

EXPLORING WORSHIP and MISSION in SMALL AND HOPEFUL CONGREGATIONS

Session 4 SMALL AND LIVING BEYOND OURSELVES



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 what it means as small congregations to embrace change and take risks in the context of God's mission and our worship.

MISSION THINKING

We gather together for worship in order to be sent out into the world to live out our faith moment by moment through the week. Worship is not an escape from the world but a chance to reflect together on our engagement with the people around us, to reflect on God's wider mission and our part within it.

God's mission is not static but active and dynamic and constantly changing. But change can be scary and unsettling. How we manage change and take risks in relation to living out our mission involves first acknowledging our fears around change and the unknown and then a willingness to let go of the past and to embrace change. Are we ready to "try something new today"?



OBJECTIVES

- To recognise and give thanks for times of change in our past
- To experience learning or trying something new to gain confidence in risk taking
- To name our fears around change and potential opportunities for mission
- To commit to doing something new in mission together.



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PREPARATION

Venue: Think about the heating of the room, the layout and whether everyone can see each other, lighting so people can see to read, think of how to make the space gentle and quiet for worship. For telling the story a circle is preferable with space in the middle to set the story out. Also set up an area to set out buffet style food, plates, cutlery and napkins and some tables for people to sit at to eat. On each table place a printed out map of the world and some pens.

Food: Think about who will bring food and encourage people to bring different foods from around the world. This could be a full meal or snacks and light refreshments. Remember to include some unusual drinks rather than tea or coffee (or try Chai or Indian spiced tea) This works very well if you have a multi-cultural community but if not, people could be encouraged to try recipes from places they have been on holiday. Otherwise try your local Asian or African markets or delis or any high street supermarket to see what different foods are on offer. Good foods to try include plantain, pitta bread and various dips, Indian sweets or try out some recipes from a world food cook book available from organisations such as Oxfam, New Internationalist. Do be aware of any dietary requirements such as veggie, halal or any allergies such as to nuts or gluten and try and find foods that everyone can try.

Resources:

- Creative work done in previous weeks such as timeline, map of the community, wall of fame, favourite things song
- Song words and responsive prayers
- music for songs and musician/ recorded music
- Bible
- Garden netting or fabric and A4 fish shapes cut out of paper
- stones, candles, matches,
- print outs or way of projecting intercessions so different people can read and all can respond

For the Story:

This is a really effective and visual way to tell a story. It takes a bit of time to gather all the items together but is well worth the effort. Take your time to familiarise yourself with the script and don't rush the story. Tell the story slowly and reverently and concentrate on the dolls and props and try not to look at those who are listening to the story until the end. Then sit back and look around at everyone and ask the "I wonder..." questions one by one.

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Give plenty of time for people to respond and don't be worried if there are long periods of silence while people are thinking. Allow people to offer their thoughts in a non-judgemental way and accept everyone's contribution with grace without being tempted to respond back with your own opinion.

At the end gently and deliberately pack everything from the story back into a box one item at a time and in silence – don't just shove it all in a heap!

- Rectangle of beach coloured fabric approx 1m x 80 cm
- A few stones
- Doll's house beach chair or cushion (optional)
- 10 x 5 cm of fabric to be a beach rug or towel
- Moon, sun and stars (cut out of felt or card)
- 4 dolls house size dolls or finger puppets
- Boat made from flat oval piece of wood or card
- Piece of garden netting or net fabric to be a fishing net
- Fish shaped buttons or beads or cut small fish out of shiny or coloured card (1 – 3 cms long)
- Dolls house BBQ or building brick or match box to be a BBQ
- Small piece of bread
- 3 cockerels (from farmyard set or printed/drawn on card)
- 3 lambs (from farmyard set or printed/drawn on card)
- A cross made of wood or card

Timing 1 ½ to 2 hours depending on the size of the group and how long you spend eating

STARTER: GIVING THANKS FOR TIMES OF CHANGE

Worship

Set the scene: Create a worship space and use the centre or the front of the space to display creative work done through the previous workshops such as the community map, the wall of fame and the favourite things song.

Prayer:

God calls us on a journey
a journey into the unknown
a journey into love and laughter
a journey into pain and despair
a journey where we walk together
a journey where we walk alone

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STARTER: GIVING THANKS FOR TIMES OF CHANGE

So come,
let's walk life's journey together
knowing it is God who invites us to journey
and it is God who will journey with us.

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Song: Lord for the years your love has kept and guided

Silence and Reflection: Invite people to spend a few moments in silence reflecting on and giving thanks for the creative work from the previous workshops such as the timeline, community map, wall of fame and words written to favourite things song.

Reading: Isaiah 43: 1 – 3 & 16 – 19

Naming change and giving thanks: Invite people to introduce themselves and name in turn something that they have noticed through the week that have changed in a positive way. E.g. a building that has been opened, bulbs appearing, leaves changing colour, a change in the weather. After naming each change invite people to respond with the words, **We give you thanks for the changes we see around us.** Then lead into the following prayer:

Travelling God,
Journeying with us
in our different lives
in our different communities
at times you are distant
leaving us to work things out for ourselves
confronting us with ourselves
stripping all our certainties away
as we take stock of where we are
and dream of where we want to be
sometimes you are close
holding our hands over the roughest places
facing the biggest challenges together
or embracing us
when the journey threatens
to overwhelm us
or we feel we cannot go on
at other times you run with us

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skipping along when the path seems obvious
stopping to feast with us
as our paths meet and cross and merge together
many journeys converging and joining
many different people
learning to live along side one another
your living, breathing, loving, crying, laughing
community on earth

For the times
when we have almost given up on the journey

Forgive us and keep us strong

For the times
when we have been too caught up in our own lives

Forgive us and make us aware of others

For the times
when we've made the journeys of others more difficult

Forgive us and help us make amends

For the times
when we have stubbornly gone in the direction we want to go

Forgive us and show us a different path

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Changing and Growing

Introduce the purpose of the session and clarify domestic arrangements, timings and ground rules

Look at the timeline that you created as part of *Small and Understanding Who We are* and spend a few moments reflecting as a group on the questions below.

(NB. If you did not do this session then draw a long line on a piece of wall paper (or lining paper or several pieces of flip chart paper joined together) to represent your church's timeline. Ask everyone to contribute and mark on it significant points in the church's history. These may be times where the church or community has changed in some way e.g. the opening of a new building, the induction of a minister, the launch of a new activity, the birth of a child or reception of a new member)

- Reflect on the times of change.
- What changed?
- What was the effect? Was it scary, exciting, challenging?
- How did the community respond? With welcome, excitement, anticipation
- or withdrawal?

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Gently make the point that while change can be negative and scary, change can be positive and is how we grow and develop as a community. What happens as a result of change is often due to the way we feel about change and how we respond.

MAIN COURSE: SEE I AM DOING A NEW THING

Try something new today

Give everyone a plate and invite them to try a range of foods from around the world that are set out on the table. Make it fun by asking them to guess what it is they are eating and where it comes from. Ask them to mark with pens on the map all the different places that the dishes and ingredients may come from. Reflect that sometimes it is fun and delicious to try new foods from around the world. We may not always like what we taste but if we don't give it a go we may never know a new food and may miss out on something really good.

Script	Laying out the objects to tell the story
It was evening at the beach by the Sea of Tiberias.	Roll out the beach fabric and add waves of blue fabric and a few stones and beach chair!
The waves were gently lapping the shore as night fell and the moon and stars reflected on the water	Add moon and stars reflecting in the sea
Simon Peter and his friends were bored and fed up	Add Simon Peter and two friends
As it was a calm evening they decided to go out fishing on their boat	Add boat
They were out on the boat all night and didn't catch a thing!	Add empty fishing net
As the sun came up they saw a stranger on the beach	Take off moon and stars and add sun

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<p>To their surprise the stranger spoke to them and said "Children, you have no fish, have you". How could he have known they had caught nothing all night! "Then the stranger told them to throw their nets over the other side of the boat - after all what had they to lose?</p>	<p>Put net on other side of the boat</p>
<p>Peter and his friends were amazed! The net was so full of fish they could hardly haul it in.</p>	<p>Fill net with fish</p>
<p>The friends exclaimed to Peter, "It is Jesus! Well Peter was so excited that he grabbed some clothes and jumped straight into the water to get back to the beach leaving the others to bring the boat back laden with fish!</p>	<p>Add clothes/towel and move Peter to the beach.</p>
<p>When they arrived at the shore, they found a charcoal fire already lit with fish on it and bread.</p>	<p>Add BBQ, fish and bread</p>
<p>Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught and come and have breakfast". None of the disciples dared ask Jesus, "Who are you?" but Jesus took the bread, gave thanks and broke it and shared it with them.</p>	<p>Break bread and share it with the friends</p>
<p>When they had finished breakfast, Jesus turned to Simon Peter and said, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"</p>	<p>Add cockerel</p>
<p>Peter answered, "Yes, you know that I love you".</p>	
<p>Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs".</p>	<p>Add sheep</p>
<p>Again Jesus asked Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, do you love me?"</p>	<p>Add cockerel</p>

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Again Peter replied, "Yes, you know that I love you"	
Jesus said, "Look after my sheep".	Add sheep
A third time Jesus asked, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"	Add cockerel
Peter was hurt because Jesus had asked him for a third time, "Do you love me". And he replied, "Yes, you know everything, you know that I love you!"	
Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly I say to you, when you were young you used to go wherever you wished, but when you grow old you will stretch out your hand and someone else will lead you where you do not want to go. Follow me!"	Add sheep Add wooden cross

I wonder questions...

- I wonder how the disciples felt when the stranger appeared on the beach?
- I wonder how Peter felt when Jesus asked him whether he loved him?
- I wonder what Jesus called Peter to do next?
- I wonder what Jesus calls us to do?

Reflect on the Breakfast on the beach story and how after Jesus' death the disciples seemed to forget everything Jesus had taught them and returned to the familiar world of fishing. Jesus stirs them up, and calls them again and says he is not done with them. They have a new mission into the unknown as Jesus sends them out into the wider world.

PUDDING: LIVING BEYOND OURSELVES

What are we being called to do?

Break up into small groups to reflect on what God might be saying to you as a community through the reading or story. You may find the following questions helpful or make up your own. Ask the group to write their ideas on fish

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shaped pieces of paper and then invite everyone to put their fish into a large net (use a piece of garden netting as a fishing net).

- What new thing might God be stirring among us?
- What new thing might God be stirring among our local community or in our nation or in our world?
- What might Jesus send us to do or to be?

Closing Worship

Stones and Candles prayer activity

Lay out the fishing net full of ideas of what God may be calling you to do on a table in the centre or at the front of the worship space.

Reflect that both of the readings from Isaiah and from John have a strongly missional focus and could be deeply unsettling or exciting or a mixture of both. Change often involves us needing to name our fears as well as us needing to begin to shape a vision of what could be.

Invite people to join in a time of silence and prayer focusing on what risks God may be calling us to take. Give each person a stone and a night light (some people may need some help with this) and invite them to name a fear as they place their stone and to name a hope as they light a candle, placing both onto a central table around the fishing net.

Prayers for Others

We have been thinking about our journeys and times of change but of course we do not journey on our own or in a vacuum - we journey in a hurting world and we encounter people on the way so we join together in our prayers for others: (ask different people to read each line off a strip of paper)

For refugees and those forced to leave homelands and loved ones
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For those caught up in war and conflict
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For people whose loves are devastated by drought or flood
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For people who are homeless or living in hostels
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

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For those struggling to bring up children alone
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For those battling with illness or injury
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For children bullied at school
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For the older person struggling to remain independent
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For the person oppressed by racism or homophobia
For the people we encounter on the way, we pray

For ourselves as we encounter others and are challenged and changed
For the self we encounter on the way, we pray

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Song: "I dream of a Church" by Kate Compston in "*Dare to Dream*" edited by Geoffrey Duncan (tune The Bard of Armagh)

Blessing for the Journey

God who walks with us in our shoes
Bless our commitment to journey together

God who risks exploring the uncharted path
Bless our risk taking to live out our hopes and our dreams

God who soothes tired feet when the going is rough
Bless us and hold us and never let us go.

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Other Song/Hymn ideas:

One more step along the world I go (Rejoice and Sing)

O Lord all the world belongs to you (Rejoice and Sing)

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