ourselves, through sharing the story of our Lord.

Acting out Acts 10

You will need to decide in advance how to do this:

- How many people will take part?
- Which parts will they play, read or retell?

Afterwards discuss your reactions to seeing the episode this way.

ACTS THROUGH BIBLIODRAMA

Once again, the introduction of the reporter from the Jerusalem Post can be used. Suitable questions or comments could be considered in advance about a range of questions. The kinds of questions should be considered carefully in advance. Bear in mind the fact that

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this scene has an inter-racial element to it.

Alternatively, someone playing the role of a member of Cornelius' household, his mother perhaps, might interrupt the scene saying that she does not want him to convert. A group might in advance think through and prepare the kinds of arguments she might use. But the responses of everyone playing the scene should be spontaneous.

Let Peter and Cornelius respond and perhaps interact together. Review the scene: how have people felt in playing it and what have they learned?

For further discussion

Even if Peter's confidence had increased he was still struggling with diversity.

- Why did Peter find diversity so hard to live with?
- What was Cornelius' role in the process?
- What situations of diversity do you encounter around you?
- How has your response to diversity been influenced by Vision4Life?
- In what way is God currently challenging you to be more open and welcoming?

SOMETHING TO DO

Celebrate the diversity of your own group/village/town or city in an appropriate way, perhaps by joining in a local festival or planning one with others.

Plan an event to visit another group or invite others to visit you.

Prayer

Can we meet to pray with people we have never prayed with before?

Could there be other churches or neighbouring congregations with other language groups or people from different ethnic backgrounds?

God spoke to both Peter and Cornelius in this story. Do we expect that God might want to speak into our lives? Do we stop to listen when we pray, when alone or when we prayer with others?

Please pray for a new openness to others and an accepting of diversity and difference, that we may be opened to see people as God sees them.

Spirit of God,
changing and challenging the whole world,
may we not confine you
to our small notions of faith,
but respond to your global initiative,
and by openness in meeting with others
learn a whole new way of discipleship.
Amen

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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.

Do people remember Peter's visit to Cornelius? Record these ideas on the 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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