

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



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 the means and possibilities of transforming 'who we are' into 'who we could be'

MISSION THINKING



When we feel small or isolated, as individuals or as a church, we commonly underestimate 'who we are' and also 'who we could be'. "Like living stones, let yourselves be transformed into a living temple" (1 Peter 2:5). In an increasingly individualistic society, and in spite of wide-ranging new social media, many of us underestimate our effective engagement and the intertwining of our lives with others. When we begin to appreciate that, it becomes easier to see that we can change the

world by changing ourselves. In the words of Gandhi, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world". Like the yeast in the dough, in the parable of the Kingdom of Heaven, although we feel small, we may be widely influential. We may feel alone and isolated, but we may in fact be significant contributors to God's transforming work, which is happening well beyond what we can ourselves perceive. God calls us to be transformed, and in so doing, to be part of the transformation of the world.

In worship and congregational life, we can experience and discover our potential for transformation, and gain confidence to be agents of transformation in the world.

OBJECTIVES



To discover new ways of seeing and defining ourselves, by drawing on our different contexts and communities.

To discover and reflect on different ways in which transformations can occur. In reflecting on different experiences of transformation, to see how transformation can be effected.

To affirm our potential to be agents of transformation, and identify opportunities for further exploration.

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



PREPARATION:

Space:

Since the workshop is geared around a transformation, it is important to have at least two separate spaces:-

- (1) with seats for the gathering, and sufficient space on the floor or a wall, for constructing or displaying the network, as the 'main' activity is done
- (2) for cooking or assembling the food from the brought ingredients, and to serve and eat it together.

Ask everyone to bring:

in a food container, two identical items of **either** fruit **or** vegetable (options to be specified) - one item whole **and** the other chopped into small pieces. One or more stories, if they have them, of transformation or surprise – where something apparently insignificant at first, has had later a widespread or disproportionate effect.

Planning will need to be careful, and include a good estimate of expected numbers.

For the 'Starter' session:

- large platter or plate for displaying the whole items, as they are introduced
- spare bags of fruit or vegetables (for those who may have forgotten to bring any)
- seating – ideally in a circle, with central low table or good floor space for display

For the 'Main' session:

Either (for the network exercise):

- coloured string, or thin paper streamers, which can easily be broken into separate sections, to construct the network
- post-it notes for naming of the groups/ naming the 'nodes' which build up the network
- ideally a small block provided for each participant
- pens for completing the post-it notes
- modelling clay or blu-tak – for the leader to help construct the nodes of the network, as names are spoken aloud, and written on the post-it notes, by participants in turn.
- **Or** (for the wall of fame exercise):
- coloured paper or card to make the 'bricks'

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



For the Cooking:

- Plan how the chopped ingredients will be combined into a food dish for cooking and sharing, and supply the necessary 'binding' ingredients: e.g. a large pizza base, on which chopped items can be arranged, and/or eggs and milk, salt and a large frying pan, in which chopped items can be cooked together for a 'Spanish' omelette (s), and/or a large fruit bowl and some fruit juice, for chopped fruit items to be mixed into a dessert salad.
- Supply utensils, dishes and condiments for cooking and serving
- Check cooking times and oven settings e.g. 15/20 minutes for pizza on a ready-cooked base (12" base will feed 4-6 people),
- 5-6 minutes for each omelette in a 12" pan, for sharing between 2-4 people
- Assuming that the leader (s) or pre-warned participants might be asked to supervise the hot food cooking, plan the required number of other jobs for participants, in helping to prepare the meal and lay the table, e.g.
- Bring bread sticks to accompany the food, and ask 1 or 2 to cut them up into a basket
- Ask 2 people to lay the dining table – cloth, cutlery, glasses, water jug etc
- Ask 1 or 2 to mix the fruit salad

Ask 1 or 2 to volunteer to record in some appropriate way the stories that are told

The action moves to organising a time of cooking and food preparation to create a meal which will be shared together. Leaders will need to have some ingredients and condiments (eggs, pizza base, salt, pepper etc) in reserve, but as far as possible, organise the cooking/preparation of food incorporating at least all the chopped items brought by participants. Dishes might helpfully include:

- Soup
- Spanish omelette
- Pizza with variety of toppings
- Green Salad
- Fruit Salad

[If anyone has a bread-maker, it might also have been possible to bring yeast and dough to the introductory session, to include in the talk about sacraments / bread and wine – and the bread could be baking during all of the 'Main Course' sessions]

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



STARTER: THE CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION

Welcome and Introductory Explanation

As we introduce ourselves to one another, we shall be coming as separate individuals, yet we are not isolated beings. In the course of the workshop we shall experience and celebrate the transformation of separated-ness into something new and delightful, which can be shared.

Hymn suggestions:

e.g. Brian Wren "Lord God, your love has called us here" (first two verses)

Wild Goose Resource Group "We're Going to Shine like the Sun."

"Who Do We Think Is Here?"

Gathering and Introductions

In turn, all introduce themselves; as they do so, they place their whole fruit/vegetables on to a plate/platter in the centre of the group, to build up a mound, and offer some piece of information about themselves which links them to the fruit/vegetables (e.g. I'm Jean and I live in a green house, the same colour as this pepper. I'm John; this turnip looks battered, like I feel sometimes on the morning after the match).

Biblical Reading about Transformation

Choose an appropriate reading according to the time of the Christian calendar (e.g. Advent / Christmas / Epiphany / Lent / Easter (Emmaus Road) / Pentecost) or an appropriate Gospel story (eg Transfiguration / Feeding of 5,000 / one of the healing stories):

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



Invite everyone to show their second (chopped up) item of fruit/vegetables, leading into a time of shared reflection about the relationship between the whole and the parts – dwelling especially on:

- How similar or otherwise one is from the other – could you imagine the whole, having seen only the parts, and vice versa?
- Attractiveness or otherwise of whole and parts
- The need to change/chop up the whole, and usually combine with other things, in order to create a nourishing dish to eat
- The elements of the Eucharist – bread and wine, both manufactured substances very different from their 'original' whole grains and grapes
- The encouragement of faith that we should allow ourselves to be broken and re-made by God's hand, even though we can rarely glimpse what we are to become, or to what we are contributing

MAIN COURSE: THE OPENING OF OUR MINDS

"Discovering Who Is Really Here

Either: Network – Strings Exercise

The aim is to begin with a central relatively tight circle (depending on numbers, this might be formed by the actual people present, or else use the items of whole fruit/vegetables and let the people operate from them, as from a shared model on a table or the floor).

Pass a single string around the circle to connect with each person, and then joins the ends. Point out how strong this appears, but also how limiting and perhaps how small.

In turn, ask each person to name one or more 'other people/groups' with whom they have a reasonably close connection: e.g. my family, my school, my workplace, local council, WI, my pub, choir, flower-arranging class, sports team. As each of these is named, they are allocated another 'node' – either represented by a chair, or a plastic building block, or symbol of some sort – and a coloured string attached (using blu-tak or modelling clay) to it, and to the person speaking. People are encouraged to call out if they too are linked with this same group, and another string used to connect them with it as well – so the new 'node' might be placed within or outside the initial circle, depending on practicalities. The exercise continues around and around the group until most possibilities are exhausted.

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



(It could be speeded up if, as the first person to do so names 'my family', everyone with families of their own sets up new nodes at the same time, and the next person chooses a different 'outside' entity to be named.

As the model becomes more complicated, and perhaps begins to look and feel more like a game of Twister, people might need or want to extricate themselves as individuals in the system, and climb outside to be able to look from a wider perspective.

OR Wall of Fame Exercise

Use this as an alternative, if it seems easier from a practical point of view.

Each person is asked to name groups or organisations with which they are in regular contact, but keeping the list to groups outside church-run organisations. Each name is written on to a paper or card 'brick' of uniform size but different colours. The bricks are then mounted on to a wall, with overlapping joints like a brick wall – so that the scale and scope of the initial group's networks are fully visible. Alternatively, the paper/card units can be of different shapes and sizes, and a network 'map' drawn or fixed with strings from an original 'group circle' as in the first option, to indicate where the original group's networks apply.

Whichever exercise has been chosen, bring it to a close by inviting people to reflect that, although the group began with only x number of individuals, they have brought with them a large number of other people with whom they are connected. If something changes the individuals in the initial group, it follows that many others will also be affected.

"Mixing It"

Mix together the ingredients which everyone has brought to prepare a meal which all can share. See the preparation section for some suggestions for this.

Those not involved with cooking might help with laying a table for everyone present (including perhaps an empty place (s) for 'the others' or 'anyone who might turn up'). The whole fruit/vegetables might be arranged into a centrepiece decoration. They might also help with reading or telling stories as below, or recording in some way the tales that are told.

During this time, encourage light-hearted conversations and stories about Transformations – personal anecdotes being the best, especially if they involve a surprising and significant outcome from a small everyday event, and/or changes of mind or perception or scale about a situation, a relationship, or an event. For example, 'the day we pitched our tent late at night in a field, only to discover next morning we were in the middle of the county cricket ground'

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



PUDDING: RESPONSE AND CELEBRATION

Enjoying Who We Are Now, Who We Could Be and Who Could Be With Us

Use the response:

The Lord is here

His Spirit is with us

Design a 'dessert', drawing on any or all of the following:

- **Intercessions:** following the lines of 'network strings' from the 'Main Course', in offering prayers for each person present, and their connected people, and for any others in the local community, or in national or international news at the time.
- **Circle Dance:** in a simple circle dance is embodied the understanding that each member of a dancing circle is simultaneously both a singular individual and an essential part of a greater whole. Each person moves as an individual, but also contributes to the movement of the circle, which is more than just a multiplication of the individuals.
- **Shared Meal:** enjoy the food which has been prepared and cooked. The leader, in saying grace, might remind people of the transformation of the fruit/vegetables into food for those present, just as they in turn are being changed into agents for transformation of a wider community.
- **Communion:** it might be appropriate to share a brief communion, before going on to eat together the meal that has been cooked.
- **Personal Reflection:** in smaller groups, with a partner or individually, people could be invited to reach a personal resolution for the future, arising from their changed awareness during this workshop. e.g. sharing the experience with one or more 'others' who were here, through the network connections, as in 'I was speaking about you the other day'; taking out a gift to be given to someone from the networks; retaining some part of the day as a display in church or somewhere else in the community.

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 3 SMALL AND WHO WE COULD BE



Conclusion

Close the workshop by gathering all participants again in a group, as at the beginning. Ask each person to thank their neighbour individually around the group, for anything they have received from him/her e.g. "Thank you for ... coming to be here / your lovely smile / bringing the banana / your story about .. / ... which has enriched/fascinated/inspired/helped me today".

Close with a hymn or song, and the words of the grace, said by all, looking at each other.

Hymn Suggestions:

- We sing a love (Church Hymnary 4)
- Tell Out My Soul (Rejoice and Sing)
- One More Step (Rejoice and Sing)
- Here in this place (Common Ground)
- Just a Tiny Seed (Big Blue Planet)
- Teach me my God and King (Rejoice and Sing)

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