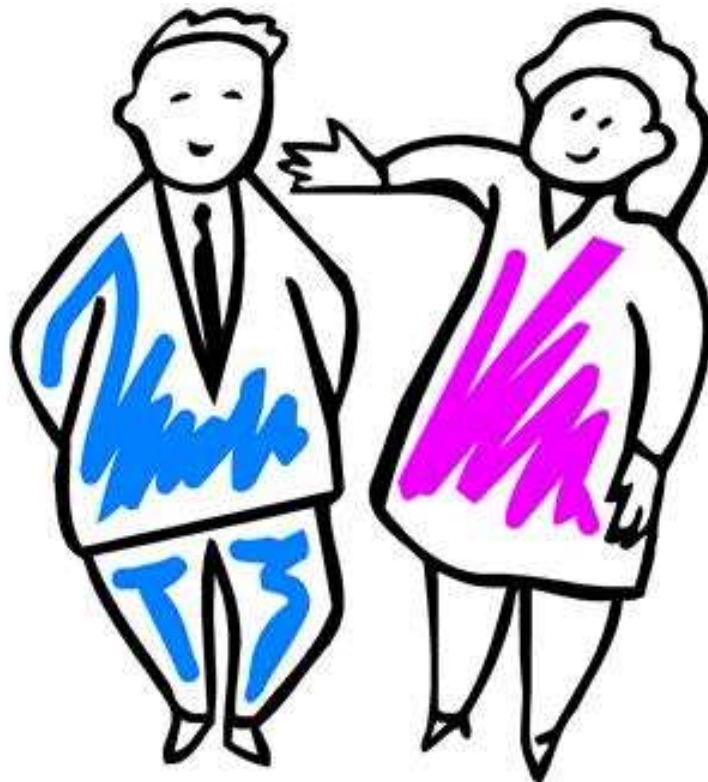


Will you come to Church with me?



**A workbook produced by the
Mission Core Group
Diocese of Glasgow and Galloway**

Introduction

What this Workbook is for and How to Use it

What this workbook is for

This workbook is for congregations that would like to see new people coming along to church.

Many of the churches in our diocese say, 'We are a welcoming congregation.' And, they are! Congregations, developing their ministry of welcome, have done a great deal of careful and devoted work over recent years. The Mission 21 MYCMI programme has been useful to some; others have been using *Growing in Welcome*, the downloadable Welcome Workbook in this series. They are warm and welcoming communities of believers where the Holy Spirit is clearly present: they have much to offer the newcomer in their midst.

Yet newcomers sometimes seem few and far between. Congregations can feel rather like the host whom Jesus described in the parable, who prepared his banquet, but looked around in vain for his guests.¹

Unlike the host in the parable, however, we do not need to go very far to find them. There are people among our neighbours and friends, in our families and workplaces, who would gladly come to church with us, if we felt able to invite them.

The Mission Core Group offers this workbook as a way for congregations to develop a confident culture of invitation in their church. This workbook is underpinned by our conviction that everybody has the God-given gift of being a good inviter; and, that everybody knows somebody who is waiting to be invited.

¹ Luke 14: 15-24.

How to use it

There are five sections in this workbook. Taken sequentially, they form a series of sessions. Each session has also been designed so that it may be used independently of any of the others.

The workbook material can be used in a variety of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- **Series of evening sessions:** a small group, or a number of small groups, could work their way through the material; for example, in the context of a Lent study course, or a house group.
- **Congregational study day:** a congregation might come together to discuss a selection of the material over a shared meal on a Saturday, or after Sunday church.
- **Vestry away day:** a vestry could take this workbook away with them and study it during a day retreat.
- **Local churches' support network:** a cluster of local churches, meeting for mutual encouragement and support, could use the material here as the basis for a training event.

Questions for discussion are written in **bold type**.

Suggested timings for the questions are in brackets. However, please note that these are only suggestions. For example, with a larger group of a dozen or more, it will probably be more helpful for the participants to discuss the questions first in small groups of three, and then offer feedback to the whole group.

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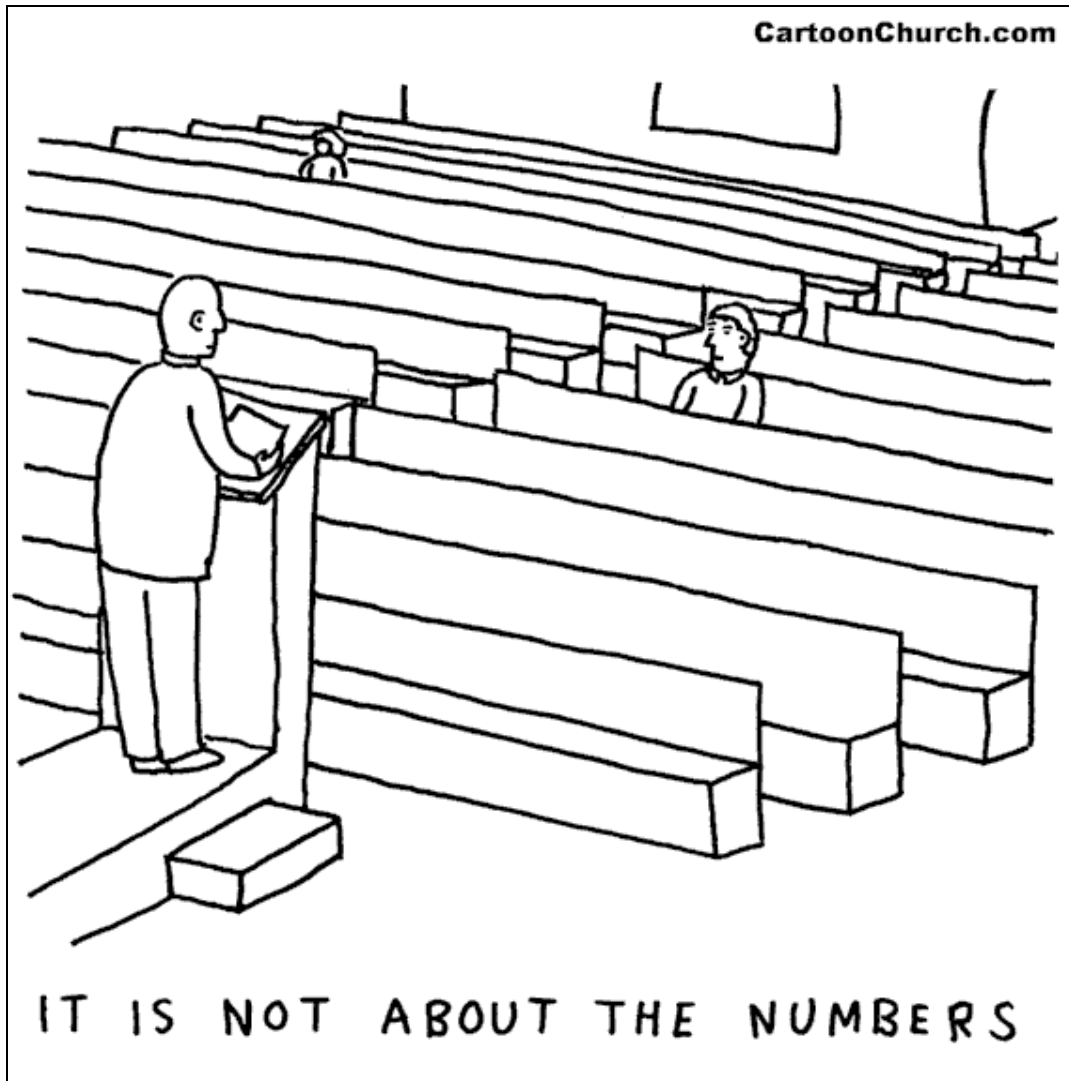
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Session One

Reluctant Witness



What is Evangelism about?

Inviting our friends to our church has been called 'the simplest, shortest step in evangelism.'² Yet often it can seem like one of the hardest. In this session, we shall explore some reasons why that might be, and why we need to bother about evangelism anyway.

² Back To Church Sunday 25th September 2011 promotional leaflet; see also Finney, J, *Finding Faith Today: How does it happen?* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 79.

Have you ever tried to invite someone to your church? What happened? (5 min)

If you were asked to invite one of your friends to church, is there anything that might stop you? (5 min)

How do you feel when you hear the word 'evangelism'? (5 min)

'Evangelism' is a good, biblical word that has been made to seem like an ugly word. In our culture, it is often associated with boisterous forms of worship, hellfire preaching, and pushy people trying to force their religion down other people's throats. It is not surprising that many church people would rather steer clear of evangelism.

However, evangelism is not the special preserve of any particular denomination; it does not demand certain styles of worship. It simply means sharing the Gospel, the precious Good News of Jesus Christ.

Archbishop William Temple, who was Archbishop of Canterbury during the Second World War, defined evangelism like this:

To evangelise is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that people may come to put their trust in God through him, accept him as their Saviour and serve him as their King in the fellowship of the Church.³

Do you think this is a helpful definition? (5 min)

How would your group explain what 'evangelism' means? (10 min)

Sometimes churches suddenly develop quite an urgent interest in evangelism, because they feel that they need to 'Get more people in'. Why such a desire to attract new people, all of a sudden? These churches answer:

³Temple, W, in *Towards the Conversion of England* (Westminster: The Press & Publications Board of the Church Assembly, 1945).

- Because we realise that our congregation is very low on numbers
- We need new people to do the jobs that we are tired of doing
- We want more young people
- We need some children in the Sunday School
- We're short of money and we want some new people to contribute financially

These thoughts and motives are very understandable. Belonging to a church that is struggling because of a lack of numbers can be stressful, tiring and demoralising. 'Getting more people in,' making new recruits may seem the obvious solution. But this would not be about the Gospel. This would not be sharing Good News. Indeed, it looks like rather bad news for newcomers – being expected to dig deep into their pockets and to do all the jobs that established members of the congregation don't want to do anymore. A congregation that behaves like this is not doing evangelism. We do not invite our friends and neighbours along so that our church can prey upon them.

On the other hand, some church people very much disapprove of recruiting for new members and strongly object to doing evangelism. 'It's not about growing numbers,' they say, 'Church is not about numbers; it's not about bums on seats!' But, as Bishop Stephen Cottrell explains, actually it *is* about bums on seats:

For bums on seats read hands ready to serve, ears to listen, hearts to love and minds shaped by the will and purpose of God... We care about numbers because we care about people. We want the church to grow; not because we are concerned with building the earthly empire of the church, but because we want to build God's kingdom in the world.⁴

Read Luke 15: 1-7 together:

What strikes you about the behaviour of the shepherd in this parable?
(5 min)

What does the parable tell us about how God feels about 'numbers'?
(5 min)

What implications does this have for our evangelism? (10 min)

⁴ Cottrell, S, *From the Abundance of the Heart: Catholic evangelism for all Christians* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006), pp. xv-xvi.

The word 'evangelise' appears more than fifty times in the New Testament.⁵ It is a very important aspect of being a Christian. For it is Jesus himself who tells us to do it: sharing our faith with other people is part of being his good and faithful servants. All four Gospels agree about that.

Read these verses together:

- **Matthew 28:19-20**
- **Mark 16:15**
- **Luke 24:47**
- **John 20:21**

It is tempting to retort that Jesus was not talking to us; he was commanding the eleven apostles. But we shall never see the eleven apostles out and about near where we live, visiting our schools, our local shops or the places where we work. We cannot expect them to come and spread the Gospel among our friends and neighbours. If the Good News of Jesus Christ is ever to reach those people, we shall have to learn to be evangelists ourselves.

Go Evangelism and Stay Evangelism

Roger Morgan is an Anglican priest who is experienced in evangelism. He has identified two distinct types of evangelists described in the New Testament, whom he calls 'Go evangelists' and 'Stay evangelists'. Go evangelists are called to give up their lives at home and *go* with the Gospel:

This is go evangelism. Evangelism is something you do by going. You go from somewhere you belong and go to somewhere you don't belong in order to take the message to people you have never met and to whom God is sending you.⁶

The apostle Paul was a go evangelist. He gave up the life he knew as a Jewish tentmaker and travelled about from city to city with the Gospel.

⁵ John, J, *Breaking News*, (Bletchley: Authentic Media, 2006) p. 10.

⁶ Morgan, R, *Stay Evangelism: How to reach the people next door* ReSource booklet no. 10 (Wells: ReSource, 2008), p. 3.

Stay evangelists, on the other hand, *stay* where they are and spread the Gospel message among their family and friends, neighbours and work colleagues. As Morgan explains:

Stay evangelism can also be discerned in the story of the demon-possessed man in Luke 8. Cured of his problems, the man begged to be allowed to go with Jesus – but Jesus told him to stay, with the words, ‘return home and tell how much God has done for you.’⁷

Both go evangelists and stay evangelists are amply represented in the New Testament.

Read these verses together:

- **John 1:40-42**
- **Acts 8:4-8**
- **Acts 13:2-5**
- **John 4:39-42**
- **Luke 5:29-30**

Which are go evangelists? Which are stay evangelists?

What other New Testament examples can you think of? (10 min)

Think about your own life story: who was it who most influenced you to become a Christian? (5 min)

Was that person a go evangelist or a stay evangelist? (5 min)

Although there are exceptions, most groups find that more people have been helped by stay evangelists than by go evangelists.

Nobody else evangelises like I do

God calls us all to be evangelists. Some of us may be called to be go evangelists; most of us will be called to be stay evangelists. But nobody is left out and nobody is excused. Perhaps we have not thought about this before; perhaps we have been trying to avoid it. It is easy to feel daunted by the challenge:

⁷ Morgan, *Stay Evangelism*, p. 4.

- But I'm rather a reserved sort of person; sharing my feelings doesn't come easily to me.
- I know that I shall go and say the wrong thing.
- I'm not theologically trained; if someone asks me a difficult question, I shan't know what to say
- I'd feel embarrassed about trying to impose my beliefs on someone else.

Dr Mike Bechtle is the author of a book called *Evangelism for the rest of us: Sharing Christ within your Personality Style*.⁸ He believes that the reason why people feel awkward and uncomfortable about talking about their faith is often because they have been trying, or feel they ought to try, to practise a kind of evangelism that simply does not suit who they are. He says, 'If sharing your faith is something you inwardly dread, it's probably because you're working outside of God's unique design. You're following other people's patterns instead of God's.'⁹

What does he mean?

Psalm 139 says God fashioned us in the womb. When we were born, we were the perfect expression of his perfect design. He made us just the way he wanted to and didn't make any mistakes.¹⁰

All kinds of personalities with all kinds of gifts are needed to accomplish God's work:

Being shy or timid or uncertain isn't an excuse for not sharing our faith. Rather, it's the invitation to find out how God made us and become the best 'me' we can be. Then we can focus on the natural process of sharing with others (our responsibility) instead of focusing on results (God's responsibility).¹¹

We do not need to force ourselves to use uncomfortable sales techniques to convince our friends to come to church with us. Nor do we need to 'know all the answers.' We are ready as we are, to participate with God in spreading the Good News, in the way that only we can do:

⁸ Bechtle, M, *Evangelism for the Rest of Us: Sharing Christ within your Personality Style* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

⁹ Bechtle, M, *Introverts Can Evangelise the Bible Way* in First!Again: Selected articles from the magazine of 'The Faith Mission', <http://firstmagazine.org> March 1st 2010.

¹⁰ Bechtle, *Evangelism*, p. 43.

¹¹ Bechtle, *Evangelism*, p. 146.

Nobody can do evangelism the way I do; that's why God made me different from everyone else. The freedom I've found in that fact is a powerful incentive to share from love instead of guilt.¹²

Read and discuss Psalm 139: 1-18

What reassurances do you find there? (10 min)

Spend some time thinking about the unique evangelist that God created when he made you. If you would like to, share some of your thoughts with others in the group. (5 min)

Prayer Time

Praise God for the infinite care and love he has for each one of us.

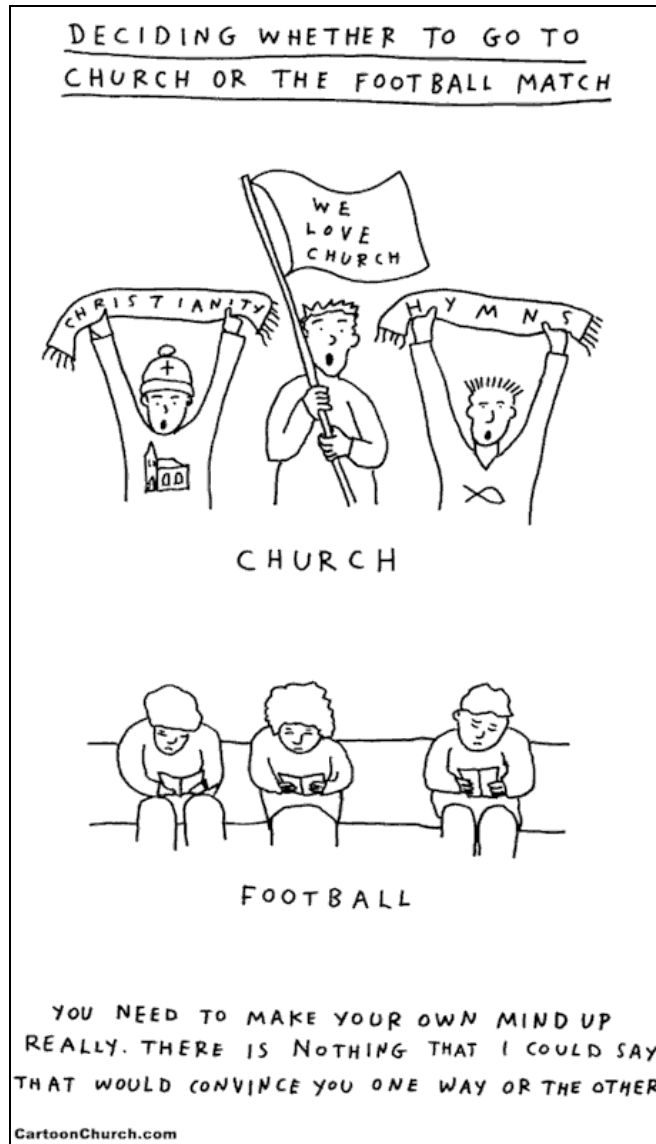
Give thanks for each member of the group, and for their unique gifts.

Ask that the Holy Spirit will come and help each person to be a fearless and effective witness to the Gospel.

¹² Bechtle, *Evangelism*, p. 149.

Session Two

Love the Church you're in



A bit of an image problem

The Church has a bit of an image problem. We have all heard about it. Christians are so weird; they're intolerant; they're all a bunch of hypocrites. Church worship: so boring and irrelevant, it has nothing to offer this generation. Perhaps we may have a suspicion that some of this could actually be true. Numbers in our congregation are not what they used to be years ago. Hardly any new people

ever seem to come through the doors... Many church people are secretly suffering from chronically low morale. It is hard to feel enthusiastic about inviting our friends to church: 'I couldn't do that,' we say to ourselves, 'my friend wouldn't enjoy it.'

Negative predictions like these create a cycle of anxiety and frustration. A church decides to hold a guest service and the parish priest asks the congregation to bring someone along. On the day, quite a few of the church members do come to the service, but hardly anyone has brought a guest. 'It's so disappointing,' thinks the priest, 'that these miserable folk haven't invited anyone.' Everybody is left feeling discouraged and dissatisfied. They certainly won't hold a guest service again: 'That doesn't work at our church,' they will say, 'Nobody's interested.'

How do you feel about this story? (5 min)

In what ways does this anecdote resonate with your own experience? (5 min)

But it doesn't have to be like this!

A research project recently carried out in Scotland listened to the views of people who had lately decided to become Christians. The researchers interviewed men and women of different ages, backgrounds and stages of life, from a variety of locations across Scotland. One of the most interesting, encouraging and unexpected discoveries was, that actually, despite originally holding some negative perceptions about church, when they eventually started going to a church, these newcomers loved it:

Time and again respondents talked about the impact that the church, meaning the body of Christians gathered together largely irrespective of place or circumstance, had on them, usually in overwhelmingly positive terms. There was 'just something different' about the people they met there.¹³

That is to say, they were not attracted only to particular kinds of churches, specific denominations or styles of worship. These were all sorts of Scottish churches – and these newcomers discovered that they really, really liked them. This is what they appreciated, when they started going to church:

¹³ Spencer, N, & Neilson, P, *Journeys and Stories: Finding faith in Scotland today* (London: LICC, 2006), p. 36.

- Being welcomed
- Feeling accepted
- Friendliness and informality
- Feeling that the church was like a family
- Seeing that the church was happy, joyful and enthusiastic
- Love shown by the congregation to the newcomers and to each other¹⁴

Spend some time discussing this outcome of the survey from *Journeys and Stories*. What strikes you? (5 min)

Think back to a time when you first went to church: what did you like about it? (10 min)

What encouragement can you take from this, for your own church today? (10 min)

Breaking out of the cycle of negativity

Can we break the cycle of negative feelings about our church? Inviting people to church is to invite them to experience the love and welcome of the community of believers. Newcomers will feel this and respond to it. It is time to stop telling ourselves that they probably won't.

How we feel and talk about our church affects how our friends and neighbours think about it and about the Christian faith. Any negativity on our part seeps out and into our local community, and dirties the image of the church. When we talk about it disparagingly or in a gossipy way, we are actively discouraging potential newcomers from coming to join us.

Look together at these comments made by church members:

- I look around the church and I just see grey heads: it's a shame, we are all so old...
- Our rector always looks so scruffy; he never seems to make any effort with his appearance...

¹⁴ Spencer & Neilson, *Journeys and Stories*, pp. 36-38.

- It's terrible: the Sunday School children always make such a noise when they come into church...
- Our choir is so small, they barely make any difference to the singing at all; I wonder why they bother really...
- We don't even have a church hall: after the service, we have to have our coffee at the back of the church...

How do you feel, when you hear these remarks? (5 min)

What do you think would be the effects of such comments, upon a non-churchgoing person? (5 min)

Can you re-shape these negative comments into positive ones, so that they reflect the good things of church life: friendliness, acceptance, joy and enthusiasm? (10 min)

What a beautiful bride!

In the New Testament, the Church is described as Christ's bride. To hear her spoken of in the ways we have discussed above, makes her sound like rather a bedraggled and batty old bride; a tragic figure rather like Charles Dickens' crazy bride, Miss Havesham:

I saw that everything within my view that ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bones.¹⁵

But what does she seem like, to God?

¹⁵ Dickens, C, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin, 1983), p. 87.

**Read these scripture passages together: Ephesians 5: 25-27
Revelation 19: 6-9**

What jumps out at you in particular? (5 min)

What do these verses say about the personal appearance and the clothing of the bride? (5 min)

What does it mean for those who are invited to come to the wedding? (10 min)

Spend some time reminding yourself of the beautiful things about your church. Share these with the other members of the group. What is it that makes you love your church? (10 min)

Taking positive action

Next time somebody says to you, 'What are you up to this weekend?' tell them that you are going to church and say what you are looking forward to.

Or, when someone says, 'Did you have a nice weekend?' say that you went to church and tell them something about it that you enjoyed.

Practise this now, in pairs. How did you feel? (10 min)

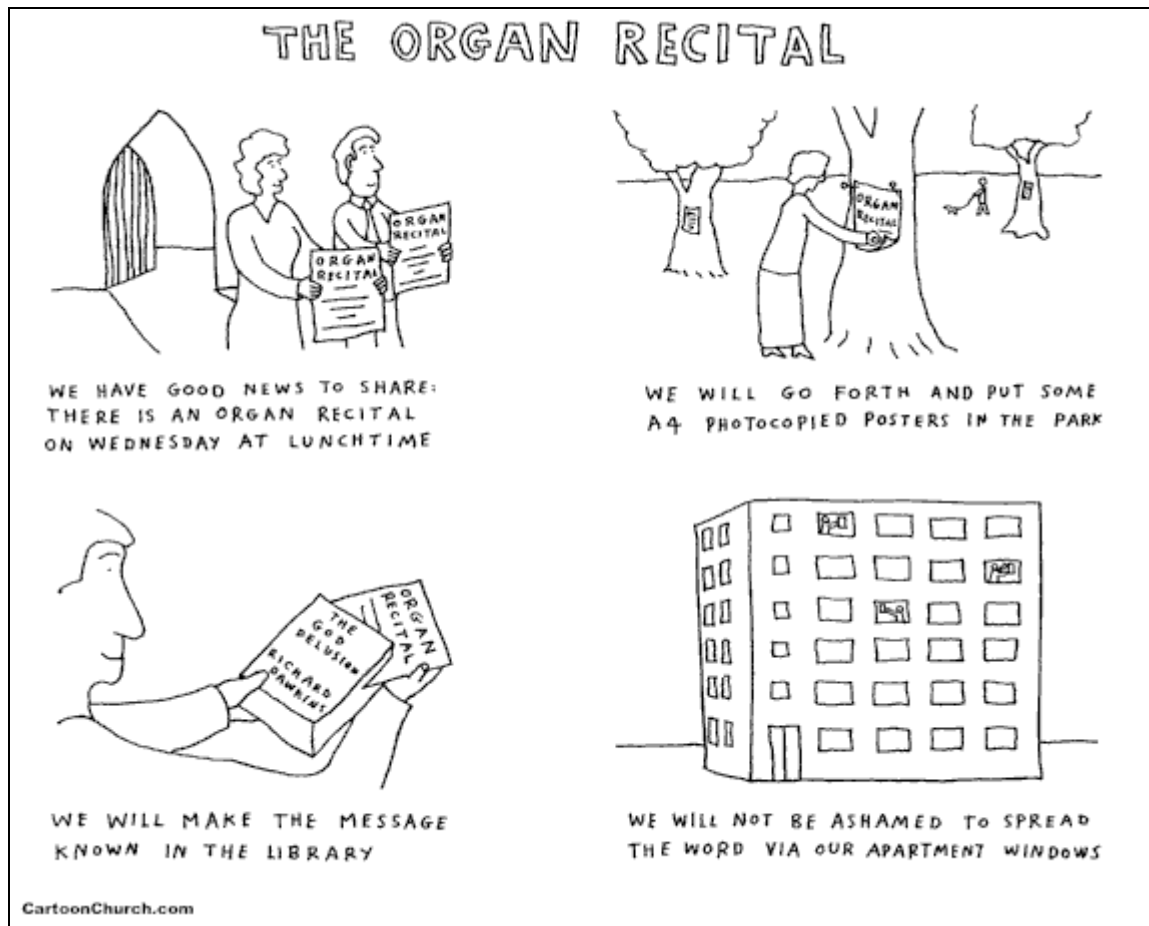
Prayer Time

Praise God for the joys and the beautiful things about your church.

Ask him to bless it even more.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to have helpful conversations about your church with the people you meet.

Session Three A Friend Indeed



Why do people start coming to church?

Many of us have been coming to church for a very long time. Some of us cannot even remember a time when we didn't. However, what about people who have become Christians more recently? How did they first start coming to church?

Our congregation may be thinking that we should like to reach out, to invite more people to come and hear the Good News. What should we do to encourage them?

In response to these questions, church people often think of ideas like these:

- Putting an advertisement in their local paper.
- Having a door-to-door leafleting campaign in their neighbourhood.
- Trying to encourage the people who use the church hall to come to church on Sundays.
- Having a series of musical concerts, because when people see how lovely the church is inside, they might want to come to a service.

All these are good and faithful acts of witness. They are also valuable means of raising the church's profile in the local community. But they are not very effective ways to bring newcomers to church.

All the research carried out into how people become Christians has found that, overwhelmingly, they start coming to church because of their family members or friends.

In the early 1990s, John Finney, then the Church of England Officer for the Decade of Evangelism, wrote a report on a large survey exploring how adults come to the Christian faith. He concluded that 'a very common approach' for people finding their way to God was: being personally acquainted with Christians, being able to talk to them about their faith, and being invited along to a church service or Christian meeting.¹⁶

The evangelist J. John quotes some statistics about why people who are not yet Christians start going to church. Just 1 percent, he says, come because some Christians knocked on their door, 6 percent because they had seen some publicity and only 2 percent because of a church hall event such as a lunch club or toddler group. But 77 percent come because friends or relatives invited them.

J. John says, 'It's easy enough to read statistics, but this one is worth stopping to think about for a moment.'¹⁷

How do you feel about this statistic? (5 min)

Have you ever been part of this pattern of coming to faith? Either as someone invited to church, or by inviting? What happened? (10 min)

¹⁶ Finney, J, *Finding Faith Today: How does it happen?* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 46.

¹⁷ John, J, *Breaking News* (Bletchley: Authentic Media, 2006), p. 41.

We may worry that, if we invite someone to come to church with us, therefore it will be our responsibility to convince them to become Christians. This is absolutely not the case. It will not be up to us: God himself will do that. We are simply called to offer them the invitation to come and get to know him.

John's Gospel describes what can happen:

Read John 1: 40-51 together:

What strikes you about this passage? (5 min)

**What do you think about Andrew and Philip's invitations in this story?
What about how Simon and Nathaniel responded? (10 min)**

What happened when they met Jesus? (10 min)

How does this passage encourage you? In what ways does it challenge you? (10 min)

Whom shall we invite to 'Come and see'?

Thinking about whom to invite to come to church with us can seem very difficult at first. There seem to be all sorts of reasons why it might not work out:

- 'I have lots of friends and family, I won't be able to decide who to invite...'
- 'I don't really know that many people; I haven't got anybody to ask...'
- 'All my friends go to church already...'
- 'I go to a church that's quite a long way from where I live, so I won't be able to invite anyone...'

Yet in a quiet time of discernment, we can discover the people to whom God is calling us.

Make a list of all the people with whom you are in regular contact, that don't yet go to church. Examples to include might be:

- **Members of your family who live near you**
- **Friends with whom you meet up to relax and enjoy time together**
- **People you know at work**
- **Your neighbours**
- **People whom you meet out dog-walking**
- **People you know from your children or grandchildren's school**

Spend some time in silence, looking at your list. Ask God to guide you to one or a few names in particular.

Write these names in the box below, which can become a prayer card to help you pray for the people to whom God is calling you. (15 min)

Pray regularly for these people and ask God to show you the right time to invite them to come with you to church.

✝

People I know, for whom God is asking me to pray

A prayer

Lord God, thank-you for these people, for whom you have given me a special concern. Thank-you that you love them so dearly, and that you want them to know you. Let me share with them what you have done for me. Please give me the words to say and the time to say them. Amen

Effective inviting

Here are some simple steps for making an effective invitation:

- The most important thing to do is to pray. Pray for the person whom you hope to invite. Pray for yourself, for the grace to know what to say, and when to say it.
- Give an invitation card with the date and time of the church service, to help your friend remember.
- On the day, go and collect your friend and bring them with you to church. The thought of going alone to a church for the first time can be off-putting; so, go to the service together.
- Sit with your friend during the service, and help them to find their way through the liturgy.
- Introduce them to some of your friends in the congregation.
- Later on, chat with them about what they thought of coming to church: perhaps take them out to coffee or lunch and talk about the experience.
- Invite them to come with you again.
- It may be that your friend will say, 'No,' to your invitation. Do not be discouraged. We invite our friends and neighbours to 'come and see', but we cannot make them come. We must keep on praying for them, and invite them again another day, for the Holy Spirit is working in his own time.

Spend some time going over these steps together. Which of them do you find particularly helpful? Are there any others that your group would like to add? (15 min)

Prayer Time

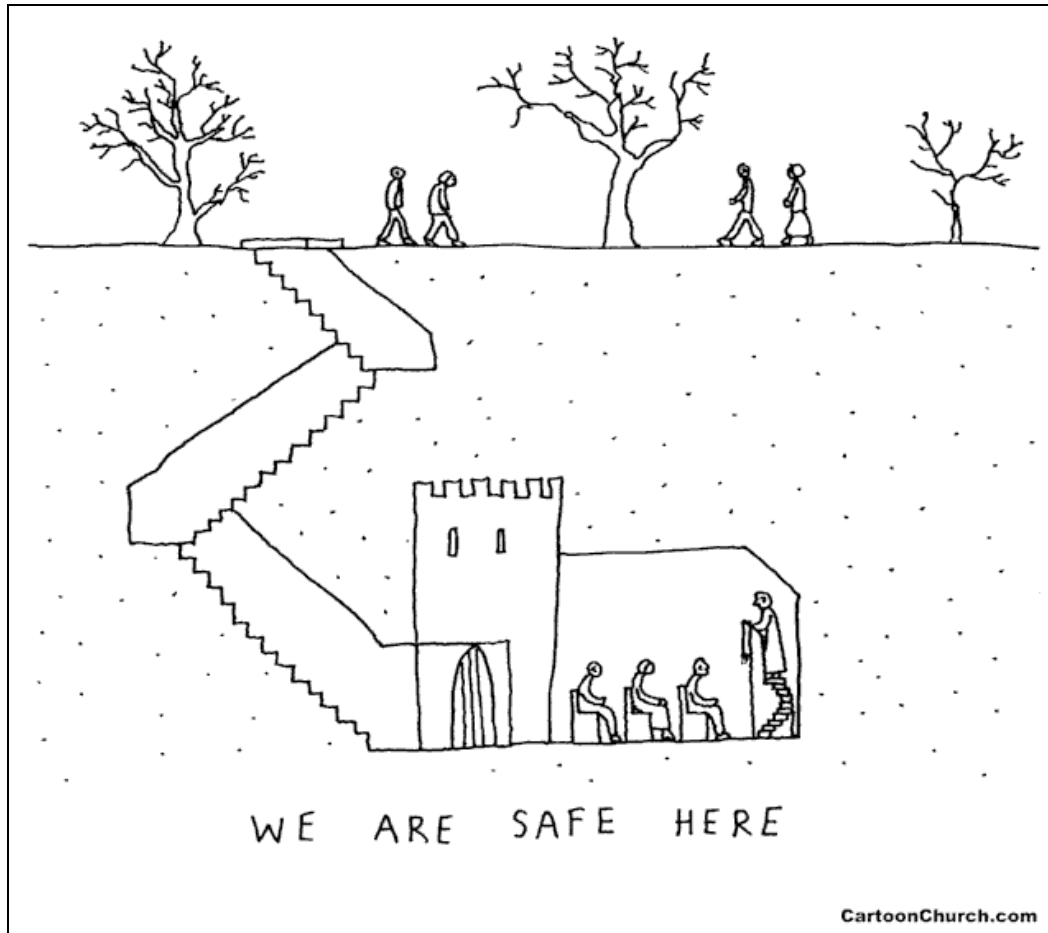
Thank God for the people whose names are on the lists your group has made.

Ask him for opportunities to serve them in loving Christian friendship.

Pray that the time will soon come, when they will want to find out more about him.

Session Four

Let me tell you a Story



Lost for words

Church Army missionary Peter Graystone was on a bus when he overheard two middle-aged women chatting. One lady asked the other, 'Why are you a Christian?'

'Oh,' said her friend, 'I couldn't possibly answer a question like that. You'd have to ask the Vicar.'

'I am convinced,' says Graystone, 'that if we are to fulfil Jesus' commission to make disciples of all people, every Christian needs to have a few words to say that account for being a follower of Jesus. Not merely why he or she goes to church, but why he or she is a believer.'¹⁸

¹⁸ Graystone, P, 'Have Confidence to Chat about Faith', Church Times 20th May 2011, p. 16.

How do you feel when you hear this story? (10 min)

**Have you ever been asked to explain why you are a Christian?
What happened? (10 min)**

Read 1 Peter 3:15 together:

What does Peter say we ought to do? When should we do it? (5 min)

What do you think of what Peter says here? (10 min)

Many churchgoers find it hard to talk about their faith. Sometimes we feel that we can justify this by saying that we would rather not push our beliefs onto others. Or that we prefer to express our Christian faith through actions rather than with words. But often what we actually mean is, we are embarrassed and we can't think what to say.

Our faith stories just don't seem worth telling:

- My faith does mean a lot to me, but it just doesn't sound like much when I start to put it into words.
- I never had any sort of interesting conversion experience: it was all very gradual.
- I can't even remember how I became a Christian: I've been one all my life and nothing very extraordinary has ever happened.

Actually, very many Christian stories are like this. It is normal for faith journeys to be slow and gradual. Some people do experience sudden 'Paul on the road to Damascus' conversions. Most people do not. A recent Scottish study interviewed a large number of people about how they became Christians; the authors could only describe what they found as, 'a variety of meandering journeys'.¹⁹

¹⁹ Spencer, N, & Neilson, P, *Journeys and Stories: Finding faith in Scotland today* (London: LICC, 2006), p. 12.

Each of these stories is nonetheless unique and remarkable. For each is the story of a precious relationship with God. Because of this, none of them can possibly be in the least bit boring or unworthy of being told.

It's time to rejoice in our faith stories, to be proud of them and ready to share them.

A tale worth telling

If you are thinking about telling the story of your Christian faith for the first time, or for the first time in while, it can be helpful to use a simple outline to explain what happened.

Try thinking of your story in four parts, and put each part into a box below.

- **How did you first start out on your Christian journey?** This could have been when you were a very little child, or much later. How did you begin? Where were you? Who helped you?
- **What did you find especially attractive about Jesus?** Did some of his teachings particularly draw you to him? Or something that the Gospels describe that he did or said?
- **When have you felt that you especially needed God, and he helped you?** This might be a time when you were feeling afraid, or when you needed healing or forgiveness, or hope for the future. How did God help you, in this situation?
- **How has your life been different because you are a Christian?** Have you made decisions to do or not to do things, because of your Christian faith? What have been the joys of being a Christian? In what ways has it been difficult? What has helped you to cope with these difficulties?

This outline is offered only as a suggestion. If it does not particularly match your personal story, feel free to move the boxes into a different order, or to put different titles on them. (15 min)

How did you first start out on your Christian journey?

What did you find especially attractive about Jesus?

When have you felt that you especially needed God, and he helped you?

How has your life been different, because you are a Christian?

Turn to someone sitting near you in the group. Spend about five minutes telling them your faith story as you have outlined it in the boxes. (5 min)

Spend about five minutes as the listener, while your partner tells you their story. (5 min)

How did you feel, as storyteller? What was it like to hear the other person's story? (10 min)

Look back at the anecdote we heard at the beginning of this session. If someone on a bus asked you, 'Why are you a Christian?' how do you think you would answer now? Spend a few minutes thinking about this. If you would like to, share some of your thoughts with others in the group (10 min)

Prayer Time

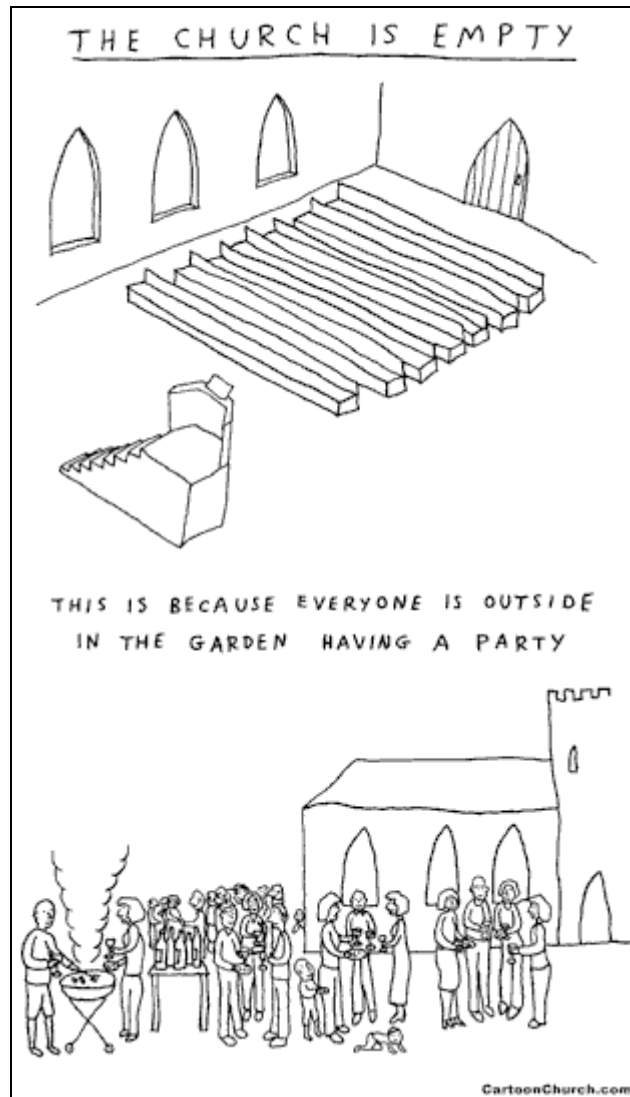
Praise God for all the richness and variety of the different stories that your group has shared.

Ask him to help you be ready to give an account of your faith whenever you are asked about it.

Pray that God will soon give you opportunities to share your own story with other people.

Session Five

Will you come to Church with me?



This session is divided into two parts. The first part discusses how to go about planning and holding an invitation service at church. In the second part, we shall start to think ahead, beyond that first encounter, towards what we can do to help newcomers find out more about the Christian faith.

Part 1

Invitation Sunday

When members of a congregation are thinking about inviting their friends and neighbours to church, it is a good idea to have a special Invitation Sunday. That is, a Sunday when the church makes an effort to be especially welcoming and everyone in the congregation invites a friend or neighbour along. An Invitation Sunday can be helpful for several reasons:

- There is strength in numbers: we shall feel more confident about inviting our friends when we know that everyone else in our church is going to do so as well.²⁰
- The whole church can pray together about the event, for the guests and for the people inviting them.
- Our guests will feel more comfortable, if they know that they are not the only newcomers in church that day.

Sometimes church people may instinctively feel that they object to the idea of an invitation Sunday. 'We don't approve of special invitation services,' they say, 'because every Sunday should be an invitation Sunday!' This is true. And one day, every Sunday may truly *be* an invitation Sunday. However, that is a long-term aim. We are more effective as churches when we start from where we are, with an achievable goal that everyone can share.

Starting from where we are

A good place to start is with our church festivals. Many churches already have a flourishing annual routine of festival events:

- Christmas carol services
- Harvest festival

²⁰ It is particularly helpful if priests and vestry members can be seen to be inviting guests too. Christian business consultant Michael Harvey says: 'As a church leader, you're not asking a congregation to do something that you're not prepared to do yourself!' Harvey, M, *Unlocking the Growth God Has Already Given to the Church: A seminar by Michael Harvey of MJH Associates* (DVD produced by MJH Associates: 2010).

- Easter celebrations
- Patron saint's day
- Flower festival

Think about your own church's year. Which annual festivals do you celebrate, that could become invitation services? (5 min)

Which one will be your group's immediate priority? (5 min)

Choose another to go into the church diary as an opportunity for later. (5 min)

Another idea would be to join other churches in the Back To Church Sunday campaign, on the last Sunday in September. See www.backtochurch.co.uk

It is often at this point that planning an invitation service can become bogged down in worries and objections. People may begin to lose confidence: 'We can't do it,' they say, 'until we've had time to...'

- Replace the notice boards
- Landscape the church garden
- Make a fresh set of service booklets
- Buy some comfortable chairs

It is important that projects like these are not neglected. However, don't let them become excuses. They may take weeks or months to complete. In the meantime, nobody has been invited to church, to hear the Good News of the Gospel. If you are feeling doubtful, look back again at Session Two in this workbook. Despite all the shortcomings you detect in your church, the Holy Spirit is right there in the community of believers. When your guests see this, they will not be put-off by old notice boards or hard pews.

For a thoroughly successful invitation service, these are all you need:

Personal invitations: the simplest invitation is the most effective: 'We're having a special festival at our church; would you like to come with me?' Have attractive printed invitation cards for church members to give to their friends.

A warm, sincere welcome: the loving, welcoming fellowship of the church makes a powerful impression on people who are attending for the first time.

Good quality food and drink: whether you serve tea and biscuits at the back of the church, a three-course harvest lunch, or Christmas mince pies, offer the very best you can afford, and lay them out attractively.

Spend some time now deciding:

How the invitation cards for your event will look, and who will make them.
(10 min)

What kind of refreshments will you serve? (5 min)

How will you make sure that guests feel welcomed when they come?
(10 min)

Part Two

The seed that falls on good ground

Of course, not everyone who is invited along to church will decide to become a Christian. The Parable of the Sower makes this very clear. However it also teaches us to expect that some people certainly *will* want to come to church again and discover more about the Christian faith. We need to make sure that we offer them the opportunity to do so, in a way that they will find helpful. Thinking about them and planning for their needs is an important part of the preparations for an invitation service.

In his recent book, *From the Abundance of the Heart*, Bishop Stephen Cottrell says, 'At every event where the gospel is being shared there should be a clearly sign-posted next step.'²¹

But how can we tell if someone is interested in finding out more? Here are two suggestions:

1. A great advantage of an invitation service, of a friend inviting a friend to church, is that the two friends can talk about it afterwards; the person who invited will be able to find out whether their guest would like to come to church again.
2. Bishop Cottrell recommends giving everyone at the service a response card to fill in if they want to. 'In my experience,' he says, 'this is the best and simplest way of helping people indicate their desire to make the next step.'²²

A response card needs to be clear and easy to use. It will have a space for the person's name and contact details, and a few basic questions. For example:

- What have you enjoyed most about St X's today?
- Would you like to find out more about the Christian faith?
- What in particular would you like to know more about?

How will your church find out whether newcomers would like to know more...?

Will you encourage church members to talk about this with their guests? (5 min)

Will you use a response card? How would you like it to look? (10 min)

Going a step further

Every time you find a card completed with a 'Yes' response is a time for thanksgiving and rejoicing. Somebody is thinking about God, perhaps for the first time, and wanting to know more about him. What will happen next?

²¹ Cottrell, S, *From the Abundance of the Heart: Catholic evangelism for all Christians* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006), p. 71.

²² Cottrell, *From the Abundance of the Heart*, p. 71.

Maybe we imagine it will be something like this:

Someone comes to church for the first time... ⇒ After a few more Sundays they decide to become a Christian... ⇒ They are now a fully committed church member... ⇒ They go onto the coffee rota and sign a Gift Aid form.

This is rather an unlikely scenario. Some people certainly do have sudden conversion experiences. For most, however, becoming a Christian is a slow and gradual process. In his detailed research on how adults become Christians, John Finney discovered that the time scale varied enormously, from less than twelve months to 42 years! He found that the average time taken was about four years.²³

We need to be able to offer people like these a continuing welcome; that is, what Bishop Cottrell calls 'a place of nurture,' where they can take time to enquire about the Christian faith and feel what it is like to belong to the community of believers.²⁴

For example, this could be...

- An enquirers' group using published course material such as *Emmaus*, *Alpha*, *Start!* or *Credo*.
- A Contextual Bible Study series using the CBS method to explore the Scriptures with a small group.
- A discussion group using material that you have designed yourselves. Although perhaps not for a church that is starting an enquirers' group for the first time, creating your own material to meet your own group's needs can be very fruitful and rewarding.²⁵

Spend some time thinking about the way your church welcomes enquirers:

Where do they have the opportunity to ask questions and find out more about the Christian faith? (5 min)

²³ Finney, J, *Finding Faith Today: How does it happen?* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1992), p. 25.

²⁴ Cottrell, *From the Abundance of the Heart*, pp. 46-47.

²⁵ The Mission Core Group has examples of a number of published courses for you to look at and borrow. The Mission Core Group will also help you to set up a Contextual Bible Study group. For more information, contact the Diocesan Office.

Where can they experience how it feels to be part of the Christian community? (5 min)

What can you do, so that your church becomes an even more effective 'place of nurture' for newcomers? (10 min)

Where every person counts

Setting up a nurture group for enquirers seems like a feasible thing to do, when a church has a number of interested newcomers, all keen to start together. But it can seem counterintuitive to run a group where there are just a couple of enquirers, or perhaps only one, in the congregation. 'We don't want to embarrass them,' we say, 'by putting them on a nurture course all by themselves.' So those people are left to muddle along alone, finding out the answers as best they can.

Yet one solitary seeker is worthy of all our best care and attention.

Read Luke 19: 1-10 together:

Who is the 'enquirer' in this story, and how does Jesus meet his needs? (5 min)

What can you say about how this person responds to Jesus? (5 min)

In what ways does this story encourage you, as you think about welcoming enquirers? (5 min)

What practical steps will you take, to be ready even for just one seeker? (10 min)

Prayer Time

Thank God for all the festivals in your church's year and for everything that makes them times of rejoicing.

Ask him to bless your invitation service.

Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you discernment as you respond to those people who want to know more about the Christian faith.

Further Reading and other Resources

Books and articles

Bechtle, M, *Evangelism for the Rest of us: Sharing Christ within your personality style* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006).

Bechtle, M, 'Introverts can Evangelise the Bible Way', in *First!Again: Selected articles from the magazine of 'The Faith Mission'*, firstmagazine.org

Cottrell, S, *From the Abundance of the Heart:: Catholic evangelism for all Christians* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006).

Finney, J, *Finding Faith Today: How does it happen?* (Swindon: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1992).

John, J, *Breaking News* (Bletchley: Authentic Media, 2006).

Morgan, R, *Stay Evangelism: How to reach the people next door*, ReSource booklet no. 10 (Wells: ReSource, 2008).

Riches, J, et al, *What is Contextual Bible Study?* (London: SPCK, 2010).

Spencer, N, & Neilson, P, *Journeys and Stories: Finding faith in Scotland today* (London: LICC, 2006).

Temple, W, *Towards the Conversion of England* (Westminster: The Press & Publications Board of the Church Assembly, 1945).

Group discussion courses for enquirers

Alpha: uk.alpha.org

Credo: Unwin, L, 'Credo: A course for the curious', (currently out of print, but available to borrow from the Diocesan Office, 5 St Vincent Place, Glasgow G1 2DH).

Emmaus: Cottrell, S, et al, 'Emmaus: The way of faith', a three-stage discipleship course produced by Church House Publishing.

Start! Produced by CPAS for Leading Your Church Into Growth, www.start-cpas.org.uk

Other resources

Harvey, M, 'Unlocking the Growth God has already given to the Church: A seminar by Michael Harvey of MJH Associates' (DVD produced by MJH Associates, 2010) www.mjhassociates.org.uk

Back To Church Sunday: www.backtochurch.co.uk