



## A starting conversation

To help you and your small group engage with some of the issues surrounding evangelism, mission and faith sharing today

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### How to use this resource

This resource is intended to be used by a number of different group contexts. The sessions can be used in a:

- Local Preachers' Meeting – where you could use it as the devotional section, or use evangelism as a subject focus for the meeting
- Circuit Meeting – where you could use the material as an agenda item to help the meeting think about ways in which people and churches could be/are engaging in evangelism around the circuit
- Church Council Meeting – to help facilitate an agenda item on the subject of evangelism
- Circuit Leadership Team Meeting – as the devotional section, or as the main substance of a vision meeting for the circuit
- House Group – as a whole church series on aspects of evangelism
- Discussion Group – as a specific and time-limited group formed to work through some of the key issues raised in this series
- Coffee Morning - as a one-off guided conversation, with the intention of hearing from the peripheral

voices within a church community

- Synod – as a workshop or plenary discussion on mission and evangelism within a district.

These sheets offer an opportunity to get a conversation going, and to hear the perspectives of different people throughout the circuit and community.

Each can be used as a stand-alone conversation guide, or the whole set can be used as part of an extended house group series. Just make sure that you have enough sheets printed so that everyone is able to have a copy. This means that people with different learning styles can be resourced to engage in the conversation in a way which helps them best. Some people like to have something to write on, others like to read text and some like to reflect and refer back at a later time. By providing handouts, you are enabling and resourcing the conversation to continue at a later time – which can only be a good thing!

Be clear about how long the conversation and discussion is going to last. As an agenda item, you may only want to spend 20 minutes on this – which means being clear about moving on and covering all four questions. If you are facilitating a house group, then it may be possible to extend the conversation to cover a whole hour. You could do this by using some of the further resources listed at the end of each session.

### Taking things further

At the conclusion of each session is a small section pointing you towards further resources (both on and off line) which will help to continue the conversation even further. They are not an exhaustive list but rather a starting point for your ongoing reflection. If there are significant resources you think we have missed out, then get in touch with us ([esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk)) telling us about the resource and why you found it helpful, and we will try to put it onto the Deepening Discipleship part of the Methodist website ([www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship](http://www.methodist.org.uk/deepeningdiscipleship)).

## Summary of the Evangelism Consultation

In 2011, the General Secretary's Report to the Conference stated:

*"I suggest to the Conference that making more disciples of Jesus Christ through apt and appropriate ways is a key priority for our Connexion today. This involves committing ourselves, even in a time of scarcity, to put a disproportionate degree of resources and energy to this end, as the acknowledged weakest 'health indicator' throughout our Connexion."<sup>1</sup>*

As part of the response to this, in late 2012, members of the Connexional Team hosted a national consultation on evangelism. The methodology included an online survey, a full-day consultation with 80 people participating in focused group work, and a further day of theological reflection with the chairs of those groups and invited specialists.

From this consultation a significant number of themes were discussed and raised by participants. The eight areas of investigation have been revisited in this series, to enable and resource further an ongoing conversation about aspects of evangelism as it impacts upon the ministry and praxis of the Methodist Church: a discipleship movement shaped for mission.

Overall, the consultation achieved a great deal.

- It has stimulated a Methodist conversation about evangelism and mission and its place in twenty first-century discipleship. It is a timely exercise, as other organisations and agencies are also working through the changing nature of society and church practice.<sup>2</sup>
- The consultation saw participants celebrate the work of UK practitioners in the field of evangelism – notably the work of Rob Frost, Share Jesus International and Donald English; alongside more recent developments catalysed from the inspiration and work of Fresh Expressions.
- Many participants used language that demonstrates that *missio Dei* theology has permeated to the

grassroots. People noted the work of the Spirit, the need to be outside church buildings, and the importance of being connected (or relevant) to local cultures and contexts – both liturgically and in terms of community development.

- There was a recognition that God IS at work.
- Hospitality, in its broadest sense, was consistently recognised as a key factor in relationship building and faith sharing. Sharing food, creating safe spaces for people, and developing a culture of welcome were all significant factors for people. Coupled with this was the desire to be generous and to recognise God's generosity and provision.
- An important message from participants was that there are a significant number of programmes and courses available.
- Participants reflected on the motivation for evangelism – and those that responded to this question did so by recognising the love of God for all people.
- Relationships matter.
- The mixed economy of Church is crucial in order to enable people to discover and deepen their faith.
- One poignant response reflected on the 'smell of church' when they were in a fellowship group. The multi-sensory nature of spirituality and faith sharing was powerfully noted.
- Small groups help equip people for their discipleship throughout the week. How these groups are encouraged and resourced continues to be an important area of work.

Beyond the logistical evaluation of the consultation process, there were a number of areas for discussion and further work.

- People were not always clear regarding what they were talking about. The language can get quite muddled between evangelism and mission – and the distinction is negligible from a congregation's perspective.
- Participants reflected in detail about what made evangelism and mission difficult. Issues of confidence, energy and time, permission, family, perception, secularism and multiculturalism were all identified as key difficulties to sharing the gospel.

1. <http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/media/41172/2-the-general-secretarys-report-0511.pdf> (paragraph 70, page 45)

2. 'Confidently Sharing the Gospel' Evangelical Alliance, <http://www.eauk.org/church/resources/snapshot/upload/Confidently-sharing-the-gospel-final-report.pdf>

- Although respondents recognised the number of faith-sharing tools on the market about evangelism, there was a clear request for specific tools to be of use in evangelism.
- Evangelism can make people feel very vulnerable. How might the Church be able to recast a narrative of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, which articulates vulnerability and dis-comfort?
- What are the outcomes that we are looking for when it comes to evangelism?
- Methodism is a broad Church, and there continues to be a need for a broad conversation about evangelism, atonement theology, and the process of ongoing discipleship.

- How is evangelism best resourced at all levels of the Church?

A more comprehensive summary of results is available on request to [esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:esdadmin@methodistchurch.org.uk).

One of the outcomes from the consultation was the importance of this being the start, not the end of the conversation; and that further resources to enable this to happen would be beneficial. This series invites people in a variety of church contexts to engage with the questions raised through the consultation, and to continue to host a conversation about evangelism. The purpose is to begin to wrestle with the issues surrounding evangelism, and to help Methodist people gain confidence in their evangelistic calling.