

Church Without Walls

Congregational and Circuit resources for becoming
a hub of new mission and ministry experimentation
for 21st century Britain



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Year One – 2017/18

Dear friends in Christ,

At Spring Synod this year, I described the 'cultural commute' that is required of many new or unaffiliated people if they are to feel connected in most of our churches. The commute – simply put, the distance between the cultures of the world and the cultures of the church – is felt acutely in the often vast differences of language and vocabulary, stories and cultural reference points, technology and music, diversity and more.

When the Church speaks about mission and evangelism, what we often are describing are ways to invite new people to make that cultural commute into our spaces, both physical and theological. We talk about welcoming people in, bringing people in, making people feel at home. At one level, this is holy and beautiful. We do want to introduce new people to the meaningful difference that a life of grace – a life centred in Christ – can make. We do want to draw distinctions between the 'worldly' cultures of transaction, scarcity, and self-centredness and God's cultures of grace, abundance, and in-it-togetherness. We do want to teach people how really 'weird' (in a good way!) things like the Eucharist, prayer, and loving your enemy can bring about unexpected life transformation for the good.

The potential danger, though, of an unreflective practice of mission and evangelism as solely 'inviting people in' is that we confuse our buildings with the Gospel and therefore fall victim to strategies of 'if we build it (or paint it, or expand it, or put better doors on it), they will come.' We abdicate the personal requirement of sharing faith with new people, thinking that our buildings and church signs will do the work for us. Or worse, if we've holed up inside for too long and no one new is showing up to our little club, we can develop a pernicious us-versus-them arrogance and then ironically come to view our numerical and spiritual decline as a weird (in a bad way!) badge of holiness.

Which is why we want to expand our understanding and practice of mission and evangelism. Yes, of course, we must learn how to invite people, to welcome people, and to make our churches places of radical hospitality and accessible discipleship.

But more importantly, I believe, we must become willing, as the Church, to make the 'reverse commute' ourselves. Instead of only inviting people in, we must feel in our bodies what it's like go into the world, to be sent like the 72 commissioned by Jesus to carry the kingdom message to places where new people actually are. To go where the people are and to learn what it is to be faithful, to be missional, to be bearers of the Good News for a new century. This will be hard but it can also be fun, and because God is with us as we go, it also promises to be ultimately life-giving.

So, friends, let us join together to become, by God's grace, a Church Without Walls. I pray that over the next year, all 11 eleven circuits and 139 churches of the Birmingham District of The Methodist Church will risk something different to practice mission and evangelism in a new way.

The following pages describe our emerging vision and a beginning set of resources for how we might engage this challenge together.

For the Christ who makes us one,

Trey Hall
Mission Advisor, Birmingham District

CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS | 2017-2020

Becoming a hub of new mission and ministry experimentation for 21st century Britain

Led by Jesus Christ, the Birmingham District of the Methodist Church launches Church Without Walls, an inclusive Gospel movement that builds relationships with new people by:

- (1) starting new congregations
- (2) revitalising existing congregations
- (3) raising up new leaders

Church Without Walls Year One (2017/18) is year of focused reflection, training and action that fuels our long-term commitment to this initiative. The challenges for every Circuit and Congregation are grouped into Four Pathways:

- (1) Claiming God's Mission With Us
- (2) Growing Congregational Confidence
- (3) Getting Outside Our Buildings
- (4) Identifying Places for New Congregations.

The Pathways are described in more detail in the following pages. The goals and challenges within each Pathway are meant to be suggestions that every Circuit and Congregation will consider, reflect, adapt, and act upon in ways that make sense and are useful for their contexts. Church Without Walls is not a top-down manifesto but a flexible launch pad into new ministry, mission, and evangelism.

This collection of resources provides ideas and guidance for Circuits and Congregations who are ready to try something new in order to reach new people. Think of it less as a step-by-step, prescriptive manual and more as buffet of ideas meant to inspire you to generate more ideas. It's not meant to be exhaustive; instead, we hope it will serve as a starting point to ignite experimentation and action in diverse ways across the District. The resources and ideas – gathered from congregations, leaders, and practitioners across the Christian spectrum – are grouped somewhat loosely under each following Pathway and its goals and challenges.

We are grateful for the many people and sites from which we have compiled these resources. We offer special thanks to:

- Elaine Lindridge, Evangelism Enabler in the Newcastle upon Tyne District of The Methodist Church, and her team, who wrote many of the missional ideas listed here and have generously shared them
- The Epicenter Group US| UK
- The Mission Shaped Ministry Course
- Deborah Webb, the Birmingham District Administrator

For free copies of the Church Without Walls overview leaflet, which can be shared with members of your congregation, contact the District Office at 0121 449 0131 or office@birminghammethodist.org.uk.

To invite Trey Hall, District Mission Advisor, to preach, teach, or help lead a vision/mission meeting in your Congregation or Circuit, contact him at 07575 796069 or mission@birminghammethodist.org.uk.

PATHWAY 1: CLAIMING GOD'S MISSION WITH US

Goal: We will know why we exist, what is distinctive about our identity and calling, and what important ministries we offer to the world.

Challenge: The District, each Circuit, and each Congregation will clarify its mission and discern its concrete missional goals for 2017-2020.

Three big questions:

- A) What is your church's culture?
- B) What are your church's core values and vision?
- C) With those things in mind, what concrete mission plans and goals do you have?

The following basic resources and processes will help you dive into these foundational questions.

A. What is your church's culture?

According to Brian Zehr of *Intentional Impact*, your church's culture is the intertwining of three major components: core values, narrative, and behaviors. When we are conscious of and intentional about our culture, it is our largest engine for potential growth.

Values:

- What needs to be most important *now*? In other words, what is God saying to us in this season of our church?
- What priorities should we pursue if we want to multiply leaders and our congregation?

Narrative:

- How will we talk about what is most important?
- How do we engage our people in these defined values?
- What verbiage will we use to lead our people to the intersection of faith and wisdom?

Behaviors:

- What will we do to live out our most important values?
- What actions should our leaders consistently take?
- What programs or processes will equip our people to live out the values of multiplication?

B. What are your church's core values and vision?

Paul Nixon of the Epicenter Group offers this reflection on identifying values:

In the late twentieth century as business management science made its impact upon the lives of church leadership teams, all sorts of terms started appearing in church life, each of which carry agenda from the world of business theory into Christian vocabulary.

Discernment. Mission. Purpose. Values. Vision. Long-range Planning. Strategic Planning. Strategic Mapping. And so on.

The processes related to producing a coherent document on any one of the above can take months, even years – especially when church leaders have day jobs and ministry responsibilities that limit the time for what can seem like esoteric and tedious work. Further complicating matters is the lack of commonality from one business guru to the next and from one church lead team to the next what they mean by any of these things. I have known these words to be used interchangeably at times.

As a pastor who helped develop a large multi-site congregation a few years back, and as a consultant who has worked with hundreds of vital congregations, I like to keep things as simple as possible. So here are a few of my working definitions and approaches to church planning.

First, let's start with Values.

Tom Bandy convinced me years ago that it all starts with values. The Bible is full of values that inform and define us in terms of how we live, how we make choices personally and as groups of faithful people. We could list scores of such values. Some are just assumed in our lives – so that we don't really have to think about them – others may take more work. For example, I may value non-violence to the point that I can go years without thinking about it. If I lived in a war zone, I would have to rethink this – and a commitment to non-violence would probably move to a more prominent place in my personal consciousness. But in most times and places, I would not have to continually remind myself of this value. On the other hand, take a practice like tithing. Millions of Christians consistently give away a tenth of their material income each year to support ministries that align with their faith in God. And yet the constant temptation to spend that money on myself is huge. Moreover, the majority of my Christian friends do not give a tenth. Therefore, tithing is more likely to find itself on a short list of my core values, if I were to make such a list. It requires ongoing focus and because it distinguishes us from how we would live if we did not consciously live as persons of faith.

How might we discover what the most prominent values are that really define the place we call church? Here is a very easy way to begin. Make up a list of all the values you can think of. Hospitality to strangers, Deep listening, Loving neighbours, Praying daily, Food security, etc. – try to keep each value to a couple words ... and then list 60 or more values on a sheet of paper. Pass out the papers to all the people in worship on a weekend, and tell them, 'Circle six.' You can specify, 'Circle only the values that you see clearly lived out in our church's ministry.' Or you could say, 'Not every value you circle may be fully lived out in our church, but by circling it, you are saying, this is critically important for us.' The former kind of list would be a list of actual values, and the latter aspirational values.

Another kind of values exercise would focus not on values in the abstract, but rather on the kinds of people that God is calling our church to love and to serve tenderly and intentionally.

Then hand the sheets to a team of two or three, who will draft a short vision statement, simply documenting God's good future as our leaders imagine it today.

A mission statement is helpful in some cases; it is quite optional in others. Vision and values are often enough! Does your church possess clarity about what business it is in? If a church is clear about where it is seeking to go and about several key values to be lived on that journey, its mission is probably implicit. A broad mission statement may already exist within the church's bye-laws or within the denominational framework. Even if there is little guidance from such foundation documents, the Bible is helpful: Loving God and neighbour is every church's biblical mandate. Helping folks step into God's preferred future or to live fully into God's will for their lives: this also is every church's mission. Your church's specific vision statement will help you customize the church's universal mission in terms of local detail. If you choose to create a brief mission statement for your church, you are simply going to describe (in just a few words) the specifics of the journey toward your church's vision of a preferred future, and to answer the very simple question, 'Why do we exist?' Lovett Weems and Tom Berlin would remind us that any mission must point back to the practical implications – the ... 'so that... xyz can happen.' And, remember: If the mission statement takes more than one sentence, no one is going to remember it.

C. What are your church's concrete mission plans and goals?

Use this framework of questions to move from your mission and core values into concrete action. This is a simple way to begin congregational action plan.

1. WHY DO WE EXIST?

[Mission]

For example:

to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world

or

We tell true stories, share good food, and worship beautifully.

2. HOW DO WE LIVE/BEHAVE?

What is our vibe? Describe the quality, ethos and texture of our community.

[Values]

For example:

bold, inclusive, relevant

3. WHAT MAKES US PARTICULAR OR DISTINCTIVE FROM OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES?

[Vision]

For example:

- evangelism/outreach to _____ (particular demographics and psychographics)
- clear discipleship pathways to move people in different places deeper into faith
- robust lay leadership with clear leadership expectations and development pathways
- starting new churches

- combining justice with service
- willingness to take risks around inclusion
- worship style

4. HOW WILL WE PRACTICALLY ENGAGE THE JOURNEY?

[Core discipleship practices that all-in people are moving toward]

For example:

- Regular participation in community worship when you're in town
- A regular personal contemplative/prayer practice
- Being part of a weekly small group
- Attending/helping host a quarterly party!
- Doing a 1:1 relational meeting with a new person every week
- Making a percentage-giving pledge to the mission of the church
- Working for justice [in this particular way]

5. HOW WILL WE KNOW WE'RE SUCCEEDING?

[Strategy]

For example:

- we will start one new worship community every 2 years
- we will increase the racial diversity of our lay leadership and staff leadership by 50% within 3 years
- we will become leaders in a community organization

6. WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT NOW (next 3, 6, 9, 12 months)?

[Main objectives]

- Build a timeline for each strategy with objects, dates, and roles (see an example below)

7. WHO WILL DO WHAT?

[Define roles]

BASIC TIMELINE EXAMPLE

Strategy: Move our project towards Launch Sunday, when we begin weekly worship

Objectives:

- ENLIST teams
- DEVELOP leadership
- DEPLOY into ministry
- LAUNCH SUNDAY
- FOLLOW-UP

ENLIST	DEVELOP	DEPLOY	LAUNCH	FOLLOW-UP
(May-June)	(July-August)	(Sept-Dec)	(January)	(Ongoing)
Prayer	Team planning	Events	*see below	Personal contact
Worship	R+D	Preview services		Gifts?
Children	Timelines	Communication		Connection plan
Hospitality	Coaching for leaders			
Communication				
Special Events				
Follow up				

*LAUNCH

What new cultures or practices do we hope to 'norm' with this new thing?

For example:

- Relevancy – we want to make connections between faith and living the world, particularly in the secular workplace, where most people spend most of their time
- Testimony – we want laypeople to share what it feels like to undergo the Gospel
- Participation – we want Sunday morning to grow in attendance, in the number of people leading worship, in the way the congregation engages each other during the worship service
- Next steps – we want to identify clear relationship and programmatic connection points from Sunday into the other 6 days of community life

PATHWAY 2: GROWING CONGREGATIONAL CONFIDENCE

Goal: We will expand the capacity, courage, and joy for mission in each Congregation through a season of focused attention in worship from Advent 2017 – Lent 2018.

Challenges for each Circuit and Congregation:

- A. Incorporate the Congregational mission into the spoken welcome at the beginning of every worship service.
- B. Build a basic system of intentional welcome, connection, and individual follow-up for every newcomer.
- C. Include a form of lay testimony in every worship service.
- D. Invite preachers to include a mission question, story, or application in every sermon.

A. How is your congregation's mission incorporated into the beginning of every worship service?

Your one-sentence description should be highlighted during the welcome every week. For example: *Good morning and welcome to St. Paul's Methodist Church. It's great to see everyone today, especially those who are here for the first time. Thank you for being with us. At St Paul's, we tell true stories, include all people, and worship God as beautifully as we can.*

Take a few minutes to write down a basic script for your church. Review it to remove clunky language and to edit it for brevity, clarity, and honesty. And then start using it.

B. How welcoming are you really?

Most churches think they are welcoming to newcomers, but they are often wrong. It's not that they're insincere when they say that they're welcoming, it's just that they often haven't considered what it might feel like for a newcomer walking through the doors for the first time.

1. **Your current welcoming capacity.** The following questions will help you to reflect on where you are right now and what your needs are:

- Think of an occasion when you were made to feel really welcome/unwelcome. How did it feel? What makes the difference between good and bad hospitality? Does it affect a person's behaviour? Why? When, as a local Christian community, did you last properly consider your welcome?

- How much would your local church be willing to change for the sake of offering a good welcome?
- What would a genuine welcome look like to people with differing abilities, e.g., sight and hearing impairments, learning disabilities, those with mental or physical health concerns?
- What does the Bible teach about the importance of welcome or who should be welcomed? What should our attitude as Christians be to welcoming people? (Consider Isaiah 58: 9-12, Genesis 18:1-8, Matthew 5:1-12, John 2:1-12, Matthew 28:16-20, Philippians 2: 1-13).
- Imagine attending your local church as a guest for the first time. What emotions are evoked as you become a guest in a new context? What would a new guest experience in your local church? What rituals and practices might be perplexing?
- If we are to make people feel truly welcomed in our local churches, what should be kept/changed/adapted?

2. **For a more direct self-evaluation**, use the following questionnaire to analyse your congregation's current welcoming capacity.

Our church at a distance: website and social media presence

- How clear is it for a first time visitor?
- Does it have the what, where, when clearly on the front page?
- Does it show our church to be a welcoming bunch of people or a building?

Our meeting place

- Is it easy to find, with signage (contact numbers, website, etc.)?
- How easy is it to park (enough spaces, disabled spaces)?
- Is there adequate and visitor-friendly signage (e.g. toilets area, kids work)?
- Is it child friendly (no trailing wires, clean, etc.)?
- Are the toilets clean, well stocked and warm enough?

Our people

- Is there an appropriate welcome at the door for visitors and regulars? Are the welcome team trained?
- Do enough regulars turn up early to make visitors feel welcome? Do we regularly remind regulars to be welcoming?
- Is the service led in a welcoming way (jargon free, explaining, clear, warm)?

Our systems

- Are there up-to-date welcome packs/leaflets for visitors?
- Do we have a follow-up-process for visitors? Do they receive a follow-up note, email, or phone call within 48 hours of visiting?

- Do we have a next steps course for those wanting to explore faith?
- If there is a sheet of news and announcements, is it clear for newcomers?
- Do you ask newcomers what they thought?

3. **Mystery Worshipper.** If you'd like a truly candid assessment of your current welcoming capacity, invite a couple of friends who are not affiliated with your congregation to serve as 'mystery worshippers' who, unbeknownst to your congregation, attend a service and share their experience and opinions using a supplied form. This is a good way to see if your congregation treats strangers as welcomingly as you hope you do.

For an example of a mystery worshipper form, visit <https://www.lichfield.anglican.org/documents/mystery-worshipper-form/>

4. **Communications + Digital Mission.** Your congregation's online presence can help or hinder attempts to reach new people.

Churches are beginning to grasp the nettle on the issue of the internet. Many churches have websites that promote what they are about and what they do. There are also other online tools that churches are using. The rise of social media provides us with new opportunities and challenges to communicate with the world. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, as well as the flourishing of blogs and podcasts, have transformed the way we share information and perspectives. Many people now engage with social media in some way. See <http://bigbible.org.uk/digilit/> for a good introduction to each.

Practical hints

- Quality matters. If you are creating your own site or blog, it will not attract people unless it is of a reasonably high quality.
- What's your message? What are the fundamental things you want to say? How do you want to say them?
- Who do you want to connect with? Who is your audience?
- What's the best tool? Each tool on the internet does something different; explore each of them to see what they offer.
- Staying safe. When we think about the internet we probably also think about safety. The church now offers guidance and policies about staying safe online as do other organisations. Go to the Methodist church website and search for 'internet safety' and it will provide you with a downloadable document.
- Always remember to act with integrity. What you write can be read by many people. Consider how your words might impact others and therefore seek only to do good.

Check out these thinks:

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/>
<http://www.thinkyouknow.co.uk/>
<http://www.rejesus.co.uk/>

<http://d-church.blogspot.co.uk/>

<http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepening-discipleship/evangelism>

For help with website and communications:

<http://www.churchmarketingsucks.com/2011/03/church-websites-101-dont-start-with-the-web/>

For help with social media:

<http://www.stevefogg.com/2015/11/12/social-media-tips-church/>

For social media in small congregations:

<https://prochurchtools.com/ultimate-social-media-strategy/>

C. How to Build A Culture of Lay Testimony in Your Congregation

Testimony saves lives.

That's one of the reasons that when people ask me for best practices for starting or revitalizing churches, I almost universally recommend it.

Every week in worship, organise a layperson to stand up and share in five minutes or less what it feels like to undergo God in their own particular skin. Every week, make sure someone who is not the preacher tells a true story of faith, that is to say, an honest personal account of gratitude or struggle or changed perspective or joy or lament or doubt or beauty or surrender or anger or trust or love or anything that finds and searches for a grounding in Christ. Call it testimony, call it spiritual autobiography, call it whatever you want – just start doing it. Every time you meet, make room for diverse people to translate their faith experience into public words.

Because of its capacity to channel spiritual power, testimony has been and is still a crucial part of the pioneering days of many Christian traditions and movements, but it often falls out of vogue as we grow more 'refined' or bureaucratic and contract out our fundamental need for storytelling to clergy or other religious 'professionals.' Which is why these days you're more likely to hear a testimony of true life transformation in a 12-step recovery meeting than you are in Christian worship.

Why don't we do it more in the church?

Probably for a host of reasons: the idol of polished 'excellence' in worship, clergy control freakery, Christianities that have prioritized the rational or the official over the subjective, the false notion that 'real' testimonies are only about dramatic events and not the boring, ordinary parts of day-to-day human life, the individual fear of exposure, the pain of invidious comparison with others' stories and the anxiety that 'my story isn't _____ enough' or 'I don't have a story.'

Make room for testimony and as true storytelling becomes a norm in worship, these negative barriers will begin to diminish. Your community will begin to teem with new verve and potential. People will listen more attentively, as they recognize themselves in the testimonies of others, as they relax into

the awareness that they are not alone in their own stuff, both good and bad: *Oh, right, she's talking about me! I totally do that, too. I've also felt that way, or wondered about that. I want what he has. Yes!* Laughter, tears, and deep existential rest – all symptoms of the spiritual assurance that can be opened with testimony – will begin to transfigure congregations that before seemed stagnant or hesitant or repressed. And missional power and humility will expand as people come to subjectively experience what they might have cognitively believed (or not) for years, that their true stories are what God wants.

Make room for testimony and your church's mission statement about changing lives will no longer only be something that you print in your bulletin every week; now it will be narratively demonstrated every week in people's stories. And a mission story is always better than a mission statement. Which is why testimony is also one of the most evangelical commitments you can make. In my experience, most unaffiliated folks are not that interested in checking out a worship service to hear an unknown preacher's sermon, but they'll show up to hear a friend of theirs tell a story. I've baptized a number of adults who came to worship only because of a friend's testimony and ended up sticking around and rather unexpectedly coming to faith.

So, how do you start a regular ministry of testimony in your congregation? For some longer reading, check out two wonderful books: Lillian Daniel's *Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony* and Thomas Long's *Testimony: Talking Ourselves Into Being Christian*.

But to get you started, here are some basic suggestions:

For church leaders:

- You can start whenever you want, but some find it helpful to launch a testimony trial run that is framed in a particular season of the program, liturgical, or calendar year. Whenever you start, share in advance with your congregation what testimony is and isn't and why you're embarking on such an experiment.
- Since the first experiences of testimony in a congregation will begin to establish a culture, choose the first 8-10 testimony givers with several things in mind. You'll want a diverse range of people (age, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.), a diverse range of experiences and stories (incorporate the wide spectrum of the human experience so that you don't privilege one personality or spirituality 'type'), and people that you trust to take it seriously.
- Reach out to these individuals well in advance, tell them what you're hoping for, and ask them to pray about it. Give them a list of guidelines (see below) and if they say yes, schedule them for a particular worship service. I like to have testimonies scheduled at least 6 weeks in advance so that testimony givers have time to reflect and prepare.
- Especially if the practice is new for your congregation, offer to read folks' first testimony drafts or meet up with them one-to-one to encourage them. When they stand up to share in worship, you want them to feel as confident as possible. As the practice continues and

deepens in your congregation, you may to decide to add an additional one-to-one meeting afterwards, as the experience of giving testimony often unlocks callings, purpose, and questions.

- You can place testimony anywhere in the service. I personally think it works best in the first half of worship, perhaps before the Scripture reading, so that people connect it to the other proclamations of the Word.
- Have someone briefly introduce the testimony each week, sharing in a sentence why your church does it, and inviting the testifier up by name: 'Here at ___ Church, we believe that stories change lives. Let's give Demetrius a round of applause as he comes to share testimony with us today!'
- Have the testimony giver close the time with prayer, or have someone else pray for the testimony giver.

For those giving testimony:

The following is a list of suggestions that I email to people several weeks in advance of their testimony.

Giving testimony:

Thanks for being willing to share some of your testimony in worship on [date]!

Plan on your testimony lasting no more than 4-5 minutes. The time goes quickly, and written words take longer to speak than we might imagine, so be sure to prepare in advance and to practice.

We're trying to help people get connected to each other and so we would like to include your email address in the worship program so that folks who identify with your testimony can be in touch directly. If you would prefer us not to do that, just let us know.

There aren't a ton of dos and don'ts for testimony, but these suggestions may help as you prepare:

1. Your testimony is **your** testimony. Don't feel like it has to be like others you've heard in worship. If yours is funny and full of levity, that's great. If it's more introspective or chill, that's great, too. A short reflection, a story, a poem that you've written or some other media: share authentically how God is moving/active/present/working in your life and you'll be just fine.
2. We hope that testimonies will share 'new life' experiences – a new perspective, a change of heart, a new belief or practice or question, a new community, etc.
3. Don't try to cram too much in; pick a point or two and let that be it. Remember: 4-5 minutes goes quickly.
4. If you are sharing something marked by pain, we suggest that, as some have put it, you 'speak from your scars, not your wounds.' Both scars and wounds are part of the Christian experience, of course, but scars are perhaps better material for testimony as they often include the reflection and wisdom of walking through time in the pain, whereas speaking in public about open, current, unexamined wounds can sometimes hurt more than help.
5. Don't diss directly on other churches or denominations or religions. We understand that we all come from some place and sometimes this includes a difficult religious experience. It's totally fine to be honest and to reflect on that, but we ask that you not single out particular groups; for example, please don't say anything like 'the Baptist church is horrible and exclusionary' or 'Roman Catholics don't understand' or 'Muslims don't believe in grace.' We want to avoid the potential stereotyping and demonizing of other traditions.
6. Be yourself, for Christ's sake. You can only be where you and who you are. No need to pretend, because it's your testimony.
7. Don't forget introduce yourself by name at the beginning of the testimony and to close in prayer at the end.
8. Did we mention 4-5 minutes? ;)

You can also experiment with other ways of sharing testimony during worship that don't require one person to stand up. Pose a question and break people into small groups of 2-3. Or pass the microphone around and invite people to share 15 seconds of good news in their lives or 15 seconds of a current spiritual challenge they're experiencing.

Try a variety of these practices for a few seasons in your congregation, and see what happens as people start to tell the honest-to-God truth. Church renewal is not guaranteed, but lives-being-saved are.

As people get more comfortable with speaking about their spiritual lives in worship and small groups, take the next step and lead a congregational workshop on faith-sharing. The Methodist resource *Talking of God* is helpful for encouraging and developing this capacity:
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/talkingofgod>

D. Missional Lectionary for Preachers

From Advent 2017 to Lent 2018, we're asking preachers (lay and ordained) to consider how to inspire and challenge congregations towards mission and evangelism in their sermons. Finding a missional connection in the Scriptures shouldn't be difficult; as some have pointed out, we can think of the entire Bible as a set of missional documents.

The following section is designed as a small, simple lectionary supplement for preachers who are willing to take up this Pathway challenge. It offers a basic missional question for each of the Gospel readings from Advent 2017 to Lent 2018 that might spur the preacher's own reflection and preparation for the sermon.

3 December 2017 / Advent 1: Mark 13.24-27

How might the instruction to 'keep awake' be related to mission? What does it mean to watch for and look for Christ in every human face, including the faces of those people who are not part of your congregation?

10 December 2017 / Advent 2: Mark 1.1-8

Notice that these people are flocking to the wilderness instead of the Temple: the Good News that John is preaching is not coming to them from the important religious building but rather in and from the midst of the world. How might this connect with our call to leave the buildings in order to share the Gospel more readily?

17 December 2017 / Advent 3: John 1.6-8, 19-28

How is 'testifying to the light' – like John, describing our own relationship with and to Christ – related to our missional capacity?

24/25 December 2017/ Advent 4 and Christmas: Luke 1.26-38 and Luke 2.1-20

The 13th century mystic Meister Eckhart wrote: 'We are all meant to be mothers of God ... for God is always needing to be born.' What does it mean for us to bear Christ into the world in our deeds – and in our words?

31 December 2017 / Christmas 1: Luke 2.22-40

How might we 'speak about the child' to those in this world who are longing for restoration, healing, reconciliation, and redemption?

7 January 2018 / Epiphany or Baptism of the Lord: Matthew 2.1-12 or Mark 1.4-11

As we are on mission with God, we encounter those, like the Wise Men, who are not part of our 'tribe' or 'people group' or 'demographics'. What message is God speaking to us through those people? How is our own sense of belovedness by God connected to our capacity to be in mission?

14 January 2018 / Epiphany 2: John 1.43-51

How might the church invite unaffiliated people to 'Come and See'? What are we inviting them to come and see? Is it more than our building and worship service? Do you think that God might be inviting the church to 'Go and See'? What might that look like?

21 January 2018 / Epiphany 3: Mark 1.14-20

What nets (signs of our past ways of being, even as church?) is the church possibly being asked by God to leave behind in order to be on mission with Jesus?

28 January 2018 / Epiphany 4: Mark 1.21-28

Jesus's fame spread – the report literally 'went out' (the same verb used to describe Jesus's casting out of the false spirit) to the surrounding areas. What reports are 'going out' about our churches in the communities they're in? What stories are being told about our churches in the shops or homes close by?

4 February 2018 / Epiphany 5: Mark 1.29-39

For many of us in the twenty-first century, the idea of an exorcism doesn't seem relevant. We can explain medically what was going on with this person, and we fail to see how this story still has a message for us today. What is it in your context that binds people and keeps them from being able to experience real joy, community, or purpose? Do you believe God can work in those places, and are you proclaiming the gospel message with the same passion and authority that made the people in the synagogue take notice?

11 February 2018 / Transfiguration: Mark 9.2-9

No one has been able to measure the impact that witnessing this 'Christophany' had upon Peter, James, and John. The glory they saw was so beyond description that it reduced Peter to foolish babble. The three disciples were ordered not to speak of what they had seen until after the Resurrection. The implication was clear; after the Resurrection they would *all* speak of what they had

seen. They would cite this vision and other irrefutable proofs as evidence of the deity of Christ and his resurrection. When we share our faith with others, how do we bear witness to the existence of God and the truth of what God has done for us in Christ through the Resurrection? What experiences or understandings come to your mind and what words will you employ to describe the indescribable mystery of God in your life?

18 February 2018 / Lent 1: Mark 1.9-15

How might experiences of desert, wilderness, struggle, temptation, exile in our lives be preparation for evangelism and witness?

25 February 2018 / Lent 2: Mark 8.31-38

If any want to become Christ's followers, they must first: (1) Deny themselves – Is this a call to asceticism or a call to temper self-will and self-indulgence? (2) Take up the cross – What does it mean to take up one's cross? Is there a different cross for each person? (3) Follow me – Following Jesus is a discipleship issue that involves both being and doing. Being like Jesus and doing the works of Jesus are both integral parts of discipleship. How are evangelism and mission integrated into this classic call to discipleship?

4 March 2018 / Lent 3: John 2.13-22

Do you have any anger at how the church has sometimes excluded individuals and groups of people or has distracted people from the mission of Jesus? If so, how can you use your anger for good? How might your anger or frustration be offered to be used and transformed, by God's grace, for building new relationships with people?

11 March 2018 / Lent 4: John 3.14-21

John 3.16 is in many ways a summary of the Gospel. How would you translate its meaning for someone who has little or no Christian vocabulary? How might you share this Good News in the vernacular, so that unaffiliated people might have sense of its nature?

18 March 2018 / Lent 5: John 12.20-33

The Greeks approached the disciples who had Greek names, Andrew and Philip. Andrew and Philip, in turn, report the incident to Jesus. It would appear that the appearance of non-Jewish seekers, in Jewish Jerusalem, raised questions that needed further discussion. Jesus interprets the significance of the appearance of Gentile seekers later in the discourse. Verse 32's 'all people' alludes to the salvation of people of all very different backgrounds. Who are those people in your congregation's context?

25 March 2018 / Lent 6: Mark 11.1-11

Do you expect Jesus to show up in your context? How might his arrival, over and over again, look different from what we might expect? We cry out 'Hosanna', 'Lord, save!' How might his difference from our expectations of him be related to the way he saves us?

1 April 2018 / Easter: John 20.1-18

People on mission are able, with Mary, to say 'I have seen the Lord' – what are your individual and congregational experiences of meeting the Risen Lord?

PATHWAY 3: GETTING OUTSIDE OUR BUILDINGS

Goal: We will fling open the doors, take to the streets, and rediscover what creative, inclusive, fun evangelism feels like.

Challenge: From 20-29 April 2018, each Circuit and Congregation participates in Together in Mission week, when teams across the District engage their communities with special evangelism experiments – like a pop-up café, community art project, games night, children’s storytelling festival, pub quiz or prayer station.

- A. Timeline and Sign-up Process
- B. Planning Team Preparation
- C. Ideas

A. What is the timeline and process for participating in Together in Mission Week?

- Autumn 2017
 - Each church to decide whether to participate at Autumn Church Council meeting and, if participating, to designate a small planning team to lead the Together in Mission effort
 - Planning Team fills out the Together in Mission participation form (available at the end of this booklet or by contacting Trey Hall, Mission Advisor: mission@birminghammethodist.org.uk), indicates whether they are applying financial assistance for their project, and sends completed form to the Mission Advisor by December 1, 2017
 - Planning Team decides the nature of their project, chooses a date between 20-29 April 2018, and begins to recruit others from the church to help
 - Individuals from churches that are not participating can contact the Mission Advisor if they wish to help with a project in their area
 - Mission Advisor to confirm and send details for planning
- Winter 2017
 - A list of participating churches and project dates to be publicised across the District
 - Mission Advisor hosts a training and encouragement day for Together in Mission teams
 - Planning Teams continue to meet and recruit
- Spring 2017
 - Spring Synod to celebrate and pray for the upcoming week
 - Participating churches include a service of commissioning for their teams the Sunday before Together In Mission week
 - Teams across the District participate in mission and evangelism in their local communities during Together In Mission Week.
 - Teams write stories and take pictures of the events to share across the District and beyond

B. As the Planning Teams prepare for Together in Mission week, what else might be involved besides planning the actual event?

1. Listening and praying to prepare for community engagement

As you begin planning the event, don't neglect two main activities involved in good community engagement: listening and prayer.

Listening is an active process. Use local resources to find out more about your community. Your local government website will have a wide variety of statistics about your area, including comparisons with other local areas and identification of key needs and issues.

Plan a prayer walk and observe the area around the church. What do you notice?

Relationships are also key in community engagement. They will help the church find out what it needs to do, provide, or receive – and they also go a long way in developing trust. What relationships does the church already have which you could tap into? What new relationships might you begin?

Other questions to ask, discern, and pray about:

Where?

Where are the spaces, places, and activities where people meet?

Where do local people experience community already?

Are there existing social networks with which you can engage or do you need to find new ways of creating community within your neighbourhood?

When?

What are the rhythms of your neighbourhood?

What cultural experiences and celebrations do people value?

How might these provide interesting faith intersections?

What?

What are the fears, hopes, hurts, and needs voiced by people in the local community?

Are there local justice issues that the church can get involved in?

What are the barriers to faith in your neighbourhood? What are barriers to participating in faith communities (in their current ways of gathering, at least)?

Be careful not to fall into the trap of believing one local church needs to be the answer to everything in a community. Seek to talk and cooperate with other local churches and organisations that are already at work.

2. Leading team devotions

As a team you will grow together and work well together if you spend quality time with one another in prayer and fellowship. You may well be asked to lead team devotions one morning. Some of you may have lots of experience in this, whilst for others this will be new. First of all, do not be afraid to ask for help or guidance from other team members.

As a general rule, try to include prayer, a Bible reading and some time to share. You can also include a story, meditation or reflection. There are some excellent devotional books and many helpful websites. If you have musicians in your team you may wish to use their gifts, if not use recorded music.

Some ideas:

- The Northumbrian Community have a wonderful liturgy for Morning Prayer which includes Bible readings and a meditation: <http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/offices/morning-prayer/>
- Put everyone's name on a piece of paper and each pick one and promise to pray for that person throughout the day.
- Pray for the other Together teams.
- Write down some prayer requests and send them to the other Together teams so that they can remember you in their team devotions.
- Use silence creatively; space to think, reflect, and pray can be just what is needed in the midst of a busy week.
- Read a Psalm together and then turn that into prayers of praise.
- Pray for the person sitting beside you (ask for requests) – go around circle so everyone has been prayed for.
- Consider using the Methodist Prayer For The Day: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/prayer-of-the-day> This site also has some creative suggestions for praying with one another.
- It would be great if someone could collate any Good News stories and testimonies. We will use these after Together to encourage each other.

3. Reading the Bible together

God communicates with us as we read and explore Scripture together. The reflective method of group reading and reflection described below can be applied to any text in order to help create a safe, non-judgmental space for sharing and deeply listening to God and one another. As we listen to one another so we learn to hear more clearly the ways God speaks to us.

- Choose a Scripture passage in advance that connects in some way to the work that you are doing.
- Start with a prayer. Then one person reads the passage slowly.
- Each person identifies a word or phrase that catches their attention (1 minute).
- Each person repeats aloud the word or phrase around the group (3 – 5 minutes with no discussion). Notice how the passage speaks differently to different people.
- Another person reads the passage again, preferably someone of a different gender, age, or background, or using a different translation, to change the way the passage is heard.

- Each person identifies to herself/himself how the passage is touching their life at the moment (1 minute).
- Each shares briefly and everyone listens carefully (5 – 20 minutes).
- The passage is read a third time (another reader and translation if possible).
- Each person thinks of an image, word, reflection and names or writes this down for themselves. 'From what I've heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be? Is God inviting me to change in any way?' (5 minutes).
- Each person shares their answer (5-10 minutes with no discussion).
- Everyone prays for the person on their right, naming what was shared in the other steps (5 minutes). Close with the Lord's Prayer.

4. Working with young people: some principles and tips

- Be real. Be yourself and offer what you have, your story, and your gifts. Young people will appreciate and respond to authenticity.
- Be fun. Create a safe, welcoming, accepting environment where young people can open up, be themselves, and thrive in a fun environment.
- Build genuine positive relationships with young people. Get to know them, their interests, and their context.
- Be honest. We don't have all the answers. Young people may have difficult questions or issues, and it's perfectly acceptable to say 'I'm not sure but I'll find out for you', or 'let me look into it so I can help you more' or 'Before I share what I've experienced, tell me what you think.'
- Be truthful. Explain and share who you are and why you do what you do.
- Share your stories. Show examples, share mistakes and how you learnt from them.
- Model Christ in your team, serving, encouraging and blessing each other. Young people will notice how you engage conflict and tension in healthy ways.
- Be open, show grace, and be welcoming.
- Have boundaries and guidelines and stick to the spirit of them.
- Safeguard the young people and yourselves, have personal boundaries and create a safe environment for all.
- Be encouraging. Lift up and celebrate achievements, humour, good attitudes and offer opportunities for young people to be creative, use their gifts and develop the things they love doing.

5. Safeguarding guidelines

The following are guidelines for protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults and those who work with them. They aim to:

- Safeguard the welfare and care of children, young people, and vulnerable adults when they are the responsibility of Together in Mission events.
- Protect leaders and those who work with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.
- Provide guidance to ensure safe, good practice in work with children, young people, and vulnerable adults.

Principles of good practice:

- Wherever possible, work in twos: you should never be more than a few seconds from another authorised workers.
- Plan activities that are appropriate and inclusive.
- Before you criticise behaviour, consider what might be happening in other parts of the person's life which that may be influencing the behaviour.
- Challenge unacceptable behaviour e.g. racism, sexism, bullying, ridiculing, rejection, and mockery. Never use abusive language or behaviour yourself.
- Respect personal privacy.
- Be aware and alert. Take seriously what you see, hear or feel. If you are concerned, talk to your team leader
- Remember that you are responsible for your actions, and that the child's, young person's and vulnerable adult's welfare is paramount.
- Remember your role as children, young people and vulnerable adults' Advocate and be ready to listen to a person sensitively.
- Ensure you have read and understood the 'quick reference guide' and that you carry it with you at all times.

If you suspect abuse is occurring or if a disclosure is made to you, follow the details on the 'quick reference card' that will be supplied to all group leaders. Do not ignore your suspicions. Do not do nothing. Do not investigate matters yourself; you may clarify what has happened but do not ask other questions.

For more information, go to <http://www.methodist.org.uk/ministers-and-office-holders/safeguarding>

C. Some starter ideas for your Together in Mission event*

*With gratitude to Elaine Lindridge and her mission team in the Newcastle Upon Tyne District

The following are just a few of the possibilities you could try or adapt for your context. But please don't feel constrained by these examples. Dream, pray, and talk together to discover the most aligned, most fun, most interesting, most accessible idea you can think of for your context and community.

Button-making at community fairs and festivals, pop-up tea café at the bus stop, neighbourhood block parties, bubbles and iced lollies at the park, talent show or open mic night, messy church experience, politics and faith conversation – maybe something like this will work for you? What else? Let us know your ideas and we'll add them to the list.

GET OUT OF CHURCH SUNDAY

Read about what one church did on its anniversary. Inspired? You don't have to wait for your church anniversary to try it!

Chester-le-Street Methodist Church met together to discuss how to celebrate their anniversary. Originally they decided to combine their three Sunday services as a way of encouraging the whole church to come and celebrate their anniversary together.

With the help of their minister, they soon realised that this was an opportunity to use the morning to do something much more creative. And so '**CAMEO**' (**C**hurch **A**nniversary **M**ission, **E**vangelism and **O**utreach) was launched, with the subtitle: 'Making an appearance in the community'.

On the day of the anniversary they met first for coffee, before worshipping together at 9.30 to pray and commission the teams going out into the community.

Four teams of around five people visited residential/care homes to lead a short time of worship, study, story telling, faith sharing, or just for a cup of tea and a chat. Another team led messy church in the hall. Others had pre-arranged to visit people in their own homes. One team went prayer walking up the street, before sharing some table-chat over a coffee in the local coffee shop.

Then in the evening they had a service of worship in which those who had gone out came back to share what they had experienced in the morning – how they felt God had blessed them, and stories from the people they had met.

Like the seventy-two in Luke 10, they returned with joy, and the stories they shared were encouraging and inspiring. In these non-threatening, quiet mission activities, people felt valued and witnessed something of God at work in their lives. But as well as being a blessing to those out in the community it is proving a blessing to those who have gone out, who are challenged and encouraged to know that we can all be used by God to connect with others. The church continues to develop and use this idea as part of its regular outreach.

DOOR-TO-DOOR WORK | COMMUNITY AUDIT

We may feel apprehensive or even scared stiff at the thought of doing this, so much so that our initial reaction is to say no! The reality is often the opposite of what we expect. Most people are polite, will give you a hearing and be happy to talk about their community and how they see the role of the church, or not. Some have been waiting for someone to talk to or to ask a question; some will tell you about their experience of church when they were young and how or why they moved away from church or God. Younger people may be harder to engage but a younger person as one of the visiting duo would be helpful. There will even be the odd welcoming Christian!

Very few people will be antagonistic, negative, or not want to engage at all. But if we are prepared for this we can still smile and be gentle, listen and be interested in what they have to say, or if not, say 'that's fine' and politely withdraw with no harm done.

Practical Guidelines:

- Plan two or three questions that you can ask people. Questions like: what's one thing you love about this community? What's one thing you would like to see changed about this community? What's your impression of the church? If you could create a church that would be perfect for you, what would it be like? Is there anything that you would like us to pray for?
- Visit in twos.
- Pray together before you go and as you go. As you approach the door and wait for it to open, pray for the folks in this house
- Don't get in people's face as they open the door. Stand back a bit.
- Work out how you want to introduce yourself and the reason you are there.
- Clearly identify which church you represent.
- If someone asks a question that you don't know the answer to, it's fine to say 'I don't know'.
- Avoid getting into an argument.
- If there is something you really like in the garden tell them.
- Talk to the friendly dogs and watch out for the unfriendly ones!
- Always thank the person who has taken time to talk to you.
- Leave them, if appropriate, with a verbal invitation to join you for worship (or for whichever event is most relevant for them) and a contact card in case they have questions or want to be in touch.
- Enjoy it! Or at least smile, be pleasant, and try to enjoy it.

We can trust God to go with us and to help us respond in a present way to whatever comes. The most exciting thing is that we don't know who we will meet or what opportunities we may have to plant a tiny seed and to share something of God's love. We are intentionally seeking to listen to people, and to be interested in them, because God is interested in them too. And there is a bonus: God blesses us as we do it.

BIBLE CONVERSATION IN PUBLIC PLACES

Taking the Bible out into world is not a new idea. Many street preachers and evangelists have done this but they have concentrated on preaching and teaching. Taking the Bible out of the church or off of your bookshelf and discussing it in public places is helps Bible study and conversation to be informed by our surroundings and helps us to think about Scripture's relevance to contemporary culture.

Go in small groups of up to 6 people so you can all hear what's being said. Choose a coffee shop or other public space, but make sure that you don't dominate the particular place you visit. We have never informed the owner but if it feels more comfortable to do so then go for it.

Treat it like any other conversation. Choose a passage and read it aloud in the group. It's helpful if a few of you have a Bible with you so you can follow it and refer to it as you discuss. And then begin to discuss the passage in the light of your surroundings.

What does this passage say to you and to those around you? Keep the conversations light, curious, and open. It may be that someone asks you what you are doing or they hear something that they find interesting. If so, go with it. Be positive and affirming.

Keep the time that you are in the venue to a limit of an hour or so and make sure that you purchase refreshments. If you sense the building is getting busy it may be time to leave; don't outstay your welcome.

Visit Table Talk (<http://www.table-talk.org/>) for resources about public conversations that unpack particular issues and topics.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

In the Metro newspaper there is a regular column called 'good deed feed,' which records people's thanks for a good deed done to them. Such as Abi from London, who wrote, 'A huge thank you to the blond girl on the Victoria Line on Tuesday evening who gave me a hug when I was crying, talked to me and gave me her copy of Heat to cheer me up. I'm so grateful.' Or John from Sussex, who wrote, 'Thank you to the lovely lady who sticky-taped my boot when the sole came off.'

A small, kind act can make the world of difference to someone. This may not be traditionally thought of as evangelism, but it certainly sows seeds in people's understanding and appreciation of others.

Try to cultivate a kind attitude. Pray for opportunities to help other people, remembering that our actions can bring comfort and joy. Acts of kindness don't have to be a huge deal either – just simple, random acts, showing a friend or a stranger that someone cares. If appropriate, offer a simple 'God bless' as you leave. However, always be prepared to give a reason for the hope you have. Then, as you leave pray for God's blessing on them.

PRAYER STATIONS IN PUBLIC PLACES

The use of prayer stations has become much more popular in recent years inside the church. But they can also be set up in unexpected places outside the church. These creative areas can be extremely helpful both for those who pray regularly and for those who are new to prayer. Creating a space for people to explore prayer at their own pace can work in a variety of settings. Whether creating a single prayer station in one place, or using a whole space (park, city square, building lobby) to facilitate several stations, these guidelines should help.

Make each station comfortable and attractive to look at, using:

- Fabrics: must be flame-proofed if anywhere near candles
- Candles: make sure they are set on trays or in candle holders
- Lights
- Bibles, prayer books, etc.
- Sculptures: praying hands, cross, etc.
- Natural material: wood, cloth, water, sand, pebbles, glass beads, etc.

- Printed and laminated quotes or prayers

At a station you might have:

- Something to read (poetry, bible passage, poster, questions to make you think)
- Something to hear (either music in background or use of headphones for a particular song)
- Something to watch (a DVD clip on a laptop, a mirror)
- Something to smell (scented candle, fresh flowers, incense)
- Something to touch (fabric, dried up leaves)
- Something to taste (bread, salt, water)
- Something to say (prayer, Bible reading) and so on

If using more than one station, give each one a different feel. Consider also using different themes, such as;

- Prayers for others (prayer requests, prayer wall, candles to light)
- Prayers for the world (map, globe, prayer requests)
- Prayer for the community (A-Z, local newspapers, photos)
- A place to leave burdens (use small stones dropped into water)
- Stillness (candles, quiet music, water feature)

Make the area as comfortable, attractive, and creative as possible so that people find it easier to pray.

PRAYER WALKING

Prayer walking isn't hard to do: at its simplest, it's just praying as you walk around an area. Some people feel that being close to a location helps them to be much more focused on the needs of the locality and then to pray with more insight.

Of course you can pray as you walk on your own around any area. But there is an effectiveness in working in teams, perhaps groups of two or three. Each group could go to a different area or prayer walk a different few streets. Think strategically about where it might be good to pray. As well as praying in residential areas, consider praying outside schools, businesses, and shops. Think about where people of all ages congregate and hang out.

- Pray for the people who might be occupying or passing through these particular places.
- Think about the various activities that occur in and around these places and offer these to God, too.
- How do you see the heart of God for this place?

Prayer walking is usually a low profile affair. Be on the scene without making a scene. Prayers can be both silent and audible (but remember to keep your eyes open if you are walking!). When praying aloud, use a quiet, conversational voice. If you are praying in silence, it may be helpful to let your prayer partners know what you are praying about, so they can join with you. Be attentive to the Holy Spirit and ask to be led in your prayers to pray about specific needs. Prayer is about listening as well as making our requests.

If anyone does ask what you are doing be ready to give an answer such as: 'We are looking for signs of God's presence in this neighbourhood' or 'We are praying for God's blessing on this neighbourhood'. Be prepared to ask local people what the community needs.

Pray for God's blessing to be upon everyone you see and the people who live and work in the areas you are walking. Pray for God's will to be done in the community. Afterwards, gather to share your prayers, observations and experiences. What did you learn about the neighbourhood? How was God present in this experience? If you are leading a group, gently encourage those in your group to pray – again either out loud or in silence.

As a mission team this is something you could encourage the rest of the church community to help with and perhaps even to continue with well after Together In Mission week.

COMMUNITY MEAL

This kind of meal can be hosted inside the church building or, even better, in a public community space. Simply celebrating the community we are part of is a good enough reason for any church to show love, care, and hospitality by inviting the people who live around us to a community meal. This could be a breakfast, lunch or early evening meal any day of the week.

When starting to plan, answer the following questions:

WHY? We want to make every opportunity we can to connect with people in our community, and with those who we may know but not know well. We want to bless people, welcome them, and share God's love in any way we can.

WHO? We will invite our neighbours who live around the church, include families from e.g. Messy Church, Holiday Clubs, Luncheon Club members, any groups who use the premises or are in any way however loosely connected with our church. Helpers, prayers, givers, movers and shakers, and everyone from our church will make it happen.

HOW? By taking a risk, a big step out in faith that we can feed all who will come. By praying hard! (A safer, but less open alternative is to ask potential guests to pre-book a place.) By sharing a meal together and making it an informal, enjoyable, fun occasion. By being available and even vulnerable!

By being hospitable, open house, prepared to welcome, accepting and valuing each person. By making it fun, maybe a quiz between courses. Church folks may have hidden talents you could use.

By some of our folk of different ages being hosts whose main contribution is to sit alongside, share food, be interested in, listen to and chat with the guests and in doing so share God's love, with words or without. (It might be good to think about how we would answer the question 'why are you doing this?')

Recruit a team who will prepare and cook good food, and others who will serve the food and wash up.

Give guests a warm welcome, a good joke or two might help people to relax.

By producing good quality publicity to distribute to user groups, in significant community venues e.g. dentists, libraries, toddler groups, and invitation drops through letterboxes to homes around the church.

Provide a way for guests who wish to be notified of any future community events you may hold to leave their contact details. Be pleased with however many guests you have. Enjoy the experience, and you will be blessed.

COMMUNITY CLEAN-UP

A practical community clean-up project is a great way for getting people together from all walks of life, talking and building relationships, and positively impacting the community at the same time. You may be surprised at the variety of unaffiliated/unchurched people who want to get involved with something to improve the community. Some helpful guidelines:

Research. Keen, but not sure what to do? Try casting your vision first – talk to others (at church, school, clubs, community centre, or Local Authority Councillors) about wanting to do something in the local community and see what they suggest. They also may want to be involved. Also, walk about the local area and pray for inspiration. Once you have some ideas, narrow them down to one or two that are realistic, achievable, and that you have permission to do.

Planning. *Good planning* is important, so start by thinking and writing down all aspects of the work and speak to others for advice, to build up a complete picture of the job and elements to make it a success

Consider:

- Task size – something that a group of willing volunteers can complete in a specific time period.
- Variety – smaller teams doing a variety of tasks will give people choice in what they can do.
- Skill range: experienced vs novices – consider the tasks and think about who is confident and competent to lead aspects of it. Break down larger tasks into smaller components and ask specific people to undertake these. Think about who will volunteer and make sure the task is appropriate for them.
- Build a basic team before the event and others can join on the day
- Delegate specific work to individuals and ensure they know what they are doing before the day itself.
- Tools and equipment – what do you need for the job?
- Health and safety – think about who will do what and how and who may be impacted by it so the tasks can be completed safely. Compile a Risk Assessment (not as scary as it sounds). Have First Aid ready.

- Public Liability Insurance – double check that what you are doing is covered by your church or Circuit policy.
- Publicity – do you want others to help, or other people to know what you have done? Can you take photos, use social media, issue a Press Release? What about group caps, T-shirts, and banners?
- Backup – it is worth ensuring that key people have emergency contacts as appropriate. For example, team mobile numbers, other 'permission givers', Community Wardens etc.
- Is your activity weather dependent?

Delivery. Make sure the key organiser or delegated second-in-charge can be free to respond to issues if they arise.

After the event. Try to end the event with a feel-good factor, such as an invitation for everyone to meet up after the event to talk about what they have been doing, perhaps over food and drink. If the event ends on a good note, then people will be open to doing it again.

Be a good Samaritan. So what stops us? Are we worried about getting involved? Of course we need to be careful, but let's not be the kind of people who cross by on the other side. The story of the Good Samaritan acts as both a reminder and a challenge to get involved. Some mission teams have put community service in their programmes and are involved in neighbourhood clean ups. Is this kind of action something churches and individuals could be encouraged to continue well after Together in Mission Week has finished?

For stories, resources, and inspiration go to:

www.hopetogether.org.uk/

www.randomactsofkindness.org/

GIVING AN EVANGELISTIC TALK

If you're thinking about doing an evangelistic talk, start from one of two places: either find a Bible passage that you feel God is wanting you to share from or start with a story. It does not have to be a long one but a spring-board into what you feel directed to say.

The Gospel is GOOD news, so telling it should be full of life and hope. The Bible is full of stories where God meets with human beings; these encounters say something about who God is and the desires and challenges of being human. In an evangelistic talk you need to make people aware of those encounters today and the way God can enter a life and give the resources needed to face life's challenges and fully enjoy its celebration.

At the core of any talk about God is the truth that God is love and all God's actions demonstrate that core nature of God. God's greatest demonstration of love was to send God's Son, Jesus, to be one of us. The concepts of the humanity and divinity of Jesus are not to be argued here because we need to keep it uncomplicated. Look at how Jesus lived ready to respond to any human need that presented itself to him, by way of illness, hunger, infirmity, distraught parents, embarrassment. The same Jesus meets us where we are, and is always ready to respond.

Jesus spoke in stories. Make sure the story gets at the point you set out to convey. I remember a well-respected evangelist telling a long story to his peers and at the end he had to admit it hadn't said what he was trying to say. You can make your own stories up, use ones that you found helpful, use a relevant part of your own story.

In the talk keep reminding people that they are important to God, that God is speaking to them and they need only to listen. Remember that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to bring conviction, but we sow the seeds.

Be intentional in your delivery. Keep to the one main point you want to deliver, and be intentional in your ending.

In summary, make sure it is good news that you are sharing. Keep to the one major point; the Holy Spirit can then apply it to different lives. Be clear and intentional in concluding.

HOME VISITING

There is no set format for visiting people in their own homes. Some simple guidelines and suggestions for good practice:

- Consider how well you know the person you are going to visit
- You need to know why you are going. Are you going because there is a problem? Or are you going to get know the person better? Or are you going to ask about something else?
- It is usually best to make contact before you go to find out if it is convenient. As a rule people don't want you to call before 10am. It is best to avoid meal times.
- Have some idea about the amount of time you are prepared to give each visit. Be prepared to adjust this time according to the person's needs. Even if you have only a short time to visit, relax back into your chair, rather than perching as if you are about to leave.
- Be guided by them as to how the conversation develops. If it is someone who is no longer able to go to worship, they may be interested to know how things are going. For example, what theme is being followed, what is going on during the week?
- Don't gossip.
- Be prepared to pray or share a passage from the Bible with them. Always ask if there is something they want to pray for. Don't assume that you know what they want prayer for.
- Re-acquaint yourself with safeguarding principles as outlined at the beginning of this section.

RESPONDING TO DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

As you're engaging folks in public, you may get asked some challenging theological questions:

Who made God? Why is there suffering? Isn't it enough just to live a good life? Is there really a hell? Do all religions lead to God? What about science? Is the Bible accurate? What about reincarnation? Why does the Church not practice equality with regard to gender, race, sexual orientation, etc.? Why are there so many starving people in the world?

These and many other questions are (1) great, important questions and (2) sometimes incredibly difficult to answer. It's important to consider our responses and to think about how we respond. There are books and websites that give their answers and some of them can be helpful. However, rather than giving a list of my own answers here, I encourage you to talk to friends and consider for yourself how you would respond if someone asked you one of the above questions.

Try to discern when people genuinely want to know the answer to a difficult question and when they are using that as a smokescreen because they don't want to talk about faith or God.

Regardless of the questions, here are some principles to help you respond:

- Love – Always respond in love. Simply trying to win an argument is never a good idea. Consider what you can do to present yourselves in a way that is as Christ-like as possible.
- Patience – Take time to listen to people. Consider what the question behind the question might be. For example, the question 'Is there really a hell?' might be asked, but what the person might really want to know is 'What happened to my granddad when he died?' So please try to be sensitive to the deeper needs of others.
- Humility – Admit if you do not know the answer. Admit it if your answer seems inadequate. At times, admit it if there is a chance you may be wrong (there often is!). If you feel the conversation is worth pursuing, admit you don't know the answer but offer to find out or introduce someone who knows.
- Don't judge, offer pat solutions, or hijack the conversation with your own agenda. Do show respect, listen well, pray, and keep confidences.

People don't usually come to faith in God because someone can answer all their questions. More often it is way that their questions are respected, honoured, and responded to that demonstrate God's love.

PATHWAY 4: NEW PLACES FOR NEW PEOPLE

Goal: We will dive boldly into our District commitment to start eight new congregations by 2020.

Challenge: Each Circuit identifies the geographical area or human population from which a new congregation can be planned, funded, staffed, and launched in the future.

Challenge: The District launches two new congregations that are seedbeds for leadership development.

- The District Mission Advisor is ready to meet with leadership from your Circuits and Congregations to discuss possibilities, pray with you, and resource you as you take next steps towards starting a new congregation or expression of Christian community.
- The District Mission Advisor also provides one-to-one coaching and consulting for the leaders of these new projects as they prepare, build relationships, and launch.

What does Year 2 (2018/19) of Church Without Walls look like?

More information will be available in the Spring of 2018, but here's a short preview:

The Birmingham District will be offering an immersive training experience called Whole Church Initiative—a year-long process of three phases (Gather and Pray, Learn and Imagine, Act and Reflect) designed to help the churches that really want to change to engage the tools they need in order to actually change.

Like Mission Shaped Ministry (MSM), Whole Church Initiative is based on missional principles. Unlike MSM, it requires congregations to form teams before they start the journey, spend a season of spiritual preparation and team formation together, attend 5 day-long workshops over several months with significant team homework in between, make some concrete action steps, and be assigned a coach for ongoing follow-up. It's not just an isolated one-time seminar or information-heavy class; the goal is to help teams learn a new way of doing ministry and to make lasting congregational changes.

Watch for sign-up materials in Spring 2018.

Together in Mission Week **Congregational Commitment Form**



Please complete this simple form to confirm your participation in the *Together in Mission Week* 20-29 April 2018, in which your congregation will plan and carry out a special evangelism/mission project in your community. The names of participating congregations will be published in District and Circuit news. Form due by December 1 to the address below.

Name of Church: _____

Name of team leader for the project: _____

Team leader contact phone: _____

Team leader contact email: _____

Brief description of your project: _____

Place and date of your project: _____

Have you started recruiting a small planning team for the project? _____

Names of planning team: _____

Small supporting grants of £100 are available from the District *for churches who struggle to find the funds* to carry out a *Together in Mission* week project. Are you seeking financial support for this endeavour? _____

What questions or needs do you have at this time? _____

_____ Signature of Minister

_____ Signature of Church Council Secretary

By December 1, please send a copy of this completed form to

Trey Hall, Mission Advisor, at mission@birminghammethodist.org.uk or 67B Farquhar Road, Birmingham, B15 2QP.

A Prayer*

If we met you, Jesus Christ,
we might not think that you were on a mission.

Your talk would be of common and curious things:
salt, bread, trees,
lost animals, lost money,
paying taxes, hosting a dinner party,
wise outcasts and foolish builders.

Jesus, we would not know you were on a mission.
We would think you were making sense of life,
lighting up the ordinary, identifying the truth among the plain.

Lord, when you next look on the world with compassion,
and when you need mission done in your way:
We ask you to ask us.
We ask you to embolden us.
We ask you to send us.

We pray in your name and in your way.
Amen.

**Adapted slightly from the Iona Community*