

Get Out More.....

A set of studies for use by small groups to help us all be more “mission-shaped”.

With thanks to Church Army in Australia.



Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Over the last few years there's been a lot of talk in Church circles about "fresh expressions of church", "emerging church", "new ways of being church" and other similar phrases.

With the publication in 2004 of the "Mission Shaped Church" report by the Anglican Church in the UK, the discussions and decisions by our own General Synod in October 2004, and the large number of conferences that have been held the subject is very much "centre stage" in the wider Church's thinking.

Perhaps you are excited by the concept or maybe worried about how this thinking will affect your church. Then again you could be wondering whether this is just the Church's current "flavour of the month" soon to be replaced by another one.

Whatever your feelings on the subject, there's one fact that can not be escaped. Christ has given us all the task of being his witnesses. But, for many of us, that isn't easy, is it, especially in this rapidly changing world in which we live?

This material has been produced to help us think about the complex, many-faceted environment, in which God calls us all to live out our faith, and to consider how we might make a difference for God in our communities.

It is not intended to burden you with more activities but rather to help you to walk alongside those you already meet in your daily life, and enable you to share something of your faith in a way that is relevant to your companion and not threatening to either of you.

The material presented in this booklet consists of six sessions which will work over six consecutive weeks.

Each session includes one or two Bible readings with questions to help you apply the teaching to your daily lives.

Also included is a "**Get Out More**" section which will give you several simple practical suggestions about how you can ground what you are learning in your daily life and start to make steps to interact more with the community around you.

I am very grateful to Church Army in Australia for allowing us to use and edit this material and make it available across our Diocese.

If your parish would like help in becoming more "mission shaped" then why not contact John Barnes, our Diocesan Mission Facilitator?

More than mission-shaped churches, we need mission-shaped people.

It is my hope that through this material, discussion, investigation, prayer and reflection, you will be encouraged to think how you might become more mission focused and active in the communities which you live amongst. **And take action to "Get Out More"**.

For Jesus



+Stuart

1. Changing (and Challenging) Contexts

Purpose: To consider how our communities have changed and how that affects the way we need to minister to them

Reading: Acts 18:1-17.

What people and factors (local, national and international) influenced Paul's ministry in Corinth? How might his ministry have been different if they had not been present?

The "Mission-Shaped Church" Report identifies several ways in which our environment has changed over the last thirty years.

These include:

- **Housing** - there are many more households but they are smaller in size.
- **Employment** - there has been a marked increase in the number of either both parents or lone parents working outside the home.
 - people are working longer hours.
 - we now have seven working days.
- **Mobility** - most families have access to a car.
 - it is less likely that people will live and work in the same area.
- **Family** - the divorce rate has gone up.
 - the number of single people has risen dramatically.
- **Free Time** - there is a growing interest in sporting activities.
 - people are watching more television
- **Consumerism** - people expect to have the freedom to choose and to opt in and opt out.
- **Post-Christendom** - most people have no identifiable religious interest even if they define themselves as "Christian" in the census.
 - Do you agree or disagree with the above list?
 - Are there any other changes you have noticed?
 - How do you think these changes affect the life of your community?
 - How do you think these changes affect the Church's ministry?

Get Out More

Find out a little more about the people in your community:

1. Design a simple questionnaire and carry out a survey with some people in your community. You could include questions about the changes in the community that they have identified, how life has changed for them, the concerns that they have, what they would like to see improved, etc.
2. Useful information about your local area can be obtained from a several sources - National Church Life Survey (www.ncls.org.au); the Australian Bureau of Statistics (www.abs.gov.au); your local Council; your local library (they may have copies of the ABS data).
3. Buy your local newspaper and make a note of the major local news items. What concerns are expressed in the letters page?
4. Chat with one or two people who work in and for your community (police officers, shop owners, pub managers, the postie workers, principals at your local school, local councillors, etc) to find out how they feel the community has changed.
5. Do a prayer walk around your area. In small groups (twos or threes) simply go for a walk. Ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to anything that he wishes to highlight.

Try to become more aware of the environment around you that so often you take for granted – the sounds, the smells and the textures as well as the sights.

While you walk, occasionally stop and pray. When you come back to the rest of the group share your thoughts and experiences.

My Networks

3. Telling Your Story

Purpose: To think about our journey of faith and how to tell it to others.

Before looking at the Bible tell one another about your journey to get to this session. How did you get there? Did anyone accompany you? What did you see or hear? Did anything different happen? Did anything delay you or speed your journey?

Now reflect:

- How was that task for you?
- Were you able to explain without stumbling?
- Did you find yourself using words that your listeners did not understand?

Readings:

John 9:13 – 34 & Acts 22: 1-21

Compare the two readings:

- What led each person to talk about their experiences?
- What background information did they give?
- What did they say about the actual events and the results?
- What explanation was given?

The majority of us Christians tend to get rather hot under the collar as soon as there is even a hint of that “E-word” (evangelism). There is often a sense of guilt as we know that we should be doing it but would rather shy away from it and leave it to somebody more able or foolhardy than ourselves.

Interestingly, Jesus never told us to be evangelists and Paul explained that only some were to be evangelists (Ephesians 4:11).

Instead, in Acts 1: 8, Jesus said, “You will be my witnesses” and in today’s reading from Acts, even the great Apostle Paul is told to be God’s witness. How would you describe a witness?

Do you think that there is a difference between the two words ‘evangelist’ and ‘witness’?

The Collins English Dictionary gives one definition of the word ‘witness’ as “a person who testifies, especially in a court of law, to events or facts within his own knowledge.” That’s all that God wants! We don’t have to use special words or know all the answers. Just say what we’ve experienced.

- Make notes how you came to faith (your faith journey):
- Describe your background - what were things like before you were a Christian?
- How did you come to faith?
- What are the results - how did becoming a Christian affect you and how does being a Christian affect your daily life today?

(Perhaps you have grown up in a Christian family and cannot think of a time when you did not call yourself a Christian. That’s OK. Rather than writing about how you came to faith, note down details of when you publicly declared your faith – owned it for yourself).

Now tell one another in your group about your or faith journey. Use your notes if necessary but try to do it without if possible.

Give one another feedback about how it sounded - not so much the content of the story but how it was said. Were there any jargon or clichés used? Did the person waffle a bit?

Get Out More

1. Practice your story - chat to yourself in front of a mirror. See if you can do it without looking at your notes.
2. Try out the story of your faith journey with one or two trusted friends who would not call themselves a Christian. Simply explain that you have been asked to do it as an exercise and you would appreciate it if your

friend made comment afterwards about whether you were understandable or used jargon or clichés. If they would like to tell you what they thought of your experience that would be great.

Purpose: To see how we need to adapt our story according to the context.

Readings:

Acts 13: 16 - 43

Acts 17: 22 – 32

Compare the two examples of Paul preaching to his audience and think about his account of his conversion in Acts 22: 1-21 that you read during the last session:

- How did he start his speech?
- What similarities are there in what he says?
- What differences do you notice?
- Why do you think Paul altered his approach?

Paul, like all of us, only had the one faith journey to talk about and yet what he said in different situations could be very different indeed. He adapted his approach according to what he knew of his audience, which of his networks he was mixing with. Some things in his life story became more relevant so he emphasised them while other facts could get in the way so sometimes he dropped them altogether. He tried to build links with his audiences' experience and beliefs and what he had to tell them about God. He summarised his method nicely in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

Your Networks

Take a look at your network diagram that you drew up a couple of sessions ago. Select one or two of the people that you regularly meet and consider:

- What do you know about the person?
- What things do you have in common with them?
- What links might you be able to make between your faith journey and their situation?
- How could you tailor your story so that it became more relevant to them?

Like last session, share with one another your faith journey but ask your listeners to imagine that they are the person you have selected.

4. Tailoring Your Story

Again offer feedback to one another.

Get Out More

1. Continue to develop those networks, chatting with the people that you regularly meet.

2. Find out what the people in your networks listen to, watch on TV or what .lms they go to see. Try to occasionally listen to or watch the same as them and think about how you could make links between your faith and what the films or programmes.

3. If you are not already doing so, start the practice of praying daily for the people that you have selected from your network diagram that God might give you the chance to talk about faith journey.

5. Open Doors

Purpose: To think about the opportunities that God gives us to tell our story

Reading:

Colossians 4: 2-6

For quite a small passage of Colossians, Paul packs in quite a lot.

Note down all the references that Paul makes to prayer and to witnessing.

How might you as an individual and as a member of the group take on his instructions in your daily life?

Echoing the final verse, Peter writes “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3: 13-16). The opportunities to share our faith will come as people notice the difference in us so we need to be prepared to answer their questions. We need to pray for those God-given opportunities but we can also develop an environment where those opportunities will occur by organising events that people might come to - events that do not need to have a Gospel presentation but will simply help to break down barriers and enable them to see that Christians are actually quite normal.

Get Out More

1. Run an event that might give you an opportunity to develop your networks further and possibly share your faith.
2. Get involved more in your community. Join a club or organisation or perhaps become a local volunteer. (eg. Lions; Rotary, Probus; RFS; local Chamber of Commerce; sporting clubs)
3. Think about the Baptism, Wedding and Funeral contacts your church has. How could your church make better use of them to form ongoing relationships with people and help them come to know Jesus?

6. Reflections

Purpose: To take stock of what we have learnt through this material and consider how we might go further.

“The unreflected life is not worth living” .Sophocles

If you have run an event, think about how it went. Otherwise think about some of the other “ *Get Out More* ” exercises that you have carried out during this course.

- What went well?
- What did not go as well as you had hoped?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What have you learnt?

Readings:

Luke 10:17-24

Acts 4:23-31

How do your feelings compare with those of Jesus and the Apostles?

How do the readings encourage and/or challenge you?

What next?

We hope that this course will spur you on to think about how your group can get more involved in the life of your community and help individuals in their spiritual journey to discover God’s love through Christ themselves.

Get Out More

1. Continue to develop your relationships with those in your community.
2. Think about your regular group meetings. How accessible would you say they are for a friend or acquaintance who is not yet a Christian? Consider changing the format so that you could invite friends and acquaintances and then invite them.