From coffee morning to Sunday morning
From coffee morning to Sunday morning

Preparing the church for Back to Church Sunday

A five-session course to help move our relationships forward from a social encounter to a spiritual engagement

Charles Freebury MA FIEx
First edition: January 2010
Copyright © Charles Freebury 2010
Higher Severalls House, 89 Hermitage Street, Crewkerne, TA18 8EX
c.freebury@tiscali.co.uk

This course contains the views of the author and does not necessarily reflect the policy of the Methodist Church of Great Britain

Charles Freebury studied at Cliff College in the 1960s and, after an extended gap year, returned in 1999-2001 to complete the MA in Evangelism Studies, which he achieved with Distinction. In between, he enjoyed a career in international business, latterly as a Director with the Worldtrade Management Services practice of PricewaterhouseCoopers, and is a Fellow of the Institute of Export. He is a Methodist Local Preacher and is Chairman of the Cliff College Committee. Charles is married with two daughters, a granddaughter and several grandkittens, yet is still younger than Sir Cliff Richard.

Many thanks to the five local churches that have given permission for photographs to appear in this handbook. Appendix 2, “Seven marks of healthy churches” © Church House Publishing is reproduced by kind permission of the publisher from The Healthy Churches’ Handbook (CHP, 2004).

Permission is given for photocopies or prints of the handouts to be made by users without limitation for use within their organisation. All rights reserved. No part of this publication, except that stated above, may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the author.
## CONTENTS

How this course works 4

Leaders’ notes:

- Session 1 – Setting out 6
- Session 2 – Preparing the church 11
- Session 3 – First steps 14
- Session 4 – Next steps 17
- Session 5 – Stepping out 20

Session handouts 22

Appendix 1: Related resources 34

Appendix 2:
- Seven marks of healthy churches 36

---

A **LARGE PRINT** version (words only) of this course is available free of charge. Click here: [c.freebury@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:c.freebury@tiscali.co.uk) to receive a copy by email.

To listen to the content of either version in **AUDIO**, click on “View” on the top bar, then “Read out loud” and “Activate Read Out Loud”. Click on the first two again to select what parts to have read out loud. If your version of Adobe Reader does not support this, you can download the latest version free of charge – click here: [adobe.com/uk](http://adobe.com/uk) then click on “Get Adobe Reader” in the webpage.
How this course works

From Coffee morning to Sunday morning is aimed at supporting churches, especially Methodist churches, in their preparation for Back to Church Sunday. It does this by helping regular church members and attenders to develop relationships with people who used to come to church but who no longer do so. The course starts from the principle that most of our churches have good contacts in the community through our social activities, but struggle with how to attract people into the spiritual heart of the church. It builds on the biblical foundation that restored relationships, with God and each other, are the heart of Christianity. While the immediate aim is to prepare for Back to Church Sunday, the intention is to help churches go much further than this through building-up relationships so that they can deepen and evolve from a social encounter to a spiritual engagement.

The course is worked through in small groups and each of the five sessions should last about 1½ hours. It is helpful if the Sunday service before each of the group sessions features that week’s session theme in the worship and preaching.

The material for each session is set-out in the Leaders’ notes. Each attender has a copy of the Session handouts. The leader simply takes the group through the handouts, allowing plenty of time for discussion and Bible focus.

The Appendices give details of other useful resources for use in this field.

A PowerPoint slideshow accompanies the course, although the course can be run without it. The first few slides can be used to introduce the course to, for example, your Church Council, Circuit Meeting and/or Local Preachers’ Meeting. The remainder follow the content of the Session handouts.

Session 1: Setting out, goes through what the course is for and how it works, and gives the chance for course attenders to talk together and ask more about the course and about Back to Church Sunday, so that everyone is brought up to speed.

Session 2: Preparing the church gets the course into gear in earnest and deals with how the church can prepare and put things into place for your Back to Church Sunday initiative.

Session 3: First steps then works through how individual church members and ‘regulars’ can take some first steps in developing their relationships with people they know.

Session 4: Next steps takes this further.

Session 5: Stepping out gives the opportunity to draw it all together and plan what to do next, and introduces other resources that are available to support the initiative.

This course deals with developing our relationships with adults, so it is not intended to cover work with children or teenagers. For a similar approach to working in a families context, see resources such as those in Appendix 1.
Session 1: Setting out

From Coffee morning to Sunday morning?

What exactly do we mean by “From Coffee morning to Sunday morning”?

Churches have a surprisingly large number of contacts with people who do not regularly go to a Sunday service, including those who used to go but no longer do so. These contacts could be church activities ranging from coffee mornings to children’s clubs, social service in the community, or the occasional offices of baptism, marriage and funerals.

Then, at the other end of the scale, all churches have by definition one or more spiritually attuned activities including Sunday services and possibly weekday worship, home groups, prayer meetings and outreach courses such as Alpha, Emmaus or Christianity Explored.

There is a lot of distance between these two ends of the scale! And not always anything in between, leaving the church wondering why they never, or no longer, see their coffee morning people or playgroup parents on a Sunday morning. The church may feel that it has somehow failed, or puts these absences down to the unspirituality of the outside world. It may even feel that, where people have stopped coming, including those who are still members of the church, it is their fault for, say, lack of loyalty, and not the church’s.

What seems to be needed is to put in place something to bridge the gap, so that we can move our relationships forward from a social encounter to a more spiritual engagement by a series of small steps, rather than expecting people to jump all the way in one go. Relationships are one of today’s biggest issues, especially since the current economic downturn has led people to rethink their priorities and what is most important to them. Christianity is all about relationships: first our restored relationship with God, whereby we become his children, and then a special depth of relationship – fellowship – with each other. Therefore developing relationships at all levels is central to the mission into which God calls us to join Him.

Who is the course for?

Methodists are traditionally very good at being alongside people who, for instance, used to come to Sunday School or church but are now mainly seen at get-togethers like coffee mornings, and parents or grandparents of children involved in our playgroups or other children’s activities. A deep social concern has always motivated Methodists to engage with the pressing needs of the community. But what Methodists often seem to struggle with is
how to move these social relationships forward to a more spiritual level. Methodists are loyal, sociable, caring, involved and community-minded. But we are reluctant to talk about our faith. As many as 23% of Methodists are involved in community and social service (other churches 15%) but only 7% are involved in evangelistic activity (other churches 13%). Hence there is typically quite a big gap in the life of Methodist churches between the ‘social’ and the ‘spiritual’.1

As a result of all this, many people who are no longer regular churchgoers are influenced through the social side of the church’s work, and are likely to see ‘Canal Street Methodist’ as “my church” even though Sunday morning sees them at Tesco, watching the kids’ local football match, spending time together as family, or a separated parent’s day with the children. But it is not so easy for them to find their way back to the more spiritual side of things.

The church is likely to be genuinely concerned about the difficulty in attracting people back to the spiritual and worshipping heart of its life and wants seriously to get to grips with this. It might have tried Alpha once or twice and even enjoyed it, but then it ground to a halt for lack of newcomers and people felt a bit disillusioned. It may have tried to update its Sunday mornings and wondered why only the same people continued to come. What else can it do? Well, let’s see if this course, along with the other Back to Church Sunday resources, can give some clues.

“Our calling”

We should locate what we are doing here into the four themes set-out in ‘Our calling’, namely Worship, Learning & caring, Service and Evangelism.

Worship is at the ‘spiritual end’ of the scale, not just on Sundays but increasingly through other activities that can gather people together into a worshipping community, such as ladies’ meetings or pram services. Exploring new and relevant ways of worship is beyond the scope of this course, but Back to Church Sunday is of course one of these.

Learning & caring helps people to grow and learn as Christians and more or less starts at the Alpha or house group level. Like worship, is it an evolving and deepening spiritual engagement. This course is part of the learning and caring activity. In Session 3 of this

---

course, church members and ‘regulars’ are encouraged to grow their faith and develop their own spiritual lives as part of the initiative, so the church’s learning and caring activity is vitally important in every area of the church’s life.

**Service** is being a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice. We have already highlighted this not only as a Methodist strength but as something that is at the heart of the Gospel. Happily, the false divide between ‘social gospel’ and ‘spiritual gospel’ that dogged a good deal of the 20th century should be well behind us and we can now hold the two together, as of course did Jesus and the New Testament Church (not forgetting the Wesleys!). They are like the two wings of a bird: with both it soars, with one it just goes round in ever-decreasing circles and falls out of the sky.

**Evangelism** scares a lot of people! But for most people today, friends and family are the main factor in their coming to faith in Christ, or coming back into the Christian community. It really is as simple as that, for both them and for the Christians and Christian communities who are open to deep and meaningful friendships without hidden agendas. People generally come to faith by first feeling that they belong and can trust people in their local Christian community, second coming to the point of believing in Jesus and entering into relationship with him, third allowing this new-found faith to reshape their lifestyle and values. So the heart of evangelism is helping to develop contacts into friends, and accompanying those friends by taking small steps together along the way from coffee morning to Sunday morning – and beyond.

**Bible Focus:** Matthew 28 verses 16 to 20. Do you sometimes wonder or feel fazed about what Jesus asked his disciples (that is, all of us) to do? You’re in good company – look at verse 17! What do you think the people who “doubted” were feeling at the time? Look at the first and last things Jesus said here. How might these two reassurances help us to feel more confident with what he asks of us?

**Where we start and where we finish**

We begin with the assumption that the church already has some level of social activities and/or service in the local community and know a wide range of people including some who used to come to worship but who no longer do so.

As to our immediate destination, where we hope to arrive by the end of the course, well, how can I put it? You know how it is when you invite people to a church event and you see the panic in their eyes as they frantically try to think of what might be in their diaries on that day? This course aims to move the relationship forward so that, when you ask them to the Back to Church Sunday service, instead of them saying “Aahh, oh, umm ... oh yes, I’m afraid it’s the only time we get in the week to do the shopping and then we always go to see the family”, they say “Sounds interesting, yes I’d love to come with you, it’s been ages”.

The bit in between, where we are putting small steps in place to move from the social to the spiritual, is for many of us really tough, both conceptually and practically. This is what we are going to get to grips with in the course. You could of course do the job for Back to Church Sunday simply by good publicity, handing out invitations everywhere, a special page on the church website and so on – all of which are an integral part of a Back to Church Sunday initiative. But in this course we will try to take a look beyond this to a deeper engagement.

Back to Church Sunday is only the immediate, interim destination, hopefully a milestone along the way but only part of the journey of faith. There is so much more to be explored,

---

2 Yes, I keep going on about “Christian communities” rather than “churches”! Simply because a key New Testament word for church is “ekklesia” – a ‘gathered-together community’. I like that way of putting it...
discovered and rediscovered and what we are really setting out to do is to accompany our friends on the journey, with both of us finding something new around each corner. Whether the next steps along the way are further special Sunday services, an *Alpha* course, or other ways of engaging with the big questions of life and our relationship with God, it is an exciting and, in fact, lifelong journey. Bon voyage!

**Sunday morning?**

The Methodist Church’s and Back to Church Sunday websites\(^3\) have no shortage of ideas for how to organise your Back to Church Sunday service, so this is not covered in detail here. However, it may be worth looking for a moment at how the church (including its people) comes over to those who have not been to a service for quite some time.

For example, those coming to a Back to Church Sunday will appreciate finding some familiar ground in, say, some of the hymns or songs and the style of worship. But if the worship services are so staid, routine or traditional that they simply do not connect with people’s issues, or if the environment is rather cold and distant, then using this as the framework for Back to Church Sunday can do more harm than good.

Or, how do you actually look to people coming back? I passed round pictures of three local village churches at a recent Sunday service and asked which church did people feel most attracted to? The third picture, of an all-age Sunday service, got the votes – simply because of the people there.

In a word, we should stop and think very carefully before building stepping-stones to an unreformed (I use the word advisedly!) ‘Sunday morning’ for our Back to Church Sunday.

\(^3\) [methodist.org.uk](http://methodist.org.uk) and [backtochurch.co.uk](http://backtochurch.co.uk)
Happily there has been a lot of hard thinking on this issue by all denominations and a huge range of ways forward has emerged. Informal services such as café church around tables with refreshments, at breakfast, mid-morning or teatime can be a very accessible open door. They could be mid-week and not only on Sundays. Cell church repositions the heart of church life and worship into the small groups known as cells.

A final thought. I wonder whether the real problem with a traditional Methodist ‘five-hymn-sandwich’ is not in the style of the music or content, but in the way that, for many churchgoers, it is what they affectionately grew up with, say in the 1950s. It would have been for them a hugely formative and important period. To revisit it each Sunday recreates, perhaps without being consciously aware of it, a safe, valued and comfortable environment that they understandably feel reluctant to let go of. But it creates a major disconnect between the valued, remembered worship of the 1950s and the utterly different world and issues of 2010. Back to Church Sunday is for reconnecting people, not with the past but with the present.

**Take heart!**

We may sometimes wonder whether any initiative we may try is doomed to failure because of all the talk about the church being in decline everywhere in Britain today. But things have moved on. One in five churches grew in the 1990s but, by 2005, it was one in three. Two-thirds of churches were declining then, but by 2005 it was down to one-half, the other half either growing or stable. However, at the same time, overall church attendance is still declining, so churches that are doing nothing to recover from decline are more likely than ever to lose people very fast.

We now know a lot about those churches that are holding their own and growing, including what qualities and characteristics have helped them to do so. Some resources are mentioned in the Appendices.

So there is good reason to take heart! Provided of course that we are prepared to do something about it, and take the risk of inviting God to work out His mission among us.

“The great joy was that some old friends felt able to come back to church; and that we were able to welcome new friends when our own church folk personally invited their friends to come to church with them.” (a church that took part in Back to Church Sunday 2008)
Session 2: Preparing the church

In this Session we look at how the church itself can put some stepping-stones in place. We pay a brief visit to some key issues, which can then be explored and developed by the church later.

**Some starting points**

Three Christians arrived at the gates of heaven. “And what have you brought with you?” St. Peter asked. “I’ve brought my rosary” said the Roman Catholic. “Very good”, replied Peter, “in you go. And what about you?”: “Well, I’ve got my Bible with me”, the Baptist said. “Fine, on your way”. The Methodist meanwhile lifted up the tea towel on top of the object she was carrying and smiled: “And I’ve brought a casserole!”. Discuss together how each of these: prayer, the Bible and hospitality, could make a good starting point for our relationships with people. Which would you feel most comfortable with? What would you appreciate most if you were on the receiving end? Why?

**Two basic concepts**

- **All you need is love**
  The motive for any kind of outreach has to be love. If we care about people then we will want them to discover, or rediscover, a living relationship with Jesus. If we don’t have this motivation at the centre of everything we do, then all we end up with is a ‘hit list’ of people to arm-twist back into church, which is the opposite of what we are setting out to do, and does more harm than good.

  Michael Green wrote: “love ... is crucial. Without it there can be no effective evangelism. The world has to see in Christian circles a warmer, more accepting and caring fellowship than they can find anywhere else – and until they see that they are not going to be all that interested or impressed with God-talk”.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Mark 12 verses 28-34. Make a note together of two or three of the main things you do in the church. Discuss to what extent the love that Jesus speaks of is the main motive behind the church doing them.

- **Where are people coming from?**
  People are not unspiritual today, rather the opposite: most believe in God, many often pray even though many fewer go to church regularly. To quote Tony Blair (yes, that Tony Blair): “We enjoy a thousand material advantages over any previous generation, yet we suffer a depth of insecurity and spiritual doubt they never knew”. What is certainly true is that people are on a spiritual quest and feel highly vulnerable without proper spiritual roots. The fact that they do not often look back to traditional church in their quest is, to be frank, our fault rather than theirs. We have simply failed to connect.

  For most people, church is simply not seen as relevant to the top issues of their daily lives and that is why many people stopped going. They are not generally hostile to the church, yet they may well suspect people from the church of having an ‘agenda’

---

4 *Evangelism - now and then* (IVP, 1979) p.25
5 2008 British Social Attitudes Survey, see christian.org.uk
whenever there is an invitation to go beyond the coffee morning. So it is understandable that nothing much can move until there is a trusting relationship, evidenced by deeds and not just words.

**Practical things to do**

Tanya\(^7\) starts taking her baby to the nearby church’s mother and toddler club; the Minister drops in there regularly and Tanya makes some new friends. She is nervous about talking to the Minister about baptising her baby but, when she eventually plucks up courage, finds her “surprisingly nice”. She senses a genuine welcome at the baptism service; starts praying for her baby; makes friends and finds the church relevant; comes to a pram service; starts to feels God is real; prays more; buys a children’s Bible for her toddler and reads it herself; comes to Back to Church Sunday and later to a children’s service; finds the words begin to make sense and starts to look forward to the services; comes to an *Alpha* course which makes her feel “challenged, excited, happy, stretched, confused”. Somewhere along this three year journey she realises she has become a Christian.

The practical things we look at in this session will help to put in place a framework for journeys such as Tanya’s.

- **Know who your friends are**
  I have a rule-of-thumb definition of “friend”: when you call on her unannounced, before you reach the front door the curtains twitch and the kettle goes on; then, after saying “How are you?”, she listens more than talks. This is the sort of relationship that we’re aiming for\(^8\).

- First, draw up a list of church and related activities through which we meet people who are not regular churchgoers.
- From this, identify the type of people we mostly know: families, retired, or whatever it may be. Again, no names – no ‘hit list’!

- **Spot the gaps**
  Then look to see what gaps there might be between ‘coffee morning and Sunday morning’. For adults and especially older people, is there any stepping-stone between coffee morning and a traditional, formal Sunday service or an *Alpha* course? For parents, is there anything between playgroup or parents-and-toddlers and All-age Worship or Junior Church?

- **Provide the right activities**
  The church will need to take a careful look at its programme in order to style what it does in the best way to support a step-by-step approach. Some initiatives will need to be put into place to fill the gaps identified above and provide the series of small steps that are needed. Some examples are given in Session 4, “Next steps”, later in the course. Beware: one of the secrets of a healthy church is to do a few things and do them well\(^9\), so some traditional (and no doubt cherished!) activities may have to go to make room.

  During this session, simply be content to put a few ideas on the table. They can be developed after the course – but don’t forget to come back to them!

- **Equip your people**
  The members and regulars of the church will need resourcing well in order to play

\(^7\)Adapted from *Emmaus, the way of faith, Stage 1: Contact* (CHP, 2003) p.16

\(^8\) For less rule of thumb and more context, see the section on “six levels of welcome” in the next session

\(^9\) See “Mark 7” of the healthy church, in Appendix 2
their part in the ways we are going to discuss in the following sessions, including:

- Helping to identify, affirm and hone their Holy Spirit gifting;
- Helping them to grow in their faith and prayer life, both individually and together; and
- Providing booklets, invitations and other material that will be helpful to pass to friends at appropriate times, as discussed in the following sessions.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Romans 12, verses 4-13. Discuss which of the gifts and qualities set-out here are reflected in the life of your church. What could we learn from this passage?

- **Look closely at what you are and do**
  The marks set-out in Appendix 2, that consistently show up in healthy churches, have to do with qualities rather than activities. This might come as a surprise to many Methodists who usually measure ourselves by how full our diaries are! It is about who we are rather than what we do.

- **"Pray without ceasing"!**
  Nothing much of any consequence will happen without ongoing insistent prayer, but the Church Life Profile found that Methodists are not so keen on prayer groups. They are three times more likely to attend a social group than one for prayer or study, and only half as likely to attend such a prayer or study group as people from other denominations. We need to catch up by providing a wider range of opportunities for prayer together, not only a conventional prayer meeting but other types of prayer environment for those who feel uncomfortable to pray out loud or ‘off-the-cuff’.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16-19. Discuss together some things you can learn in your church from these four instructions. These are only four of quite a long list contained in verses 12-22 but they are key.

> “Most of the people who don’t regularly come were long standing friends, or in some cases relatives of those who already come — emphasising the need for personal invitation and accompanying people”
> (a church that took part in Back to Church Sunday 2008)

> “It was good to see more people in church, most of whom remained chatting over coffee for half an hour or more afterwards”
> (a church that took part in Back to Church Sunday 2008)

> “Overwhelmed by the power of giving an invitation”
> (a church that took part in Back to Church Sunday 2008)
Session 3: First Steps

We now look at some ways to develop existing relationships with the people you know, taking some tentative first steps to move on from social encounter and towards spiritual engagement.

Do you feel apprehensive about what we are doing together? It’s only natural. Discuss how these two definitions of outreach\(^\text{10}\) might make us more confident, and why:

- “A journey with a friend, not a confrontation with a stranger”; and
- “Loving your neighbour until she asks why, then speaking of Jesus”\(^\text{11}\).

Is this different from how you had thought of ‘outreach’ or ‘evangelism’? If so, how? And how would you see these two principles working in practice in your church?

An often quoted saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is “Preach the gospel always; sometimes use words”. One of his less well known sayings is “It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching”\(^\text{12}\). An early Christian similarly said in about 150 AD “Beauty of life causes strangers to join our ranks ... we do not talk about great things; we live them”\(^\text{13}\). People need to see and trust who we are, before we can expect them to listen to anything we say about our faith.

Discuss how you can live this out in your church and community. Note how many things you could do before you get to the stage where you feel comfortable to speak openly about your faith.

**Developing who we are**

Start to think about these points now and then keep coming back to them regularly, because none of them are done in a day and they are all quite big topics!

- **Grow** your own faith
  Through prayer, worship, church home groups or Bible studies and other opportunities.

- **Discover your gifts**
  These are the things that God has helped you be good at. It is the Holy Spirit who gives these to you, either through enhancing what you are already good at, or gifting you with new abilities. Understanding better what they are will help you to know what you can offer in your relationships with people. For example, some Christians are gifted with encouragement, some with the ability to help in practical ways and so on, as we found when looking at Romans 12. Also **discover the “fruits”** that the Holy Spirit has been growing in your lives; these are all very relevant to our relationships so we will look at them now.

**BIBLE FOCUS**: Galatians 5, verses 22-23. Discuss how each of these “fruits” is important for our relationships.

---

\(^{10}\) From the Methodist Church’s Evangelism and Mission Education office, 2005

\(^{11}\) One well-known missioner, Roger Johnson, suggests a different ending: “… then being yourself”; another, Graham Horsley, suggests that what some churches tend to do in practice is “… then fudging it”!

\(^{12}\) *Emerging evangelism*, p.28

\(^{13}\) *Ibid.*, p.136
• **Allow God’s love** to be implanted in you. Love is not something we go all gooey over, or work ourselves up into a lather about. It is something we simply accept from God as the Number One gift and fruit of the Holy Spirit.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** 1 Corinthians 12, verse 29 to chapter 14, verse 1a. Discuss how this passage helps us to understand why love is the premier gift of the Holy Spirit.

• **Be available:**
  - to **God**: listening to how He may prompt you, for example through the church, through your own prayer and thinking, through what you learn from your developing relationships and through your own conviction;
  - and to **your friends**: by being sensitive and listening out for the issues, questions, needs and priorities that are on their minds.

• Finally, **relax and let the Holy Spirit take the strain!**
Back to Church Sunday is part of God’s invitation to join Him in His mission. He will look after it. He simply offers us the privilege of being His fellow-workers.

**Developing what we do**

Here are some examples of things we can do. Over time, you will almost certainly find more ways, and discover those for which you are gifted:

• **Be open** to the wishes, agendas and needs of your friends. Whether you feel the main area in which you can help is in, say, visiting people, doing practical jobs for (or with) them, or other service in the community, simply keep your eyes peeled, your ear to the ground and be open to what you find out – and to where the Holy Spirit opens the door.

You will over time discover who would value whatever you can offer. And, of course, you will find out those who prefer not to accept. The key here is not to worry about whether you should try to force the pace or impose yourself on other people who might not want it. Love prefers to wait for the door to be opened – check this out together in Revelation 3, verse 20.

If you are visiting people, first have a word with your Minister about the church’s policy, for example on whether the person to be visited is already on the church’s pastoral list with an appointed visitor, on one-to-one visiting of man to woman or vice versa, and on visiting vulnerable elderly people (this may need you to hold a CRB disclosure).

• **Spend time**
Spend quality time with the people whom you find appreciate it, even where this means dropping church committees or some of the other jobs that you do. Methodists always want to be busy in the church, but this is not necessarily the best use of time. What church activities you might drop and what to continue with are of course best discussed together rather than taking a decision alone.

• **Take something with you**
When visiting for any reason, it is easier and breaks the ice not to go empty-handed. It might be the church flowers, the church magazine, a recording of a (carefully selected!) Sunday service, a screwdriver or a selection of low energy light bulbs to replace the old type.
• **Listen a lot, talk a little**
  Developing relationships is far more about listening than talking. Listen out for other people’s agendas rather than imposing ours. Also get used to discerning what is behind an immediate issue, such as anxiety or simply a search for meaning in life. People really value a good listener.

• **Practise hospitality**
  Many people really appreciate being invited to a friend’s home for coffee, tea, a chat or even a meal, once the relationship has started to grow. This is one of the best ways of helping it to develop. And, taking the rule-of-thumb I mentioned earlier, if they come round unannounced, see if you can get the kettle on before they ring the doorbell....

**BIBLE FOCUS**: Mark 2, verses 13-17. Discuss how you would feel if you attended the dinner-party as a friend of Levi (Matthew) but had not met Jesus before.

• **Pray** for your friends daily.
  Pray also for the issues that you learn about from them as time goes by. But be sure to keep these issues to yourself unless your friend asks you to make them more widely known.

• **Value** people who are not so easy to get on with.
  Some may seem distant or difficult because they are hurting, anxious, lonely, feel vulnerable or rejected. They may simply be reluctant, or find it hard, to develop relationships and make commitments. Or they may just be distant and difficult! Over time they may open up or mellow as they begin to trust you. Or not. Even if they do not, they may value your being alongside them. Let them make the pace and give them their space, but don’t abandon them unless they want to discontinue the connection.

• **Welcome** your friends at any church events, personally and individually. The *Healthy Churches’ Handbook*\(^1\) suggests six levels of welcome to the church:

1. Everyone who is currently ‘in’ feels welcome;
2. ‘People like us’ feel welcome;
3. Newcomers are welcomed from the front but then the ‘regulars’ huddle in their own groups;
4. There is a real verbal welcome but people are unsure what to say next;
5. People are welcomed as part of the ‘audience’;
6. And finally – and of course this is where we should aim – we are prepared to make others part of our lives and to feel that they ‘belong’ in our church.

Where do you think your church sits among these six levels of welcome (it could be at more than one place)?

• **Above all, love your friends!**
  Not simply with your own innate caring, but allowing the Holy Spirit to shine God’s love through in the practical service you do, how you listen, what you say and who you are.

Developing relationships is not just a build-up to the ‘real thing’. If we think it is, then we risk becoming manipulative with a hidden agenda – and people will notice!

Session 4: Next steps

As relationships develop, you will sense in due course the right time to begin to go a step further.

‘User-friendly’ events at church

Back to Church Sunday is one such event but there are more.

- **‘User-friendly’ worship services at the main Christian festivals.**
  It is quite a small step for someone to come to one of these because of the event that it celebrates, provided of course that it really is user-friendly and at a time that suits people. A Harvest Festival service could be held at Sunday teatime with afternoon tea during, before or after the worship. Other occasions are Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Remembrance Day, All Souls’ Day, Valentine’s Day or Mothering Sunday. In the last two cases, there could be, on a Sunday near to them, additional services or parts of services dedicated to affirming people who are in situations of broken relationships or who are single or without children.

- **Informal guest services**
  At other times it can be good to hold guest services that are designed to be comfortable and meaningful for people who do not, or no longer regularly attend church and so will not be up to speed with routines that you take for granted. Examples are worship on Sunday morning with breakfast or coffee and newspapers, or at Sunday teatime, both in a ‘café-church’ format with informal worship around the tables, and perhaps in the same room and with the same layout as the coffee morning that people are already familiar with.

  For both of these, look at additional worship opportunities at times that are more convenient for people than Sunday mornings. And bear in mind that the main things people find missing in worship are that it is not relevant enough to life issues and not spiritual enough, so be sure to cater for both.

- **Other special events**
  You may have come to know your friend through one of the existing church events and it can be helpful simply to invite them to another social event. For ideas see the resources in Appendix 1.

  But there are also many types of event that combine a social and a spiritual element: for example a meal featuring a speaker from an interesting background who can bring a Christian perspective to issues such as stress, parenting, grandparenting\(^\text{15}\), relationship breakdown or world poverty. Doing this in the context of a meal together provides a relaxing, informal environment where people feel more

\(^{15}\)My spell-checker suggested the alternative “grandpa renting”. Nice one!
comfortable listening to the Christian perspective. Again, because Methodists are used to catering, you’ll feel at home too!

Other events can be in smaller groups, providing these are very informal, such as an ‘any questions’ evening where people can raise anything they like and the Minister or leader can respond with the Christian perspective on issues raised, as well as opening-up the topics for the group to discuss freely.

_Alpha_ and similar courses continue to be a mainstay of churches’ outreach. Such an opportunity to explore Christian basics should not be left behind and you would be encouraged to accompany friends to _Alpha_.

**Bible Focus:** John 1, verses 41-46. Look at how Jesus called his disciples by letting them bring each other to meet him. Has this discussion about ‘user-friendly’ events helped to give you confidence in how you can also say “come and see”?

**Oh, by the way**

Topics that come up naturally in discussion will provide helpful opportunities to move on a little further. It is important to wait for the right time and best for opportunities such as the following to come up as a natural response to topics raised by your friend.

- **Offering a prayer**
  Would your friend like the church to pray for something you are both concerned about: recession, world peace, vandalism, crime, drug abuse deprivation? Or for a more personal topic, would your friend like you to say a prayer while you are together? The church can provide small booklets of appropriate prayers for all kinds of situations such as illness, bereavement and important events such as weddings or examinations. You can read the prayer yourself or together, and leave or write out a copy for your friend. An offer of prayer will often be welcomed and valued. Unfortunately it is sometimes proving increasingly tricky for Christians to offer this to friends at their workplace, or indeed to talk about their faith in any way. Attempted restrictions on your freedom to mention Christian issues at work may also apply to all the following bullet-points.

- **Offering a suitable booklet, video, or website address**
  This can be timely at Christian festivals or when the news is of conflict or other issues where there is a Christian response. There are some excellent websites (see Appendix 1) but be very careful when selecting websites to recommend, refer them to the Minister or leadership first. The Methodist booklet _Called by name_ can be a useful response to someone wanting to know where Methodist Christians are coming from, which is not an unusual question.

- **Questions?? Help!!**
  As people get to know and trust you, they will start to raise the hard questions that are on all our minds. Such questions will not all seem obviously ‘religious’, even when in reality they are, such as when they reveal widespread anxiety about the future; dysfunctional relationships; insecurity; disillusionment with a lifestyle that peaks on shopping or football; values of right and wrong that have nothing more as

16 See _Religious liberty in the workplace; A guide for Christian employees_ downloadable from [christian.org.uk](https://www.christian.org.uk) and their report _Marginalising Christians_.

17_Called by name_ (Peterborough: MPH, 2002)
a reference point than last week’s EastEnders, and so on.

It may come as a relief to know that, not only are you not expected to make the running, but you’re also not expected to know all the answers! It is quite in order to say that you don’t know the answers, but that people like your Minister or pastoral or Alpha leader could help talk through them.

In the meantime, perhaps the most telling thing you can suggest is that, while you don’t know the answers to the hard questions, you do trust Jesus because he and your Christian faith mean everything to you, and Jesus did go through every kind of difficulty that we do. This may prompt a response from your friend, especially about Jesus (people are invariably fascinated by Jesus) and, when this comes, there is no better or simpler way than to offer a copy of a Gospel in today’s language and allow the biblical account to speak for itself.

In due course it is useful, and biblical, to work on becoming more confident to speak about our faith comfortably. I have therefore referred in the closing session of this course to some resources specifically aimed at helping with this.

- **Know when to call in the experts**
  It is important to be able to sense when you need to call in reinforcements by way of the Minister or someone trained and skilled in what is needed. Don’t delay when you sense this is needed, but always ask permission to mention anything like this to your Minister first. And then leave them to it.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Acts 8, verses 26-38. Note how Philip was sensitive to the Holy Spirit and simply needed to be in the right place at the right time. Once Philip had connected with what the Ethiopian was absorbed in, it was the Ethiopian who invited Philip onto his own territory and started asking the questions. Put yourself in the place of the Ethiopian and discuss how you might have felt before and after meeting Philip. What would you now be planning to do differently when you arrived home?

**We are not alone**

While much of what we have covered in this session may be done individually, it is important to know that we are not alone.

- First because **this is God’s mission** and we are simply His fellow-workers, by invitation.

- Then because we do it **as a church** and not as lone rangers. This means that we are
  - Accountable to the church for what we do: lone rangers can be loose cannons (as well as mixed metaphors);
  - Supported by and supporting each other, which is especially important when the going may not be so easy;
  - Equipped and pastorally sustained by our Minister and leadership in everything we do.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Luke 10, verses 1-5 and 17-18. Seventy-odd is a lot of people, not just Jesus’ closest followers who could be expected to know chapter and verse well, but others who would not be so close or confident. They were to start by simply wishing peace on the homes they went to, and the outcome gave them a lot of joy. Does this encourage you? How?
Session 5: Stepping out

This closing session of the course gives the chance to check any questions or uncertainties that continue to niggle in the back of the mind, then look at the way forward for Back to Church Sunday, putting some things in hand and considering briefly some later possibilities.

Taking the temperature – any questions?

Briefly discuss how people have reacted to the course and whether you have become more confident or nervous, positive or unsure. This is also the time to take questions and second thoughts, and think them through together. Make a note and act on the ideas you develop.

Some possible ‘To Do’s

- Discuss the plans for Back to Church Sunday and how each person fits into them.
- Review and put in place suitable opportunities for prayer in the church.
- Obtain a good set of resources that people can pass to friends: booklets, videos, website addresses and so on.
- Put in hand an initiative to equip the people of the church to identify their gifts and play their part in developing relationships. Be sure to allow time for this.
- Plan ‘any questions’ evenings, Alpha, special services or other initiatives to follow-up Back to Church Sunday. It is vital to have a next step for people who have begun to rediscover their church.
- Review the church programme so as to fill in the gaps between coffee morning and Sunday morning with appropriate ‘stepping-stones’.
- Take a look over your ‘to do’s and see if you are trying do too much at once! If so, see how you can plan it to be more manageable.
- Stop doing activities that are not central to your mission.

BIBLE FOCUS: Acts 13, verses 1-5. This passage is about growing your own leaders, among other things. How do you think the representatives of the church felt about ‘losing’ two of their key people and being left to do everything themselves (see chapter 11, verses 25-26)? How do you think Paul and Barnabas felt? Why do you think they went to Cyprus first (clue: see Acts 4, verse 36) and what can we learn from this?

To come back to later

Don’t try to do everything at once, but after Back to Church Sunday and after looking at the above suggestions, consider the possibility of some of the following:

- There is a wealth of material to follow up Alpha and other courses. And there is Called by name for those who are interested in knowing more about or becoming members of the Methodist Church – it is quite common for people who used to
attend church earlier in life not to have much of a grasp of what their church’s main values and foundations were, sometimes because they were never told!

- Decide whether the church might in due course consider a **Healthy Churches’ Handbook** or other **church review** (see Appendix 1 for some others).

- Stand back and take a long look at the whole way you do ‘Sunday morning’. How newcomer-friendly, spiritual and relevant is worship? Is it a step too far for newcomers, or even a step in the wrong direction if the environment is staid, cold and unwelcoming. Examine how it could be renewed and freshened with the Holy Spirit’s help and given different expressions, probably at different times of day or on different days of the week.

**Talking about our faith?**

This course looks at how we can develop relationships **before** we come to the stage where we may feel comfortable to talk freely about our faith. But at some stage it is good to move on further so that we do feel more confident.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** 1 Peter 3, verses 8-9 and 13-16. A key verse is verse 15: note that Peter wrote this to Christians who had already undergone instruction on the Christian faith and so were equipped by their church for the task; also that Peter said we should be responding to questions about our faith rather than foisting it unsolicited onto people. Discuss together how verses 8-9 and 15-16 help us to see how we should approach talking about our faith.

There are several resources than can help. The first three sessions of the *Lost for words*¹⁸ course cover some of the ground that we have already gone over, while its second three sessions get to grips with what Methodists and others typically find very hard (they are not alone!): Telling our story; Telling God’s story; and Keeping going. *Time to talk of God*⁹ aims to encourage Methodists and other Christians to renew their ability to talk to each other about God.

Even after having spent time developing our faith and relationships, some may still feel that talking about their faith is “not for them” and in this case I would simply encourage them at some stage to go through one of the above courses without necessarily intending to go further, and then just leave it to the Holy Spirit to put any words together. They may well find that a few well-placed words just come out at the most unexpected times. The Holy Spirit has a knack of helping such words to be both few and well-placed, as well as popping them into our minds quite unexpectedly!

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Revelation 3, verses 7-8. Of the seven churches who received the letters set-out in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, only two were not censured, and these were the smallest, one of which was this one in Philadelphia. How do you think the people of this church felt on reading this? Does the affirmation given to them also give you confidence? Why? If you have time later, find which other church was not censured and ask the same questions.

**And finally ...**

- Refocus quietly on Back to Church Sunday.

- Commit the whole initiative to God in praise and prayer.

---

¹⁸ *Lost for words - sharing faith naturally* (CPAS, 2002) see [cpas.org.uk](http://cpas.org.uk)

¹⁹ *Time to talk of God* (mph, 2005)
This opening session will take more time than the others over explaining what the course is about, but should allow plenty of opportunity for your questions and discussion, so that everyone feels assured about where we are heading in this course and in our Back to Church Sunday initiative.

**From Coffee morning to Sunday morning?**

Most churches, through their social activities and service, have many contacts with people who do not, or no longer attend worship services. But there is often little in place to help people to move from one to the other, from social encounter to spiritual engagement. It needs small steps to bridge the gap. This course is about how to put these steps in place, through helping churchgoers develop relationships with people you already know and accompany them on their journey. Relationships are key: many people today feel let down by materialism and consumerism, especially in the current recession, and are anxious to rediscover the importance of their relationships; Christianity is all about right relationships with God and each other, therefore so is the Christian community, the church.

Discuss briefly together: who are your most important relationships with? It could be friends, family, workplace colleagues, people at church even. Do you see your Christian faith as primarily a relationship with God?

**Who is the course for?**

The church might have tried *Alpha* or updating its Sunday services but still only the 'regulars' come and the church is unsure what to do about this. People may feel inhibited when it comes to talking about our faith or asking others to come to church events like Back to Church Sunday.

**“Our calling”**

This course links into the four Methodist focus themes of “Our calling”. Meaningful *Worship* is one of the destinations of this course, specifically Back to Church Sunday. *Learning & caring* equips and energises the people of the church as they develop their relationships and this is what we are aiming for in the course. *Service* to others is a key starting-point and stepping-stone. *Evangelism* is what the church is doing through this initiative.
BIBLE FOCUS: Matthew 28 verses 16 to 20. Do you sometimes wonder or feel fazed about what Jesus asked his disciples (that is, all of us) to do? You’re in good company – look at verse 17! What do you think the people who “doubted” were feeling at the time? Look at the first and last things Jesus said here. How might these two reassurances help us to feel more confident with what he asks of us?

Where we start and where we finish
We begin with the assumption that the church already has some level of social activities and/or service in the locality. As to where we arrive by the end of the course: when we can invite people to Back to Church Sunday and they say they would love to come with us, instead of trying frantically to think of a prior engagement, then we have arrived! We have accompanied our friends to the point where the journey becomes a spiritual engagement. How to put in place the stepping-stones to get there is what the course is all about. After Back to Church Sunday we can of course continue the journey with our friends into a whole range of explorations and experiences together.

But first a basic but important question: what was it that attracted you most to your church, and what you have found attractive about other churches you have visited?

Take a look at these three pictures of village churches. Which would you feel most attracted to? Why?

Questions?
Now is the chance to raise any questions and uncertainties you may have about what we are going to do in this course, or about the Back to Church Sunday initiative.

And finally – take heart!
In spite of what we keep being told, many churches are active, healthy and growing, so there is good reason to take heart! Provided of course that we are prepared to do something about it, and take the risk of inviting God to work out His mission among us.

We close this session with the course prayer:

And now we give you thanks because by the Holy Spirit you lead us into all truth, and give us the power to serve you as a royal priesthood and to take the joy of the gospel into all the world. Amen  

(Methodist Worship, p.56)
Three Christians arrived at the gates of heaven. “And what have you brought with you?” St. Peter asked. “I’ve brought my rosary” said the Roman Catholic. “Very good”, replied Peter, “in you go. And what about you?”. “Well I’ve got my Bible with me”, the Baptist said. “Fine, on your way”. The Methodist meanwhile lifted up the tea towel on top of the object she was carrying and smiled: “And I’ve brought a casserole!”. 

Discuss together how each of these: prayer, the Bible and hospitality, could make a good starting-point for our relationships with people. Which would you feel most comfortable with? What would you appreciate most if you were on the receiving end? Why?

Two basic concepts

- **All you need is love**
  The motive for any kind of outreach has to be love. If we care about people then we will want them to discover, as we have, the reality and relevance of a living relationship with Jesus. If we don’t have this motivation at the centre, then all we end up with is a ‘hit list’ and we can do more harm than good.

**BIBLE FOCUS**: Mark 12 verses 28-34. Make a note together of two or three of the main things you do in the church. Discuss to what extent the love that Jesus speaks of is the main motive behind the church doing them.

- **Where are people coming from?**
  People are not unspiritual today, rather the opposite, on a spiritual quest and feeling highly vulnerable without proper spiritual ‘roots’. However, church is not seen as relevant to the top issues of their daily lives, so we need to develop trusting relationships with no hidden agendas, a key aim of this course.

**Practical things to do**

Tanya starts taking her baby to the nearby church’s mother and toddler club; the Minister drops in there regularly and Tanya makes some new friends. She is nervous about talking to the Minister about baptising her baby but, when she eventually plucks up courage, finds her “surprisingly nice”. She senses a genuine welcome at the baptism service; starts praying for her baby; makes friends and finds the church relevant; comes to a pram service; starts to feels God is real; prays more; buys a children’s Bible for her toddler and reads it herself; comes to Back to Church Sunday and later to a children’s service; finds the words begin to make sense and starts to look forward to the services; comes to an Alpha course which makes her feel “challenged, excited, happy, stretched, confused”. Somewhere along this three year journey she realises she has become a Christian.

Discuss together whether your church has put linked steps in place for someone like Tanya, or is she likely to fall between the cracks somewhere and never end up at this destination?
• **Know who your friends are**
  - Draw up a list together of church activities through which you meet people who are no longer regular churchgoers.
  - From this, identify the type of people you mostly know: families, retired, or whatever it may be. Not a list of names – no ‘hit list’!

• **Spot the gaps**
  We’ve looked at people like Tanya, but what gaps are there without any stepping-stones for other types of people you have identified, between ‘coffee morning and Sunday morning’?

• **Provide the right activities**
  Think of the sort of ‘stepping-stones’ that need to be put in place. There is no need to draw up a full list now as some examples are given in later sessions. So simply be content to jot down a few ideas to come back to later.

• **Equip your people**
  The members and regular attenders will need resourcing well in order to play their part in the ways we are going to discuss in the following sessions, including helping them discover their gifts and grow in their faith, and providing suitable booklets and other material. Is the church doing enough to help people grow in this way? What more could it do?

**BIBLE FOCUS**: Romans 12, verses 4-13. Discuss which of the gifts and qualities set-out here are reflected in the life of your church? What could we learn from this passage?

• **Look closely at what you are and do**
  It is worth taking a quick look at *Seven marks of healthy churches* without going through them in detail. It shows typical characteristics that are found in healthy and growing churches. These are more about who we are than what we do – which might come as a surprise to many Methodists who usually measure ourselves by how full our diaries are!

• **”Pray without ceasing”!**
  Nothing much of any consequence will happen without ongoing insistent prayer. How can the church provide a wide enough range of opportunities, not only a conventional prayer meeting but other types of prayer environment for those who feel uncomfortable to pray out loud or ‘off-the-cuff’?

**BIBLE FOCUS**: 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16-19. Discuss together some things you can learn in your church from these four instructions. These are only four of quite a long list contained in verses 12-22 but they are key.

We close this session with the course prayer:

*And now we give you thanks because by the Holy Spirit you lead us into all truth, and give us the power to serve you as a royal priesthood and to take the joy of the gospel into all the world. Amen* (Methodist Worship, p.56)
Do you feel apprehensive about what we are doing together? It’s natural to do so. Discuss together how these two definitions of outreach might help us feel more confident, and why:

- “A journey with a friend, not a confrontation with a stranger”; and
- “Loving your neighbour until she asks why, then speaking of Jesus”.

St. Francis of Assisi said “Preach the gospel always; sometimes use words”. Discuss how far you think the relationship with people should have progressed before you should try to put into words what your faith means to you (clue: we don’t necessarily get that far in this course!).

**Developing who we are**
We need to

- **Grow** our own faith
  Through prayer, worship, church home groups or Bible studies and other opportunities.

- **Discover our gifts**
  We should try to identify our “spiritual gifts” – the things that God has helped us to be good at – and look for the “fruits” that the Holy Spirit has been growing in our lives. It is often easier for others to spot these!

**BIBLE FOCUS**: Galatians 5, verses 22-23. Discuss how each of these “fruits” is important for your relationships.

- **Allow God’s love** to be implanted in us.

**BIBLE FOCUS**: 1 Corinthians 12, verse 29 to chapter 14, verse 1a. Discuss how this passage helps us to understand why love is the premier gift of the Holy Spirit.

- **Be available**: 
  - to God, listening to how He may prompt us; and
  - to our friends: by being sensitive and listening.

- **Relax and let the Holy Spirit take the strain!**
  This is God’s mission. He simply gives us the privilege of being His fellow-workers.

**Developing what we do**
Discuss these and other ways in which you think you may be able to take some first steps in developing your relationships.

- **Be open** to the wishes, agendas and needs of your friends.
  If you feel the main area in which you can help is in, say, visiting people, doing practical jobs for (or with) them, or other service in the community, simply keep your eyes peeled, your ear to the ground and be open to what you find out. You will
discover who would value a visit or whatever you can offer, and who prefers not to. Don’t force the pace, love prefers to wait for the door to be opened – check this out together in Revelation 3, verse 20.

- **Spend time**
  Set aside time, to spend quality time with the people whom you find appreciate this, even where this means dropping some of the other jobs that you do or meetings that you attend.

- **Take something with you**
  It might be the church flowers, the church magazine, a recording of a Sunday service, a screwdriver or long-life light bulbs. You choose.

- **Listen a lot, talk a little**
  Listen out for their agenda rather than imposing yours or the church’s, and look out for what is behind an issue.

- **Practise hospitality**
  People may really appreciate being invited to your home for coffee, tea, a chat or even a meal, once the relationship has started to grow.

**BIBLE FOCUS**: Mark 2, verses 13-17. Discuss how you would feel if you attended the dinner-party as a friend of Levi (Matthew) but had not met Jesus before.

- **Pray** for your friends daily.
  Pray also for the issues that you learn about from them as time goes by.

- **Value** people who are not so easy to get on with.
  Let them make the pace and give them their space, but don’t abandon them unless they want to discontinue the connection.

- **Welcome** your friends at any church events, personally and individually.
  Not just a cheery “Hello!” but a demanding commitment. Can you go as far as being prepared to make others part of your lives so they really feel they belong?

- **Above all, love your friends!**
  Let the Holy Spirit shine God’s love through in the practical service you do, how you listen, what you say and who you are.

We have been thinking about taking some first steps, but be assured that this is a real, integral part of our mission and evangelism. In the next part of the course we look at some next steps.

We close this session with the course prayer:

> And now we give you thanks because by the Holy Spirit you lead us into all truth, and give us the power to serve you as a royal priesthood and to take the joy of the gospel into all the world. Amen  
> (Methodist Worship, p.56)
Next steps

As relationships develop, you will sense in due course the right time to begin to go a step further. Discuss these and other ways in which you think you may be able to take some next steps:

‘User friendly’ events at church
Back to Church Sunday is the focus of this course, but it is useful to set this into context and look at other user friendly church events also.

- ‘User friendly’ worship services at the main Christian festivals.
  It is quite a small step for someone to accept your invitation to one of these because of the familiarity of the event that it celebrates.

- Informal guest services
  Informal, comfortable and meaningful, such as on Sunday morning (with breakfast or coffee and newspapers) or Sunday afternoon (with afternoon tea) both with informal worship around the tables.

- Other special events
  A meal with a speaker who can weave some of their Christian story into their life story, ‘any questions’ evenings where people can raise anything, and Alpha or similar exploration courses.

BIBLE FOCUS: John 1, verses 41-46. Look at how Jesus called his disciples by letting them bring each other to meet him. Has this discussion about ‘user friendly’ events helped to give you confidence in how you can also say “come and see”?

Oh, by the way
Topics that come up naturally in discussion will provide helpful opportunities to move on a little further. Here it is important to wait for the right time and not be premature, usually letting other people raise the issues.

- Offering a prayer
  Would your friend like the church to pray for the topic that has been raised, or you to say a prayer while you are together? Your church can provide small booklets of appropriate prayers for all kinds of situations. Seek guidance from your Minister or leader on whether you may encounter problems if you offer this or any of the following to people while you are at work.

- Offering a suitable booklet, video, or website address
  This can be timely at Christian festivals or when the news is of conflict or other issues where there is a Christian response. There are many concise and well
designed resources designed for this. Be very careful when selecting websites to recommend and always check out the sites with your Minister or leader.

- **Questions?? Help!!**
  Yes, this is what you were waiting for, and it’s the big one. People will in time start to raise the hard questions that are on all our minds. Discuss together what some of these questions might typically be.

  It is quite in order to say that you don’t know the answers, but that people like your Minister or pastoral leader or Alpha leader could help talk through them. You could suggest that one of them pays a visit. In the meantime, perhaps the most telling thing you can say is simply that you trust Jesus because he and your Christian faith mean everything to you, and Jesus did go through every kind of difficulty that we do. There is no better or simpler way than to offer a copy of a Gospel in today’s language and allow the biblical account to speak for itself.

- **Know when to call in the experts**
  It is important to be able to sense when you need to call in reinforcements by way of the Minister or someone else trained and skilled in what is needed. Don’t delay, ask your friend’s permission, and then leave them to it unless you are invited in.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Acts 8, verses 26-38. Note how Philip was sensitive to the Holy Spirit and simply needed to be in the right place at the right time. Once Philip had connected with what the Ethiopian was absorbed in, it was the Ethiopian who invited Philip onto his own territory and started asking the questions. Put yourself in the place of the Ethiopian and discuss how you might have felt before and after meeting Philip. What would you now be planning to do differently when you arrived home?

**We are not alone**
While much of what we have covered in session 3 may be done individually, it is important to know that we are not alone.

- First because **this is God’s mission** and we are simply His fellow workers
- Then because we do it **as a church** and not as lone rangers:
  - Accountable to the church
  - Supported by and supporting each other and
  - Equipped and pastorally sustained

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Luke 10, verses 1-5 and 17-18. Seventy-odd is a lot of people, not just Jesus’ closest followers who could be expected to know chapter and verse well. They were to start by simply wishing peace on the homes they went to, and the outcome gave them a lot of joy. Does this encourage you? How?

We close this session with the course prayer:

```
And now we give you thanks because by the Holy Spirit you lead us into all truth, and give us the power to serve you as a royal priesthood and to take the joy of the gospel into all the world. Amen  
```
Any questions?
Briefly discuss together how you have reacted to the course and think through any questions and second thoughts together. Make a note and act on the ideas you develop.

Some possible ‘To Do’s
Talk through a possible ‘to do’ list, for example it may include points such as these:

- Discuss the plans for Back to Church Sunday and how each person fits into them.
- Review and put in place suitable opportunities for prayer in the church.
- Obtain a good set of resources that people can pass to friends: booklets, videos, website addresses and so on.
- Put in hand an initiative to equip the people of the church to identify their gifts and play their part in developing relationships.
- Plan ‘any questions’ evenings, Alpha, special services or other initiatives to follow-up Back to Church Sunday.
- Review the church programme so as to fill in the gaps between coffee morning and Sunday morning with appropriate ‘stepping-stones’.
- Take a look over your ‘to do’s and see if you are trying do too much at once! If so, see how you can plan it to be more manageable.
- Stop doing activities that are not central to your mission

BIBLE FOCUS: Acts 13, verses 1-5. How do you think the representatives of the church felt about ‘losing’ two of their key people and being left to do everything themselves (see chapter 11, verses 25-26)? How do you think Paul and Barnabas felt? Why do you think they went to Cyprus first (clue: see Acts 4, verse 36) and what can we learn from this?

To come back to later
Don’t try to do too much at once, but after Back to Church Sunday and after looking at the above suggestions, consider the possibility of coming back to some of the following. Maybe a different person could offer to look at each and come up with some possibilities?

- Look at materials to follow up Alpha and other courses, including Called by name for those who are interested in knowing more about or becoming members of the Methodist Church.
- Decide whether the church might in due course consider a Healthy Churches’ Handbook or other church review.
Stand back and take a long look at how the church does ‘Sunday morning’. Is it newcomer-friendly, spiritual and relevant, at the right time of day or on the right day for newcomers? How could it be renewed and freshened? What other destinations of real spiritual engagement and development could be provided?

**Talking about our faith?**

This course looks at how we can develop relationships before we come to the stage where we may feel comfortable to talk freely about our faith. But at some stage it is good to move on further so that we do feel more confident.

**BIBLE FOCUS:** 1 Peter 3, verses 8-9 and 13-16. A key verse is verse 15: note that Peter wrote this to Christians who had already undergone instruction on the Christian faith and so were equipped by their church for the task; also that Peter said we should be responding to questions about our faith rather than foisting it unsolicited onto people. Discuss together how verses 8-9 and 15-16 help us to see how we should approach talking about our faith.

Should the ‘to do’ list include at some later stage a course designed to help Christians talk about their faith?

**BIBLE FOCUS:** Revelation 3, verses 7-8. A final Bible passage to encourage us! Of the seven churches who received the letters set-out in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, only two had no censure, and these were the smallest, one of which was this one in Philadelphia. How do you think the people of this church felt on reading this? Does the affirmation given to them also give you confidence? Why? If you have time now or later, find out which the other church was and ask the same questions.

**And finally ...**

- Refocus quietly on Back to Church Sunday.
- Commit the whole initiative to God in praise and prayer.
- Share the course prayer together.

**And now we give you thanks because by the Holy Spirit you lead us into all truth, and give us the power to serve you as a royal priesthood and to take the joy of the gospel into all the world. Amen**  
  (Methodist Worship, p.56)
Appendix 1: Related resources

Some evangelistic courses

These are the most popular published courses, but research has consistently suggested that the most effective courses are the ‘DIY’ courses written locally, so if you feel inspired to do your own thing, then write on!

- **The Alpha Course** ([alpha.org](http://alpha.org)) is the most-used and most well known course once people are asking the questions and want to know more about the Christian faith.

- **The Emmaus Course** ([e-emmaus.org.uk](http://e-emmaus.org.uk)) is the most used after Alpha and at least equally effective as Alpha, but not so well known outside its Anglican home base. The main course, *Nurture*, shares the same length, aim and scope as Alpha but also has a large range of follow up modules called *Growth*.

- **Christianity Explored** ([christianityexplored.com](http://christianityexplored.com)) is a similar type of resource. It explores who Jesus was, what his aims were, and what it means to follow him. The sessions are based on Mark’s Gospel.

My CD-Rom of *Evangelism Resources* contains a full evaluation of the Alpha and Emmaus courses, a slideshow presentation to help churches discuss using Alpha in the context of evangelism resources, and other evangelism resources. It also includes FAQs and *The God questions people ask*, which sets out the Big Questions that are typically being asked these days and which may be useful to help leaders prepare for the inevitable! The CD-Rom is available without charge from c.freebury@tiscali.co.uk.

For ‘pre-Alpha’ enquirers’ courses see:

- **Start!** ([start-cpas.org.uk](http://start-cpas.org.uk)) is styled for a non-book culture using video and street interviews.

- **Essence** ([sharejesusinternational.com/#/essence/4532523558](http://sharejesusinternational.com/#/essence/4532523558)) is a more ‘touchy-feely’ exploration of contemporary spirituality and is freely downloadable from the Share Jesus International website.

- **FAQs** tackles two of the most frequently asked questions that arise during Alpha or similar courses: God and suffering, and God and other religions. It is available on the free *Evangelism Resources* CD-Rom (see above) and can also be used as post-Alpha follow up material.

Some ‘church review’ resources

Useful Methodist resources include *Pilgrims’ Way, Know and Grow, Presence* (not a review as such but has the same effect for rural churches) and *Shaping the Future* (a Circuit review). See [methodistpublishing.org.uk](http://methodistpublishing.org.uk) and/or [methodist.org.uk](http://methodist.org.uk)

You may have spotted that I personally like Robert Warren’s *The Healthy Churches’ Handbook* (London: CHP, 2004, see [chpublishing.co.uk](http://chpublishing.co.uk)) because it has a very 21st century approach and is more about who we are rather than what we do. It also has the advantage that, if we are looking at our mission together with the local Anglican church as the Covenant encourages, it will be more familiar to Anglicans.
Some other useful resources

- Mike Bossingham, *Building family-friendly churches* (mph, 2004) see familyfriendlychurches.org.uk

- Peter Brierley, *Reaching and keeping tweenagers* (Christian Research, 2002) see christian-research.org.uk

- Peter Brierley, *12 things to wake up to* (Christian Research, 1999) email admin@christian-research.org.uk

- The Back to Church Sunday website backtochurch.co.uk

- The ReJesus website for people curious about learning more online rejesus.co.uk

- *Lost for words - sharing faith naturally* (CPAS, 2002) see cpas.org.uk

- *Time to talk of God* (mph, 2005) see methodistpublishing.org.uk

Appendix 2: Seven marks of healthy churches

Seven marks of healthy churches

Mark 1: energized by faith
rather than just keeping things going or trying to survive
- worship and sacramental life: move people to experience God’s love
- motivation: energy comes from a desire to serve God and one another
- engages with Scripture: in creative ways that connect with life
- nurtures faith in Christ: helping people to grow in, and share, their faith.

Mark 2: outward-looking focus
with a “whole life” rather than a “church life” concern
- deeply rooted in the local community, working in partnership with other denominations, faiths, secular groups and networks
- passionate and prophetic about justice and peace, locally and globally
- makes connections between faith and daily living
- responds to human need by loving service.

Mark 3: seeks to find out what God wants
discerning the Spirit’s leading rather than trying to please everyone
- vocation: seeks to explore what God wants it to be and do
- vision: develops and communicates a shared sense of where it is going
- mission priorities: consciously sets both immediate and long-term goals
- able to call for, and make, sacrifices, personal and corporate, in bringing about the above and living out the faith.

Mark 4: faces the cost of change and growth
rather than resisting change and fearing failure
- while embracing the past, it dares to take on new ways of doing things
- takes risks: admits when things are not working, and learns from experience
- crises: responds creatively to challenges that face the church and community
- positive experiences of change: however small, are affirmed and built on.

Mark 5: operates as a community
rather than functioning as a club or religious organization
- relationships: are nurtured, often in small groups, so that people feel accepted and are helped to grow in faith and service
- leadership: lay and ordained work as a team to develop locally appropriate expressions of all seven marks of a healthy church
- lay ministry: the different gifts, experiences and faith journeys of all are valued and given expression in and beyond the life of the church.

---

20 The Healthy Churches’ Handbook, Appendix 4, pp.144-145
Mark 6: makes room for all
being inclusive rather than exclusive

- welcome: works to include newcomers into the life of the church
- children and young people: are helped to belong, contribute and be nurtured in their faith
- enquirers are encouraged to explore and experience faith in Christ
- diversities: different social and ethnic background, mental and physical abilities, and ages, are seen as a strength.

Mark 7: does a few things and does them well
focused rather than frenetic

- does the basics well: especially public worship, pastoral care, stewardship and administration
- occasional offices: makes sense of life and communicates faith
- being good news as a church in its attitudes and ways of working
- enjoys what it does and is relaxed about what is not being done.