

Exploring Worship and Mission

Sacred Spaces



A series of workshops designed to help local congregations explore different aspects of worship and their relation to mission



Aim: to explore the concept of sacred space both inside traditional church worship areas and outside – to see where and how God is encountered today

Mission Thinking:



Buildings for Christian worship have changed dramatically through the centuries. Often they mirror the theology and practice of church life. Think of the sumptuous wealth of some Roman Catholic Churches, the consciousness of tradition and heritage in many Church of England buildings or the deliberate simplicity of non-conformist meeting houses.

There have been recent changes too. Modern church buildings tend to be simpler, on the whole. They may embody a more democratic 'feel' to worship, with altars and pulpits on a level with the congregation, informal seating and multi-purpose use.

In recent times in Western Europe, there have been three other major influences. The ecumenical movement has made us more aware of both the gifts and value and contribution of our own traditions. The increasing prominence of other faiths has brought us into contact with worship spaces of many different kinds. And the growth of new age and eclectic spirituality has rendered every space potentially sacred in quite unexpected ways.

Mission thinking encourages us to make sure our worship spaces are welcoming. Visitors as well as regular attendees should find that they are drawn to worship. Churches should also be aware of the longing to worship that leads communities to create sacred spaces outside the wall of the church.

Objectives:



1. to reflect on our own experience of worship in sacred spaces
2. to consider how a space can invite or enhance worship

Practical matters

Timing: allow 1 ¾ hours

Participation: as well as gathering the materials below, ask two people to be prepared to speak for 3 minutes each in the debate (see over)

Materials required:

- Flip chart and pens (for group leaders)
- Big sheet of paper and lots of brightly coloured pens or paints
- Postcards of photos of worship spaces which the participants have visited or worshipped in – participants to be invited in advance to bring these
- Posters of natural spaces, woodland, garden, mountains, etc.

Spaces: You will need room for these formats:

- Plenary sessions, sitting in a circle with access to the flip chart
- Tables or floor space for everyone to draw or paint
- If possible, a garden or open space within easy reach of the meeting place.

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1. Welcome/Ice breaker

(Duration 10 minutes)

Immediately get people to stand up and walk around the space they are in – touch the walls and furniture, look into every nook and cranny, and sniff things. Then stop everyone and tell them to stand completely still where that are and simply listen.

Be sensitive to anyone who might have hearing or seeing difficulties or poor mobility, and to the owner of the space in which you are meeting!

Now come back into the group and go round. Everyone is to say their name and something they have sensed about the room: e.g. 'I am John and that table smells of lovely fresh polish'; 'I am Bianca and the wall paper is furry'.

2. Spaces we have known

(Duration 10 minutes)

Divide into 'buzz' groups of two or three. Ask people to show each other the photographs of sacred spaces that they have brought. Ask them to describe the place on the photo or, if they have forgotten to bring one, to describe a place of worship, in the following terms:

- What was it like being there?
- How was the space conducive to worship?
- What elements got in the way of worship?
- Was the spaces accessible for everyone to worship?

Come back into plenary and ask people to call elements of space which are conducive to worship, then elements which get in the way of worship. Write these on flip chart paper, and display.

Open the discussion briefly around the question of different traditions and different faiths – can we learn from each other?

3. The big debate

(Duration 25 minutes)

Pick one of these topics – there may be one which is particularly relevant to your place of worship – and debate it in plenary session. Your two prepared speakers have 3 minutes each (be tough!), followed by discussion – let passions run free!

- All churches pews should be removed and replaced by chairs
- The minister should always preach from the pulpit
- Going up to the communion rail to receive communion is better than sitting in seats to receive it
- We should do away with books and put all hymns on Powerpoint

Stop 10 minutes before the end, and ask what is in the mission perspective on this debate (see Mission Thinking, front page).

4. Sacred Spaces

(Duration 25 minutes)

If it is possible, go into a garden or open spaces for this part of the workshop. If there is no such space to hand, if it is raining, or if moving would take too long, display the posters of natural scenes.

In 'buzz' groups again, ask people to describe what it is about natural environments that open people to a sense of God's presence.

If you are indoors, write the results on a flip chart page and display it. If you are outdoors, oral reporting back will be enough.

Open the discussion for a time, around the question of non-Christian use of sacred space: pagan and new age worship, the placing of flowers at the site of a death such as road accident, and other uses that people may know.

5. Design your own

(Duration 20 minutes)

Spread out big sheets and give people access to paints and/or coloured pens.

Invite people to design their own sacred space. They may like to take inspiration from the words on the flip charts or spoken in the garden, from the posters of natural scenes or the photographs of worship spaces.

Although people may work alone, the activity should be as corporate as possible – tables close together, or kneeling around paper on the floor.

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6. Out into the world

(Duration 10 minutes)

Ask people to stop and stand back from their drawings and do three things.

Firstly, to look around at the meeting room, and the visual images that are around – photos, posters and each other's drawings.

Secondly to visualise their journey home, where they will spend the night, and where they will go the following day. You may like to invite people to say something about one of these – e.g. 'I'll be driving past the new hospital', 'I work in a cramped office'.

Finally, to 'break out' into space, shaking hands, embracing (if they don't mind doing this) and commending each other to God with a greeting such as 'God go with you'.