

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 1: SMALL AND UNDERSTANDING WHO WE ARE



A series of workshops designed to help local Christians reflect on worship and mission in the context of being numerically small and filled with hope.



AIM:

To explore who we are as small congregations, affirming our vision, our place in the world and acknowledging and exploring our vulnerability

MISSION THINKING



We live in a culture which often places a value on size, so that large numbers, imposing buildings, and economy of scale are valued; and small is seen as insignificant. When we are part of a congregation with small numbers, it is easy to become discouraged, to focus on what we cannot do, and to feel our efforts are worthless.

But the biblical texts are full of stories of God working through the small and vulnerable. Mission thinking encourages us to recognise the value that God places on the small, and to affirm God's activity and presence amongst us.

OBJECTIVES



- To reflect on what we value in small events and communities
- To understand more of our own faith community, and reflect on our own resilience and vulnerability.

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PREPARATION

Space

- Large enough space where two groups can work separately on large table each or on hard floor space;
- Lines of vision (so all can see each other);
- Lighting – not too harsh, but enough so folks can read/see;
- Worship space – you may want to use coloured scarves, or candles to create a gentle/quiet atmosphere

Materials

- Food: agree who will bring food; all food to be finger food (i.e. no forks/ knives needed); main course could be like a 'smorgasbord' (i.e. lots of little bits of food)
- Tool kit: wallpaper lining paper/pens/felt-tips/post-its of difference shapes and colours for the time-line and map; enough comfy seating for all; central table/scarf for the symbols (see above); large lit candle (so don't forget matches)
- Symbols: invite all participants to bring something from their home that symbolises the value of 'small' to you (e.g. a paperclip: tiny, but holds lots of things together; small piece of wood: organic matter, but can be used to bring heat and light; a seed: buried in ground will sprout and grow.....)

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STARTERS: THE CALL FOR UNDERSTANDING

Worship

Invite all to place their symbol on the central table, around the candle, and to share one word/sentence about what it symbolises about the value of 'small'

Share starters while sharing reflections

Sing, or say together 'He knew the greatness of the small' in Wild Goose songs 'Love from Below' see:

<http://www.ionabooks.com/1152-0947988343-Love-From-Below-songbook.html>

Valuing the small:

in myself and in others

Spend time alone:

Either question: think of time when you've been alone – remember how it feels: what did you like/find challenging?

Or action: find a space in room; make yourself as small as possible; make yourself as large as possible. Reflect on how that feels – what did you like/find challenging?

Or words: read story of the mustard seed Luke 13:18 - 19 and consider:

What small things do I value in myself?

What small things do I value in others?

In what ways does small = vulnerable; small = resilient?

Who am I?

Valuing the small:

in our faith communities

Share your favourite 'remembered' parable or bible story where 'small is beautiful', where something small was valued and shared (loaves and fishes, yeast, salt....) for this 'remembered bible' method don't hand out bibles, or texts, but invite folks to trawl their memories and rely on what they already know of the bible

(See Janet Lees, *Word of Mouth: Using the Remembered Bible for Building Community*, Wild Goose 2007 & *Tell me the Stories of Jesus*, Wild Goose, 2011 for inspiration on this approach).

Share a) advantage in being small and b) challenge in being small

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Story:

"Bath-time in a busy household and the four year-old, after a day of nursery and play reflects: 'Mummy I'm tired. So much happened today. I feel really sad.' Mum replies: 'Perhaps we can find some little things that will make you feel better.' 3 year-old, shrouded in towel and still dripping offers without hesitation from doorway: 'she can have some of my little things.'"

Question: What little things could we give away that would make a huge difference to someone else's life?

MAIN COURSE: THE CORE TO UNDERSTANDING

Who are we? Mapping our Communities

Introduction: need large sheets of paper (white lining paper/wallpaper ideal), marker pens for writing on lining paper, post it notes and biros for writing on post-its. Divide group into two. Group one to work on map of your neighbourhood, Group 2: a timeline of your community. Each group should spend about twenty minutes on this exercise, sharing their knowledge and memories. There are no rules, and no pressure to achieve scientific accuracy!



Group 1: Map of Our Area

- Agree the actual area (e.g. whole village/town centre/ neighbourhood) that you're going to map
- Appoint a 'cartographer' (no skills required!) who will draw the map. If all feel anxious about offering, suggest whoever does it, does it with their non-leading hand (i.e. with right hand, if you're normally left-handed etc) thus emphasising that artistic merit is not an issue....
- Begin drawing the map of your area
- Include significant buildings/transport networks
- Notice where housing is/isn't
- Notice where public amenities are/are not – police, schools, shops, community centres, churches
- Place map around central table
- Post-it notes can be used to add/subtract/move things around.

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Group 2: Timeline of Our Area

- Spread large sheet of lining paper along length of table
- Draw thick line along middle of paper, lengthways
- Far left of this line = starting point/date (doesn't need to be in living memory, can be memories we have inherited)
- Far right of this line = arrow pointing to future
- Mark 'present day'
- Encourage all to add (using post-it notes) significant events in your community – in words/pictures: new housing/demolitions; people coming/going; public events. If it's a time-line of your church/worshipping community, could note significant events in the life of your worshipping community. Post it notes help move things around in chronological order.
- Place timeline around central table

Reflection/Questions

Invite all to fill their plates with 'small' nibbles from table. While eating, reflect on the following questions together:

- What surprised you about the map?
- What surprised you about the timeline?
- What does it feel like to be a small community?
- We are a small community in relation to.....
- What are the advantages of being a small community?
- What are the challenges of being a small community?

PUDDING: WHERE DO WE TAKE OUR UNDERSTANDING?

Read Luke 10: 1 – 8 (the sending out of the 72)

- Imagine yourself in the story – imagine how you might feel as one of the 72
- Read the story again
- Think of times in your life now when you might be in the position of the 72, or the groups of 2
- Reflect on the **resilience** needed to be one of Jesus' disciples in this story
- Reflect on the **vulnerability** needed to be one of Jesus' disciples in this story
- In what ways are you **resilient/vulnerable** as a faith community?

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Closing Worship

Prayer: light again (if it's not still lit) the candle used in the opening worship, place it centrally around the symbols brought at the beginning of the session. Add the timeline and the map to the central space. In a time of silence, invite all to think of one sentence, or one word of prayer they would like to share.

End by sharing a plate of chocolates/sweets around the room.

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